



## 'BLAME IT ON MAUREEN O'HARA': IRELAND AND THE TROPE OF AUTHENTICITY

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## Colin Graham

# 'BLAME IT ON MAUREEN O'HARA': IRELAND AND THE TROPE OF AUTHENTICITY\*

### Abstract

This essay examines the role of authenticity as it appears as a factor in Irish cultural production. Taking examples from Yeats's folklore collections, tourist marketing and beer advertisements, it suggests, using the writings of Adorno, Baudrillard and Jacob Golomb, that the trope of 'authenticity' persists, in variant forms, as a marker of how Irish material and textual culture 'promotes' itself in a post-colonial context.

### Keywords

Ireland; Irish culture; authenticity; Yeats; tourism; advertising; post-colonialism; Adorno; Baudrillard

On the side of the colonizer, it is the inauthenticity of the colonized culture, its falling short of the concept of the human, that legitimates the colonial project.

(Lloyd, 1993: 112)

The Story of Ireland's heritage is a new reason for visiting Ireland. It is told in a modern but authentic style and mirrors European culture preserved in an island which makes it possible to visit centres from neolithic to 19th Century, even on a short visit.

(Heritage Island, 1994)

## Introduction

**S**OMEWHERE BETWEEN COLONIZATION and post-colonialism, domination and independence, the in/authenticity of the colonized is overturned. The role of authenticity alters from being a signifier of the colonized's cultural incapacities, to being a marketable sign of value. If authenticity is not only a product of colonialism but central to its ethics, then we need a clearer grasp of its definitions, of the means by which it comes to be elevated to the status of an evaluative ethic and of how it contorts with changes in the colonial situation. And as David Lloyd and 'Heritage Island' seem to suggest, authenticity may have both a typical and particular function in the context of Irish culture and the chronologies embedded in it.

'Blame it on Maureen O'Hara' (*Irish Times*, 1999) is one suggestive way in which to understand the recurrence of authenticity in the construction of material Irelands. Mary Flaherty, a designer, 'has created an "authentic reproduction" of the Galway shawl. The idea arose when she was talking to the star [Maureen O'Hara] who played opposite John Wayne in *The Quiet Man*' (*Irish Times*, 1999). The very phrase 'authentic reproduction', by its apparently oxymoronic nature, begs its own questions, though, as I will suggest below, in the Irish case authenticity is only ever reproduced, filtered and reconstituted through a process of authentication and recognition of status (thus creating a further eddy of paradoxes).

To see colonialism as the destroyer of authenticity is tempting:

Ms O'Hara recalled how the wardrobe department working on the film had offered £25 to Galway people who were prepared to part with their shawls and so dress the cast on the production. She bemoaned the fact that the shawl had become almost 'extinct' after hundreds were taken back to the US by the Hollywood cast and crew.

(*Irish Times*, 1999)

Yet the fact that the resurfacing of the 'authentically produced' shawl has its origins in that Technicolor glorification of Irishness, *The Quiet Man*, alerts us to the capacity which the authentic has to find its own beginnings in the unlikelyst of places which are themselves attempts at the authentic.

Mary Flaherty's shawl is typical of what this essay suggests is the inexhaustibility and centrality of the authentic in Irish culture: it is also an exemplary double-faced phenomenon, looking back to Hollywood (with O'Hara in a sense disowning the product she was part of) and the shawl as nineteenth-century icon of Irishness, while at the same time being unashamedly and ephemerally in the market-place of the present. Mary Flaherty's shawl ('. . . intricately woven with symbols of the heart and hands, harp intertwined with shamrock . . . , bordered by Celtic knotwork depicting interlocking birds') is, of course, a limited edition since it spectrally replaces, two-thousand fold, the 'hundreds' which were lost; the Irish

Government 'bought a consignment to present as millennium gifts to visitors', so authorizing its authenticity, while those lucky enough to own a shawl have its provenance clarified by 'an explanatory booklet'. The authentic, as will become apparent, is never obvious and is forever in need of the supplement of commentary.

This essay explores various dynamics of authenticity in the context of Irish culture, arguing that the definition of the authentic in Irish culture is central to claims for value. If the colonizer denies authenticity, then for Irish culture it becomes crucial that the 'birth of authenticity is rooted in revolution' (Golomb, 1995: 12). Authenticity and claims to authenticity underlie the conceptual and cultural denial of dominance. The nation's very reason for being, its logic of existence is its claim to an undeniable authenticity as a pure expression of the 'real', the obvious, the natural. In the Irish context, claims for authenticity move from the 'revolutionary' (in all its aspects) to the dominant, following the path of the nation to the nation-state. And just as the nation in Ireland becomes questioned and ironized, so too the 'jargon of authenticity' (Adorno, [1964] 1986) becomes critiqued as jargon. This essay follows that process in Irish culture to its conclusion in a popular, advertising postmodernism which can be seen to make its own claims to authenticity through ironic re-readings of established versions of authentic Irishness. This leaves unanswered the question of the history of authenticity in Irish culture, which will always be inseparable from the history of the reproduction and circulation of the objects and materials of 'Ireland', and which begins to imply that to chase the authentic is to trace the origins of something that will always let us know that it has another origin further back.

