

## Notes

- 1 The legislation in question was the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, also known as the "Labouchere Amendment." The other piece of legislation on the books at the time was the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act; see Kieran Rose, *Diverse Communities: The Evolution of Lesbian and Gay Politics in Ireland* (Cork, 1993), 74.
- 2 Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century* (London, 1994), vii.
- 3 Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," in *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Writings*, ed. Joseph Bristow (London, 1992), 142.
- 4 Rose, *Diverse Communities*, 3-4.
- 5 See Irish Council for Civil Liberties, "A European Human Rights Advance," in *Equality Now* (Dublin, 1990), 24-30.
- 6 Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence* (Oxford, 1991), 30.
- 7 See Deborah Ballard, "Mediawatch," (Dublin) *Gay Community News* (February 1995): 11.
- 8 Tom Lennon (pseud.), *When Love Comes to Town* (Dublin, 1993), quoting here and below from the back-cover copy.
- 9 Carole Wardlaw, *One in Every Family* (Dublin, 1994), quoting from the back-cover copy.
- 10 Quares Felas, ed. Brian Finnegan (Dublin, 1994); "cottaging" refers to casual sex in public toilets.
- 11 Susy Byrne and Junior Larkin, *Coming Out: A Book for Lesbians and Gay Men of All Ages* (Dublin, 1994); *Alternative Loves: Irish Gay and Lesbian Stories*, ed. David Marcus (Dublin, 1994).
- 12 Ger Philpott, *Deep End* (Dublin, 1995).
- 13 Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 63.
- 14 Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism," in Bristow, ed., *Importance of Being Earnest and Other Writings*, 164-96.
- 15 Cathal Kelly, "Guinness Goes Gay?" (Dublin) *Gay Community News* (July 1995): 1.
- 16 David Smith and Colin Richardson, "The Kiss that Wasn't Meant to Be," *Gay Times* (September 1995): 37.

Lawrence J. Taylor

"There Are Two Things that People Don't Like to Hear about Themselves": The Anthropology of Ireland and the Irish View of Anthropology

My title is derived from a quip by the late John Maloney, a wise publican of southwest Donegal. The year was 1973, and we had been discussing the public relations problems of anthropologists in Ireland. No doubt exaggerating, he told me that, according to his sources, neither of two ethnographers of small islands off the west coast could safely return to his research site. I asked him about a rather technical kinship article by another anthropologist who had conducted fieldwork close by in west Donegal; surely that had not upset anyone? His answer: "There are two things that people don't like to hear about themselves; one of them is lies and the other's the truth."

That piece of Irish wit—a cultural category (to which my colleagues perhaps pay too little attention in their analyses of Ireland—may express an ironic view not only of the anthropological Stranger but also, as do all really good Irish jokes, of the Irish Self. The comment also suggests that their response to anthropology can play a part in the continuing conversation of the Irish

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with themselves—a conversation that occasionally, and perhaps more often lately, bursts into fierce argument.

On the other hand, there has been a curious and instructive asymmetry between the role of anthropology in Irish academic life and its part in the public imaginary and self-knowledge of the Irish. As Tom Wilson has recently noted, anthropology's voice in the Irish academy is small and rarely heard in serious public forums on the social or cultural issues—nor, I would add, has Irish anthropology had much theoretical impact on the discipline since Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball's study so many years ago—of this other margin of Europe.<sup>1</sup> Wilson explains this lack of presence and impact as due, at least in part, to the regional and topical foci of anthropological studies that remain too mired in the western bogs, namely, endless variations on Arensberg and Kimball. Instead of the more relevant Irish anthropology, one better attuned to both academic discourse within Ireland and the current life of the Irish people, that he would like to see. Indeed, Wilson and his coeditors have shown us some of the potential of anthropological views of the Irish city in their new volume, *Irish Urban Cultures*.<sup>2</sup>

