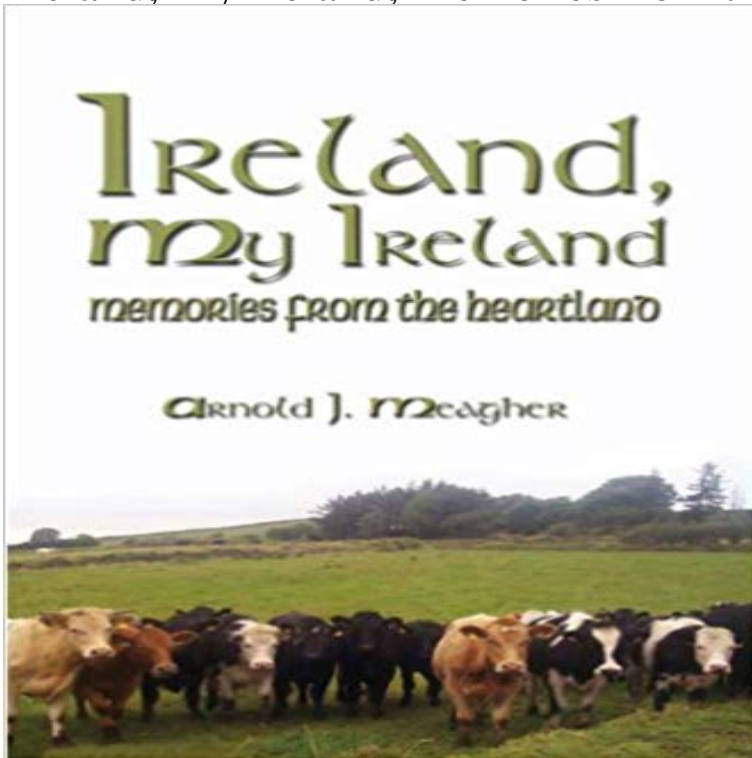


Ireland, My Ireland; Memories from the Heartland



When I look back on my boyhood in rural Ireland, I often wonder what made it so memorable, so detailed in the telling a half-century later. As far as I can figure it out, the basic reason is that I was made to feel a vital part of a small rural community in the heart of Ireland. In my village and on my grandmothers farm I had a deep feeling of being wanted and being important each day that I woke up. I had an in-born sense of belonging to my village, to my grandmothers farm, to the animals, to the birds, to the wildflowers, to the fields and hedges, to the trees and tall grasses. I had bonded with the natural world around me, and felt somehow interconnected with and supported by everything that was within my experience. I was an integral part of a corner of rural Ireland, and was very much at home in it. My most vivid memories revolve around village, farm, family, church, and school the five pillars of my youth with associated milestones, joys, and fears. The joys were many: going barefoot in the summer months, Gaelic football (Ireland's premier sport), my first kiss, the corncrakes nightly summer lullaby, special feast days on my grandmothers farm, afternoon tea in the meadow, listening to the storytellers around my grandmothers hearth on long winter nights, fishing for trout and eel, threshing day, the singing of the lark on the bog, drinking the last drops from the wine cruets as an altar-boy, my first Holy Communion, and winning the Leinster final as captain of the St. Mels football team. The fears were also many and at the time loomed large and menacing: the graveyard and the ghosts of the dead, the Masters excessive use of the cane in primary school, the fairy forts, Mr. McCabe (the village chemist), the Little People, the banshee, shopping with my grandmother, the dentist, the silent tormentors of the bogswarms of blood sucking female midges, my first confession, finding worthwhile sins for

subsequent confessions, getting caught smoking, and abuse of the cane by priests in boarding school. On balance, the joys of growing up in Irelands heartland far outweighed the fears. Some fears I grew out of, such as the fear of falling through the hole of the outhouse at the bottom of our garden into the ditch beneath, but others, like my fear of The Master, ghosts, and the Little People were a daily constant in my youth. Yet, despite these fears, mine was a joyful boyhood, joyous in its living, and a deeper joy in its telling. The stories I tell in and around the five pillars of my boyhood are true, and the names of the people in the stories are real. Some have gone to their eternal reward, but others are still adding to the stories of their lives. They may recall the events I tell here from a different perspective, but that does not invalidate either their memories or mine. It only demonstrates the richness of the fabric of our shared experience, and the limitations of one persons memory. So boil the kettle, wet a pot of tea, throw your feet up on a stool, and share in a country boys joys and fears as he romps through dew-covered pastures, meadows, and bogs at a time and place where he could still hear the corncrake and the curlew and where his ears and eyes were constantly on alert for the activities of nesting birds, changes in mood of the Master, and the subtle sounds and elusive signs of the Little People.

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of Heartland and Reign Horse Canada Yeats's own poetry would henceforth feature Irish materials with increasing frequency. Later works, such as *The Tower* or *In Memory of Major Robert Gregory*. The resistant heartland of Gaelic Ireland and the region from Clare and Galway to And the allusion to my lands long battle inevitably suggests Ireland's long **1950s heartland - Bord na Monas community** She was a huge part of my life story, and is in many of my memories. Throughout her life My grandma was so proud to be Irish. 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