The essay begins with an examination of authenticity as it is discussed in writings by Jacob Golomb and Theodor Adorno, stressing how authenticity attempts to defy definition through its ambiguous stresses on origins and teleologies of completeness fused with continual change. Gareth Griffiths (1994) suggests that the authorization of authenticity can still be undertaken by the colonizer after decolonization as a hierarchising form of control in the post-colonial period. This possibility needs to be addressed in the Irish context before going on to look at the categories of Irish authenticity which I have provisionally entitled Old Authenticities, New Authenticities and Ironic Authenticities. These distinctions are based not on the colonial/post-colonial chronology, but on the point at which an 'authentic' Ireland becomes more or less available apparently outside or in defiance of colonial dominance; thus the 'Old Authenticity' discussed is found in Yeats, the New Authenticity in the marketing of 'Heritage Island', and the Ironic Authenticity in a television advertisement for Smithwick's beer. My intention here is to begin a reassessment of the role of post-colonial cultural theories in Ireland by using 'authenticity' as a marker of the effects of the progress of colonialism in Irish culture – but a marker which unsettles certain of the teleologies of post-colonialism by virtue of its changeability and capacity for self-preservation. Authenticity is claimed and disclaimed in Irish culture, functioning as standard of worth and a cultural core value. The origins of this

cultural necessity may indeed lie in what David Lloyd (1993) sees as the labelling of Irish culture as 'inauthentic' by the colonizer. But authenticity has not simply rolled along behind 'Irishness' in history; authenticity has affected the basic discourses of Irish culture in its prevalence, which has given it a status near to that of a shared currency; a focus on authenticity takes us to the verge of seeing Irish material history as an unravelling backwards in time, detecting signs which plough against the linearities we know from political history.

### Theorizing Authenticity

All agree in principle that any positive definition of authenticity would be self-nullifying.

(Golomb, 1995: 7)

Jacob Golomb's *In Search of Authenticity* (1995) constitutes a major attempt to read authenticity as an integral part of Western philosophical, humanistic traditions and to place the 'search' for the authentic, if not the authentic itself, at the centre of humanistic energies directed against the undermining of our 'true' selves by the vagaries of the postmodern. Golomb concludes his crusading revival of the need for authenticity with the words: 'Only the return to our authentic pathos can prevent the betrayal of what is dearest to each of us: our own selfhood' (Golomb, 1995: 205). Against this is set 'the decline of the ethic of subjectivity in the postmodern era, and the suppression of individuality encouraged by the mass media and multinational markets' (1995: 205).

Authenticity is thus at least partially 'lost' in postmodernity, in the contemporary. And humanistic strategies are flagrantly at work here; the 'selfhood' which protests its own benignity and logicity can only be defined by what it is 'other' than. Here the '*mass* media and *multinational* markets' deny the full existence of selfhood, drowning its self-expression, not through public discourse or capitalism, the market or the media, but through their postmodern reconfiguration into 'mass' events which stretch beyond the boundaries of class and nationality in which the notion of selfhood was fostered. Golomb is appropriately applying a nostalgia to a version of authenticity which itself relies on nostalgias for its definition – indeed by the end of Golomb's book, and through the poetics of authenticity he describes, it is possible to see such 'pathos' expressed about the fate of the authentic as in fact a simple *restatement of the authentic*, re-treading the paths of decline and difficulty on which authenticity depends.

Golomb's notion that authenticity is disintegrated by postmodernity needs some thought – as I have already suggested, this may be merely a strategy of authenticity rather than analysis of its fate. In order to understand the ways in which authenticities are challenged, rewritten or recharged in Irish culture it is necessary to turn to Golomb's notion that 'multinational markets' are at odds with the

authentic, since this not only allows us to see why authenticity may need to 'return' in the face of the postmodern (an 'authentic reproduction' of a 'nineteenth-century' shawl uses the actress from a 1952 film as its initiating point of validation), but offers a possibility in beginning to politicise Golomb's definition of authenticity.

Since the authentic, in Golomb's analysis, is articulated in the philosophies of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre and Camus, it seems unlikely that when 'multinational markets' deface authenticity they do so because of their ideology of the market – if authenticity can arise in philosophical discourse during the times when these philosophers wrote then, whatever authenticity's relationship with capital, it can hardly be thought to be suppressed by the existence of capitalism. It is presumably then the 'multinational' that is stifling authenticity, or that is perhaps itself 'inauthentic'. This is a vital recognition, since it allows Golomb's text to be read against itself, uncovering an alternative genealogy for authenticity to the one Golomb himself sets up. In the Irish context, and in the broader philosophical imaginings discussed by Golomb, it becomes clear that authenticity overlaps with nationalism's self-projections in crucial ways. Golomb may seek to avoid an explicit politics of authenticity, but the uses of authenticity in Irish culture reveal it to be a profoundly political pretext for evaluation. Authenticity may be traditionally reliant on the existence of the nation as the basis for political thought to the extent that it cannot, in some of its formats, be re-imagined beyond nationalism – alternatively, reviving a form of authenticity validated by the nation may be a way of resisting multinationalism, post-nationalism and any other contortion or disruption to the centrality of the nation as a political unit.

