The immediate ends in this case are 1973 and 2013, and the dates are in the first place bookends and endpapers. It's now forty years since I first visited Ireland and I have been back about every three years since. In my proposed paper I want to trace, in an outsider's impressionistic way, some of the changes in Ireland and in Irish/Australian relations during this period. I first went to Ireland as a postgrad doing a thesis on the literature of the Rising, and in the benign shadow of my grandparents, natives of Counties Tyrone and Waterford who had migrated in 1914 but had left relatives behind. So I have always felt this double connection - a literary/academic one, and a ties of blood one.

1973, the year of its entry into Europe, marked the end of Ireland's monofocus on Britain. It was also near the beginning of the protracted end of the armed independence struggle. It was also the year of the end of the de Valera era when the Chief finally went into retirement. In Australia it was the end of twenty three years of a Coalition government, and a spirit of new beginnings was in the air. But to me part of Ireland's attraction was an apparent uniqueness. In my eyes Australia shared the unexciting monochrome of the rest of the Western world. But Ireland was distinguished by the ongoing fight for its independence. And it was also, to my eyes, a land still primitive in comparative ways, even a land where time had stood still. And yes, that gave it a charm and further point of interest for me.

Between these two endpoints Australia moved from a non-serious, sometimes insulting, often sentimental attachment to Ireland, through a period of gathering cultural and economic interest to what I now see as a falling off of such interest but one displaced by a more immediate confrontation - not least with serious academic studies and above all with the backpacker presence. Obviously I'm offering not so much an academic paper as a highly subjective overview which will progress by means of anecdotes and epiphanies.

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