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Picking one favorite educational experience from our trip is extremely difficult, but one of the discoveries I enjoyed the most in reference to our class was experiencing the great value the Irish place on their national identity firsthand. I had examined and read about the profound sense of nationhood in Ireland as I considered national symbols such as the use of the harp in *Dubliners* or the significance of 1916, but the text that I found deeply meaningful was *Anna Liffey* by Eavan Boland, specifically the repeated line, “My country took hold of me.” The humanization of Ireland as a captivator, a force with the power to possess one’s self, caught me by surprise. In the same stanza as the second repetition of “My country took hold of me,” Boland goes on to write: “Is it only love / That makes a place?” (48-49). In an interview about *Anna Liffey*, Boland states: “This poem is a conversation with the idea of the making of a city, the making of a place...the engagement for me with those ideas—how I talked to a place” (Apoetsdublin.wordpress.org) The ideas of “love [making] a place,” the concept of “beautiful vowels sounding out home,” and the “places, remembrances” mentioned, in addition to the idea of the poem being “a conversation with... the making of a city” all further humanize and intimate the relationship between woman and city. Reading this poem, I found myself a bit jealous of the deep connection between self and nation that lies in the idea of one’s “country [taking] hold of [her]” (Boland, 47-49).

Irish literature is challenging for those who are not intimately acquainted with the concept of Irish identity. Though I could research the history regarding Irish nationalism and the cultural context of authors such as Joyce or Yeats, one cannot truly understand how vastly different the understanding of nation is in other parts of the world without visiting and experiencing the culture firsthand. I had always considered the United States to have a strong sense of national identity, and it does in a sense, but after experiencing the culture of Ireland, a country with centuries more history than the established United States, one is able to see more clearly the impact deep cultural roots in the past have on the present. There is a distinct difference between theorizing and experiencing Irish national identity, for I had read about 1916, but hearing person after person tell of the event at this, the hundredth anniversary, as if it were a legend, with such profound pride over a failed rebellion, gave me a much deeper respect for the event’s significance to the everyday citizen’s identity. Seeing Irish flags consistently on every house and street corner from the second we stepped off the ferry to the moment we left Dublin was an instant visualization and constant reminder of the concept of Irish identity—proof from the first step onto Irish soil that this was not simply an outdated concept or exaggerated academia from the back of my Norton Critical Editions, but a living, breathing phenomenon. The sense of nation was as living and breathing and human as the personification of Anna Liffey in Boland’s poem.

Looking out over the Liffey, I considered Boland’s ideas of how people’s memories of and perceptions about and feelings regarding and love for a place become that place’s identity, and how, in turn, a person’s sense of belonging to their homeland or having a “country [take] hold of [them]” becomes a distinct part of their identity. I thought about Boland’s “[talking] to a place,” and I asked Ireland if she might somehow “[take] hold of me,” too.



I pledge that I have acted honorably. –Meredith Myers