Authenticity, Golomb notes, is bound to notions of authority, and in Heidegger's version of authenticity the authority underpinning the authentic changes from a 'authoritative God' to 'the historical dimension of the people in which one is rooted':

One is historically authentic when one creates one's own history by utilizing and recreating one's past and the past of one's people, projecting them with anticipatory resoluteness towards one's future . . . . [Authenticity] is the loyalty of one's self to its own past, heritage and ethos.

(Golomb, 1995: 117)

Authenticity here, to employ Golomb's vocabulary, becomes rooted in 'the people' and the bond between the self and the group; and additionally, authenticity relies on the ability to 'utilize' and culturally employ such 'loyalty' – authenticity is thus constantly a cultural, textual phenomenon, defining, recreating and projecting. Authenticity may resist definition, but its materiality in textuality is undeniable. In this it shares with imaginings of nationalism an important reliance on its various media: what Benedict Anderson calls 'the technical means

for “re-presenting” the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation’ (Anderson, 1991: 25).

Yet it is not just in its textually pervasive characteristics, or its espousal of connectedness with the past and a ‘people’, that authenticity overlaps with nationalism. Like nationalism, authenticity has an ambiguous relationship with ‘origins’; reliant upon their antiquity *as* authenticity, yet disparaging of teleologies which destroy the mystique of authenticity through their rationalisation of history. Golomb, early in *In Search of Authenticity*, argues that authenticity ‘calls for no particular contents or consequences, but, rather, focuses on the origins and the intensity of one’s emotional-existential commitments’ (Golomb, 1995: 9), and later Golomb suggests that Kierkegaard adds another meaning to authenticity, ‘namely, the return to the genuine origins of ourselves, our feelings and our beliefs’ (1995: 39). That authenticity expresses a return seems to imply a reversal of thought or commitment along some established lines to an initial point. Yet elsewhere Golomb points out that Kierkegaard argues that the ‘self is something that should be created and formed, not something possessing an intrinsic essence to be further developed’ (1995: 54). Like nationalism, it is the ‘genuineness’ of ‘genuine origins’ that authenticity highlights rather than the materiality of origins; and ‘genuineness’, in a perfectly circular resistance to theory, is known by its authenticity. As with the nation in Benedict Anderson’s famous formulation, authenticity wishes to be conceived of as ‘moving steadily up (or down) history’ (Anderson, 1991: 26), and as with the nation, authenticity ‘proves’ itself through its simultaneous and contradictory textual existence and refusal to be defined. In its own best scenario authenticity is thus what Golomb calls ‘a state of integrity between the innermost self and its external manifestations, whatever their form and content’ (1991: 79); an integrity (or ‘loyalty’) which demands an unquestioning belief in a wholeness involving the individual and his/her social context.

If authenticity tends to a monologic unquestioning discourse concurrent with that of the ‘nation’, it arises also out of contexts in which the nation becomes an active arbiter between the past and a ‘people’. Like the anti-colonial formation of nation, the ‘quest for authenticity becomes especially pronounced in extreme situations’ (Golomb, 1995: 3), its ‘birth’ being ‘rooted in revolution’ (1995: 12). Authenticity combines the prioritisation of ‘origins’ with the ‘pathos of incessant change’ – again moving steadily through history. Its definition is a set of contradictions; static but changing; conservative but adaptable; originary but modern.

Golomb’s book ends with a plea for the saving of a disintegrating sense of authenticity; one of the rare moments when authenticity allows its ideological susceptibilities to open out – Golomb’s authenticity at this point reaches the limits of its ability to change, at the point at which the humanism, the nationalism, the play of rationality and love of the irrational it embodies, are consciously challenged. The pathos of its plea, so obvious when placed in the context of post-modernity, is made the centre of (Golomb’s version of) authenticity’s call for resurrection.

## Adorno and Baudrillard: system to simulation

Although Golomb finishes with authenticity set against a vague postmodernism, he is most vitriolic in his conclusions at the expense of ‘the ratiocinations of Adorno and his followers’ (1995: 204). Adorno’s *The Jargon of Authenticity* ([1964] 1986) examines the points at which the authentic is socialized and popularized; in Adorno the authenticities later traced by Golomb become materiality, culture and policy. Adorno’s attempt to prick the bubble of authenticity is perhaps most effective in its analysis of authenticity *in and as a language and as an ideology*. Adorno sees ‘authenticity’ as a jargonized system, falsely constructing itself as essence and origin: ‘[the language of authenticity] is a trademark of societalized chosenness, noble and homely at once – sub-language as superior language’ (1986: 5) – an almost de Valeraean concept, coming from ‘below’, against the once-dominant. Adorno’s irritation with the jargon is furthered by its exclusionism, identifying what is outside it:

‘inauthentic’, where something broken is implied, an expression which is not immediately appropriate to what is expressed . . . ‘Inauthentic’ . . . becomes a ‘critical’ term, in definite negation of something merely phenomenal.

(Adorno, [1964] 1986: 7–8)

Authenticity is thus the inherent factor in the creation of an organicism which is ideologically-charged, exclusivist, evaluative and almost a definition of the heroic (‘noble and homely’: see de Valera’s ‘cosy homesteads . . . sturdy children . . . athletic youths . . . comely maidens’ [cited in Brown, 1990: 146]). Adorno thus sees the authentic as not only a cultural ideology but a way of thinking and being:

Whoever is versed in the jargon does not have to say what he thinks, does not even have to think it properly. The jargon takes over this task and devalues thought. That the whole man should speak is authentic, comes from the core. . . Communication clicks and puts forth as truth what should instead be suspect by virtue of the prompt collective agreement.

(1986: 9)

Adorno’s critique of authenticity hinges on disrupting the edges of its claims to wholeness and organicism, and its ability to become a self-sufficient ideology and way of speaking. Golomb’s proposed search for authenticity, on the other hand, begins and ends with the self at the centre of authenticity; the site of definition and justification in which there is the continuously twisting paradox which suggests that authenticity and selfhood are both undefined until both can be defined by each other.

Before moving on to see how authenticity figures in Irish culture, it is useful



to introduce Baudrillard's perspective on authenticity's role in simulation. While Adorno and Golomb can be placed in some sort of mutual dialogue which relies on agreement that authenticity is a dispute over possible truths, Baudrillard sees authenticity adopting a role in the fantasy of representation:

When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity . . . there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production . . .

(Baudrillard, 1983: 12–13)

Authenticity here has ceased being a measurement of value (or even a proof of 'true' existence) and become a sign of the need for such values. In the midst of apparent disintegration, authenticity reverts to the (re)production of origins and of itself. Golomb's ending is perhaps a philosophical expression of what Baudrillard identifies; holding on nostalgically to a selfhood which justifies and is 'created' by being authentic. Golomb's strategy for the self in postmodernism thus overlaps with Baudrillard's identification of the processes of nostalgia and authenticity in postmodernism. To this extent we have reached a point where the authentic can be seen as a site of contestation across Golomb/Adorno, with Adorno identifying the authentic as a jargonized ideology travestying what it represents – and with Baudrillard seeing the authentic as evidence of loss of, or change in, the 'real', which in turn moves us, nostalgically, back through history.

## Post-colonialism, Ireland and authenticity

There are real dangers in recent representations of indigenous peoples in popular discourse, especially in the media, which stress claims to an 'authentic' voice. For these claims may be a form of overwriting the complex actuality of difference equal but opposite to the more overt writing out of that voice in earlier oppressive discourses of reportage . . .

(Griffiths, 1994: 70)

In his essay 'The Myth of Authenticity: Representation, Discourse and Social Practice', Gareth Griffiths suggests that the 'inauthenticity' once used to label the colonized, and which should have been subsequently 'reversed' by anti-colonialism, has transformed into an authenticity which is under the control of the 'West'. In other words, having rejected the 'inauthenticity' applied under colonialism, the once-colonized now suffer their authenticity to be prescribed and hierarchised by the colonizer:

Whilst it is true that the various Australian Aboriginal peoples may increasingly wish to assert their sense of the local and the specific as a recuperative strategy in the face of the erasure of difference characteristic of colonialist representation, such representations, subsumed by the white media *under a mythologized and fetishized sign of the 'authentic'*, can also be used to create a privileged hierarchy of Australian Aboriginal voice.

(Griffiths, 1994: 71, emphasis added)

Given that we have seen David Lloyd (at the beginning of this essay) apply the same prognosis to Irish culture under colonial rule, it must be seriously considered whether any certainties in expressions of authenticity in post-Independence Irish culture are prescribed or 'allowed' by the colonizer. Applied to the Irish situation, Griffiths' analysis of post-colonial power structures seems a little simplistic – the cultural interchanges between Britain/England and Ireland both during and after colonization were never as settled or monolithic as Griffiths suggests they were and are in Aboriginal experience. Because of proximity, geography, race and religion the position of the Irish in colonial discourse was and is, as I have suggested elsewhere, 'liminal' (Graham, 1994). Irish culture, at once Western and colonized, white and racially other, imperial and subjugated, became marginal in the sense of existing at the edge of two experiences, with a culture that epitomises the hybridity, imitation and irony latent in colonial interchanges. 'Authenticity' may play a key role in Irish culture, but the function of authenticity in colonial and post-colonial terms in an Irish context will not, because of its liminality, follow the colonizer's trajectory in the way that Griffiths outlines. Colonialism's initial denial of 'authenticity' is at the root of the persistence of authenticity in Irish culture, but Ireland's colonially marginal, hybrid status allows authenticity a less stable role subsequently – thus authenticity becomes embedded as a feature of discourses of Irish culture, but its provenance ultimately resists limitation.

## **An old authenticity**

The teleology of colonialism suggests that authenticity will be reclaimed as part of the '[bringing] into existence [of the] history of the nation' (Fanon, [1961] 1990: 40) which Fanon sees as crucial in the process of decolonization. If authenticity is a tool for the justification of colonialism then, like (and as part of) the nation, it must be turned to face the colonizer. The history of nineteenth-century Irish cultural nationalism can be seen as such a process of reclamation, restaking the grounds for Irishness, 'proving' Irish authenticities.

Immediately we try to divide the tropes of Irish authenticities we are faced with contradiction and multiplicity. Is the predominant anti-colonial Irish authenticity of the de Valerean or Yeatsian version, for example? Folkish or rural? Irish Irish, Anglo-Irish or global Irish? These strains, along with many others

overlapping and contesting, could be identified in a longer study. For the moment I wish to focus on claims to authenticity in a text which allows for some distinction in authenticities directed against the colonial claims to 'inauthenticity' Lloyd mentions – W. B. Yeats's *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* ([1888], 1979). Yeats's collection of Irish 'peasant' tales is in one sense part of a continued popularisation of the antiquarianism which had begun in Ireland earlier in the century; Yeats's folk and fairy tales are not remarkable but typical in the way that they attempt to construct an Irishness which is from outside the social and sectarian remit of the collector, who through the act of collection, cataloguing, publishing and accumulation of knowledge sees a potential for becoming 'of' what is collated. The Irishness of Yeats's collection is constructed as both other and part of him, and is thus doubly authenticated; discursively he attempts to act as intermediary between an Irishness which is 'authentic' and a receiver of claims to authenticity whose identity will never be fully articulated (Britain or Anglo-Ireland, Europe or a universal sense of nationhood?). As medium for the authentic, his knowledge of authenticity and his ability to recognize it 'infect' him with authenticity too.

Yeats's 'Introduction' to *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland* expresses as much concern with the authenticity attached to the gathering of material as it does to the material itself:

In the *Parochial Survey of Ireland* it is recorded how the story-tellers used to gather together of an evening, and if any had a different version from the others, they would all recite theirs and vote, and the man who had varied would have to abide by their verdict. In this way stories have been handed down with such accuracy, that the long tale of Deirdre was, in the earlier decades of this century, told almost word for word, as in the very ancient MSS. in the Royal Dublin Society. In one case only it varied, and then the MS. was obviously wrong – a passage had been forgotten by the copyist.

(Yeats, [1888] 1979: 4)

The material of authenticity is here 'handed down' unchanged through history. This Irishness is certainly projected 'with anticipatory resoluteness towards one's future' (Golomb, 1995: 117); its trajectory begins in antiquity and survives history. While Yeats is primarily seeming to stress the objectivity (even democracy) of the authentication of the Irishness of 'the people'; this first level authenticity is encapsulated by two processes for authentication – both the storytellers, and at a different level the collector re-authenticate the tales; in the terms we uncovered in reading Golomb, by becoming 'genuine' the tales become authentic. And for Yeats the genuine 'proves' his loyalty (see Golomb, 1995: 117, quoted above) – the editorial ownership of authenticity may connect Yeats to his material but is also arguably anticipates the hierarchizing of subaltern authenticities which Griffiths describes. From this point Yeats can retrace with yet greater assurance the nature and production of Irish authenticity:

[In Lady Wilde's *Ancient Legends* the] humour has all given way to pathos and tenderness. We have here the innermost heart of the Celt in the moments he has grown to love through years of persecution, when cushioning himself about with dreams, and hearing fairy-songs in the twilight, he ponders on the soul and on the dead. Here is the Celt. Only it is the Celt dreaming.

(Yeats, [1888] 1979: 7)

As noted earlier, authenticity combines the prioritization of origins with what Golomb calls the 'pathos of incessant change' – for Yeats, going more closely to the origins of the 'Celt' ('humour has given way') leads to the ultimate, unquestionable authenticity of 'pathos and tenderness', which has been, as Golomb says, 'especially pronounced in extreme situations' (Golomb, 1995: 3). The ultimate collector of authenticated Irishness, in Yeats's 'Introduction', is Douglas Hyde:

He knows the people thoroughly. Others see a phase of Irish life; he understands all its elements. His work is neither humorous nor mournful; it is simply life.

(Yeats, [1888] 1979: 7)

As Adorno suggested, against the 'inauthentic' as broken, is the authentic as 'whole' – Yeats's Irish authenticity, by being 'simply life', trails off as authenticity must into a refusal to be defined (Golomb, 1995: 7) and 'in definite negation of something merely phenomenal' (Adorno, [1964] 1986: 8).

This Irish authenticity is thus complicated and usefully foreshadows the warnings given by Griffiths that authenticity may be continually authorized by the 'colonizer'. It cannot be simply assumed that Yeats is entirely fulfilling the role of colonizer – in fact the authenticity of the text only makes sense if Yeats's position is not taken as colonial but as liminal and constituted by a rhetoric of showing, claiming and confirming, which both vindicates the colonised while implicating and elevating the collector of this authenticity in the vindication.

## A new authenticity

Griffiths' notion that post-colonial authenticity still lies in the hands of the colonizer accords with Yeats's version of the authentic, since Yeats can be understood as colonizer controlling the voice of the colonized. Griffiths places his argument over authenticity in a familiar sphere in post-colonial studies, questioning how and if the 'subaltern speaks'. To believe in an ability to utter authentically may be to fail to see the continuation of power structures existing as after-effects of colonialism – it is certainly to ignore the layerings, in terms of language, class and gender, of post-colonial discourses uncovered in the writings of Subaltern

Studies (Guha, 1982–1989; Chatterjee and Pandey, 1992), Bhabha (1994) and Spivak (1988, 1990).

In the Irish case we need to be aware both of the particular circumstances of colonialism in Ireland (in shorthand, its liminality) and more generally that Griffiths' one-way process of cultural control may be naïve or at least lacking when applied to the Irish case. Authenticity, after all, appears to reverse itself during the anti-colonial process, and in the complicated and unstable cultural circumstances of Ireland this is unlikely to be simply an 'appearance'. Given Independence, how will authenticity, which is 'rooted in revolution' (Golomb, 1995: 12), move away from its origins?

Yeats's ambiguous control over the authenticity of his material reveals in its triple-level of authentication (tales, story-tellers, folktale-collectors) that authenticity thrives on the textuality and substance of its medium – as suggested above it is the 'mass', not the media, which authenticity finds difficult. Textuality seems to provide the material existence which authenticity needs in tandem with its resistance to definition – its mystique is maintained and *evidenced*, while what is actually 'authentic' is filtered through further authenticating processes (folk tales are themselves authenticated democratically by their tellers, then approved and re-authorized by their collectors/editors).

How nineteenth and early twentieth century Irish modes of authenticity (of which there are many more than the example from Yeats suggests – Corkery might be a useful contrast) are played out in contemporary circumstances would be an obvious area of research in further examining authenticity in Irish culture. Anecdotally, one might suggest that 'authenticity' has increased in its value as a marker of what is Irish as Ireland has (partially) moved out of its anti-colonial mode. Authenticity's ability to co-exist with the market has not only enabled it to survive after decolonization but has allowed it to become, in some circumstances, as Griffiths says, a 'mythologised and fetished sign' (1994: 71). What Griffiths calls 'an overdetermined narrative of authenticity and indigeneity' (1994: 84) characterizes rebirths of the old authenticities, whether these are used to sell or purchase the 'authentic' once-colonized.

In the Irish context the tourist industry is an obvious site for the peddling of the authentic in an explicit and populist way. Luke Gibbons quotes Robert Ballagh on Bord Fáilte: 'you have Bord Fáilte eulogizing roads you where you won't see a car from one day to another: it's almost as if they're advertising a country nobody lives in' (Gibbons, 1998: 210). As Gibbons points out, the Bord Fáilte advertising which he discusses seems initially at odds with the Industrial Development Authority's (IDA) selling of Ireland economically, as a market place and site for expansion; yet almost immediately the imagery and language of tourism becomes part of the IDA's marketing strategy: 'The factories and the bustling towns and cities exist in harmony with the Ireland the tourists flock to see, a land of unsurpassed natural beauty' (quoted in Gibbons, 1988: 211). Gibbons calls this phenomenon the 'appeal of remote antiquity to today's filofax

generation' (1988: 213), and it is an important feature of the ways in which older Irish authenticities have been retained in Irish contemporaneity.

Heritage Island<sup>1</sup> sell Ireland on the currency of its authenticity, marketing an organic vision of an Ireland layered with visible, visitable history. What follows comes under the heading of 'Irish Heritage Retold' in their marketing brochure:

The story of Ireland's heritage is a new reason for visiting Ireland. It is told in a modern but authentic style and mirrors European culture preserved in an island which makes it possible to visit centres from neolithic to 19th Century (sic), even on a short visit.

Heritage Island properties can be found throughout Ireland and range from restored castles and historic houses to state-of-the-art story telling of the legends and history of Ireland.

All interpretation has been professionally researched and where there has been reproduction the style is authentic.

(Heritage Island marketing brochure, 1994)

Authenticity here relies on preservation; what is to be visited is not modern, new Ireland but authentic Ireland made modern and new. Thus Ireland is now 'modern *but* authentic' in *style*; *story-telling* is state-of-the-art, but uses legends and history. It is the media (style and story) which are able to embody this apparent dichotomy of old and new and in the process preserve the authentic.

Golomb, as we have already seen, pits authenticity against 'mass media', and I have been stressing that the simple fact of changing media is not necessarily a threat to the authentic. Here the attempt to cope with the changed social/political context for Irish authenticity is embodied in the notion that 'modern but authentic' Ireland's style 'mirrors European culture preserved in an island'. There is a nod here to Irish post-nationalism and a valorizing of the European context, and yet 'mirrors' retains a distance from the possible inauthenticities of what is outside Ireland undermining the indigenous authenticity of the 'national culture' (with which authenticity so closely equates itself). The word 'preserved' is crucial, implying that not only authentic Irishness is newly (and economically) available in Ireland, but that this haven of authenticity includes (but is not swamped by) an almost lost authentic European antiquity. Authenticity's claims may always tend to such extravagance.

Heritage Island is a reworking of the Yeatsian authenticities of *Folk and Fairy Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, showing how authenticities are self-preserving through their willingness to reproduce themselves in new media and new discourses. The structures of authentication here are also those expressed by Yeats. Just as Yeats sees authenticity at a base level in the Irishness of tales themselves, at another level in the standardization by tellers and at a final level by their collectors/editors, so Heritage Island reassures its customers of Irish heritage's authenticity through the same three levels. Ireland's history/legends are the

authentic material; but their (re-)telling is further proof of their authenticity since they are told in 'modern but authentic style' ('state-of-the-art'). As a final affirmation that no inauthenticity has corrupted the 'stuff' of the authentic, the authoritative validator steps in, filling Yeats's role as collector/editor: 'All interpretation has been professionally researched'.

There is certainly a tendency here to 'an overdetermined narrative of authenticity and indigeneity' (Griffiths, 1994: 84); Irish authenticity, in Yeats and Heritage Island, displays the same characteristics of definition – Heritage Island is arguably more aware of itself as a rewriting rather than a creation, but both have a sense of the origins stretching back into faded time. Just as Golomb sees authenticity as at its best a 'search', and Adorno condemns authenticity as a 'jargon', we can now begin to see that Irish authenticity, through its very structures, is a series of claims to authenticity which persist both despite changing cultural circumstances and media and in full knowledge of what those circumstances and media are.

### **An ironic authenticity**

If authenticity in Irish culture followed only the trajectory mapped out above then its ability to order Irish cultural experience would be almost unchallengeable. From the examples I have used it might be possible to see not only the authenticity of the folkish, rural and historical/legendary as nearly monolithically dominant, but to note that its repeated forms of self-sustenance and validation give it a layered authenticity which reinforces its desire for dominance. Is it then possible for this standardized authenticity to be challenged? And if it is challenged, how far is the notion of authenticity itself (as well as what is considered authentic) undermined?

Golomb's crusading restatement of the necessity for a search for authenticity is, as has already been noted, set against the postmodern, mass media and the 'attempt to dissolve the subjective pathos of authenticity' (Golomb, 1995: 204). The rigour of Golomb's attack on these aspects of the postmodern may signal the way into reading against authenticity, or at least without the tyranny of authenticity as a central defining feature of cultural integrity. In the Irish case this would mean looking to new forms of culture as a means to disrupting the influence of old authenticities and their new forms – as Heritage Island shows, an apparently postmodern form (advertising tourism) does not guarantee such disruption.

To move towards a possible alternative formation of the authentic in Irish culture I want to discuss a television advertisement for Smithwick's beer, appropriately entitled 'Ireland' by its makers (McConnells, 1994). 'Ireland' takes as its theme the authenticity of advertising, the authenticity of Ireland and the authenticity of advertising Irish beer. The 20 second advertisement ironically constructs and deconstructs the Irish authenticity examined so far, and can be read as a possible attempt to posit a revised, ironic authenticity as a replacement.

Because of its overt iconophilia, to summarize 'Ireland' completely would take an article in itself. Its format is deliberately complex; it is almost stereotypically a postmodern montage. 'Ireland' begins with the words 'GET' and then 'INTO' in white on red, with a Northern American voice-over saying: 'Get into . . . Ireland'. The complete screen then splits into a screen divided horizontally and vertically to make four squares, each of which has changing images and film clips throughout. The first four identifiable images are (clockwise from top left): a moving aerial shot of a rural landscape; a stained glass pattern with a shamrock; a Celtic cross (towards which the camera zooms); and a neon sign for 'Home Cookin'.

Here already we can begin to establish the patterning of authenticity in 'Ireland'. The four part structure is undoubtedly a jokey reflection of the four provinces of Ireland – or the four green fields, given the top left shot. Rurality and standard cultural imagery (shamrock, Celtic cross) allow the viewer to 'get into Ireland' in an unchallenging, familiar way. The product here is on the verge of being made authentic because of its Irishness. And yet the bottom left of the four hints at what is to come. Neon and 'Home Cookin' suggest an alternative cultural background to an authentic Irishness. This is quickly reinforced by the next series of images (again top left clockwise): Ronald and Nancy Reagan drinking Smithwick's on a trip to Ireland (they actually drank Guinness – the Smithwick's is self-consciously airbrushed in); three pints of Smithwick's; a fiddler (a shot which fades into another of an Irish dancer) and Smithwick's advertising on a neon sign in Belfast. The neon and the lost 'g' in cooking, ironize 'home', which has become Americanized (signified also by Reagan).

The globalization and Americanization of the authenticity of Irishness is overemphasized in the next series: a boot kicking a ball; 'I [football, i.e. love] N.Y.', John F. Kennedy (who can be heard to say the word 'haemorrhage' – a reference to Irish emigration to the United States); the Statue of Liberty over-written by the word 'Donnelly'. Having made this point about Irishness in a global context, both as an exporter of Irishness to the States and as a culture existing in a global market, 'Ireland' reverts to an older Irishness in order to carry out another deconstruction. So a mountain/shepherd/sheep waves, a dancer and a woman carrying pints of beer become a map of Ireland with 293,140 unemployed (with paper money slipping off the map), a picture of a banana with the word REPUBLIC underneath, a diver and a condom advertisement. Here old Irish authenticities are truly challenged – a (post)modern, urban Ireland presents new realities of unemployment, sexual liberality and criticism of established state nationalism.

The advertisement, to which I have not done full justice here, ends with its lower two squares seeming to take on the possibility of reconciliation between north and south; a white dove flies across a plaque with a red hand (Ulster) and over a ceramic tile with a harp engraved on it (signifying Ireland in more nationalistic sense, as well as Guinness, Smithwick's' corporate owners). If this appears to replace an old authenticity with a new liberal politics, such a notion is undercut by a simultaneous but opposite movement in the top two squares. While the



peace and reconciliation theme is played out from right to left in the lower squares, the top squares have, on the left, a shot of graffiti ('Who stole my bike') and on the right an image of a whitewashed (and rural) housefront across which (left to right) rides an old man in a long coat on a bicycle. The humour here is at the expense of the older political discourse of national politics (and the problem of Northern Ireland), raising again the prospect of an alternative focus, established through ironic versions of the past.

'Ireland' suggests that the older authenticities are simultaneously contradicted and yet established by Ireland's cultural representation in a context wider than the Irish. The USA is viewed both as a consumer and producer of Irishness, and its effects on the maintenance of Irishness are charted through the tongue-in-cheekness of the double representation of the US Presidential desire to affix an Irishness to the Presidency. Almost all the commentary to the advertisement is spoken in snippets of North American voices: 'It's great to be back here in mythical, mystical Ireland'; 'the most wonderful place in the world; home'. And yet 'home' has already been shown to be Americanized in the sign 'Home Cookin'; so 'Ireland' sees Ireland's attempts at established authenticated culture as pitifully denying the cultural matrix which preserves old Irish authenticities.

Does 'Ireland' then represent a form of culture which is anti-authentic, or is it more interested in the establishment of an alternative authenticity? Certainly the movement from the old rural authenticity of the shepherd or the pub scene with the woman carrying pints of beer, to, respectively, the map with unemployment figures and a condom advertisement, would suggest that 'Ireland' is altering the rural, folkish, tourist authenticities in favour of urban, socialized, radicalized versions of Ireland (which are nevertheless still reliant on the notion that they are more authentic than previous versions of Ireland). This challenging of old authenticities and their newer resurrections (in tourism, in exile stereotypes of Irishness) is noteworthy in itself. But 'Ireland' does not rest there; its irony is finally turned on itself. The only (Northern) Irish voice used in the commentary says: 'Are ye going for a pint?'. A totally unrevealing comment? A stereotype? As another (North American) voice says: 'You just can't handle the truth' – in this Ireland the truth is impossible to pin down; competing claims to authenticity (which are allowed to compete in 'Ireland') have rendered their truths and their authentic origins obscure and unstable. 'Ireland' ends with the wonderfully ironic and destabilizing comment (again in North American voice): '. . . maybe that's just Blarney'. Finally the whole process of authentication, claims to authenticity and the pathos of those claims is questioned and maybe dismissed in a double-edged use of a stereotype ('Blarney') culled from the excesses of populist versions of restored Irish authenticity. 'Ireland' almost undoes its own undoing of the authentic through a near-sliding back into 'the jargon of authenticity'; and yet in doing so it both reveals the power and dissects the pathos of established Irish authenticity.

According to Baudrillard, '[when] the real is no longer what is used to be

. . . [there] is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity' (1983: 12). 'Ireland', in its joyous uncovering of myths or origins *as myths*, and signs of reality *as signs*, is able to question the objectivity and authenticity of old and renewed claims in Irish culture – its processes uncover both the mechanics of authenticity and the cultural desire for authenticity. 'Ireland' toys with an alternative authenticity, but finally cannot rest on anything but its ironic 'maybe that's just Blarney'.

The persistence of authenticity in Irish culture is best seen, then, as a series of claims, a desire for validation. There can be no doubt that this persistence arises from the cultural crisis of colonialism and its de-authenticating of the colonized. Against this Irish authenticities can be read as movements against colonialism, (re-)establishing authenticity. Yet this anti-colonial authenticity is not purely formed; the Yeats example used above suggests that any Irish authenticity will be complex, layered and affected the liminal space of colonialism in Ireland, never securely other than the colonized itself. While such old authenticities can be re-established after colonialism, the paradox of their reconstitution as authentic is central to the fate of the notion of authenticity in Irish culture. 'Ireland' may tend towards an authenticity which is urban and contemporary but its initial destabilization of an old authenticity means that it cannot trust claims to the authentic again. And still 'Ireland' is not an entire rejection of authenticity but an ironic acknowledgement of its persistence in Irish culture.

Reading Irish culture in terms of authenticity can allow cultural criticism to trace changes and consistencies in cultural production and reception arising out of the power structures of colonialism. Authenticity as a focus potentially shifts Irish cultural criticism away from the often reified pre-existing terms of debates in literary studies, and allows cultural theory to enter Irish cultural criticism in a way which can, when necessary, deny the scared status of established politicised readings of Irish culture, which can question the production processes of material culture in relation to history, and which can send us back through history via the ironies of origin and originality.

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## Notes

- \* This article was previously published in a different form in (eds) C. Graham and R. Kirkland (1999) *Ireland and Cultural Theory: The Mechanics of Authenticity*, Macmillan.

- 1 Heritage Island, established in 1992, is a private company offering tourist marketing services 'to a select number of the best Heritage Centres [in Ireland]' (C. Finegan, 'Marketing Ireland's Heritage to the International Market', paper given at Tourist Development Conference, Killarney, 1996). I am grateful to Cartan Finegan, Managing Director of Heritage Island, for supplying me with a copy of this paper.

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