I certainly do not dispute his point, however guilty I may be of having misappreciated my ethnographic youth in the west. I would maintain that the internal machinations of western rural communities remain highly relevant, however, given the current investment of European Union money in development schemes there. In fact, development officers are sometimes desperate to find anthropological studies and/or methods they can employ themselves to penetrate the local social world. I myself (and my experience is probably not unique) have been contacted by a number of fisheries-development people in Donegal because of one article in which I analyzed cooperation and competition over common property among fishermen in my little corner.<sup>3</sup> The most extensive work in applied anthropology/rural sociology is being done by Chris Curtin in Galway,<sup>4</sup> but the work of Graham McFarlane and his colleagues in Belfast, who are involved in an ambitious comparative project with anthropologists and other social scientists at the opposite EU periphery in Greece, is also very promising.

But rather than defend the continuing utility of community studies (when properly informed by a grasp of the wider context), I want to suggest another direction for anthropology in Ireland, complementary to locally

focused studies east and west, rural and urban. In fact, the direction I favor is suggested by reflection not only on what anthropologists have done in Ireland, but on the Irish public's occasionally vituperative reaction to anthropology. That reaction is an element in the continuing construction of Ireland, a process with its own symbolic geography that defines Ireland internally and externally in relation to a limited number of significant and changing "others." This construction of the national self, in which anthropology sometimes plays a part—as interfering or naive "other" (Ireland through the looking glass)—is itself a proper anthropological subject and highly relevant to contemporary life, public and intellectual, as the Irish confront themselves in the context of the European Union.

Understanding that issue, however, requires an interpretative perspective that is as yet only slightly developed in the Irish academy—even less so among Irish anthropologists, although it does characterize the work of a few of their American colleagues.<sup>5</sup> Following one line of interpretative inquiry from my own work on Catholicism in Donegal, I suggest that concentrating on national rather than just local discourse may throw a specifically anthropological light on issues important to both public and academic discourse and debate in Ireland.

Such a strategy might also enable Irish ethnography to contribute to the development of both anthropological theory and interdisciplinary Irish studies. The latter suffers from a wide, and possibly growing, gap between empiricist historians and literary theorists. While attention to discourse is certainly a feature of the "postcolonial" brand of literary analysis that is increasingly colonizing the Irish academy, it is too often imported and applied ready-made to the Irish context. The relative absence of any middle ground between those theoretical aerialists and the still-terrestrial Irish social historians has hurt both groups. Irish historians could certainly benefit from raising their heads high enough to catch an occasional glimpse of cultural theory, but so too might postmodernist/postcolonialist theoreticians benefit from alighting on the sod long enough to learn something they did not already know. It is just possible, after all, that the distinctive Irish experience, local or national, is not only interesting in its own right, but can contribute to a more sophisticated set of theoretical formulations. Whether local or national, an ethnographic attention to texts requires a corresponding attention to contexts, a rooting of interpretation

in particularities. Perhaps most importantly, though, the entire enterprise would ideally be motivated by a desire not only to contribute to the development of a general theory but also to understand a particular people.

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 The anthropology of Ireland did not begin as part of a comparative anthropology of Europe, and certainly not as a quest for the representative or average Irish district or community, but rather as a late Victorian search for primitive survivals on the western edge of the island. Thus A. C. Had-don (of Torres Straits fame) and his associate, C. R. Browne, headed west at the turn of the century from Trinity College in Dublin to the Aran Islands, Inishbofin, and other storm-battered outposts, where they would measure skulls and count first-cousin marriages.<sup>4</sup> If this Protestant and imperial view of the Celtic fringe sought the primitive Other, however, an equally Victorian (and often Protestant), sympathetic Gaelic Revival movement sought the same characters but as folkloric heroes, for the Revivalists were in search of self-definition—the true Celtic Other within. Where to look? The answer lay in an analogy dictated by symbolic logic (in both senses of the term): as Ireland is to England, so are the islands of its western shore to Ireland. The Gaelic *Ur-ground* was to be sought on such outposts as the Arans, west of Galway, or the Blaskets, off the southwest Kerry coast.

Of these islands, none figured so large in the collective Irish imagination as the Blaskets, where British classicist Robin Flower had “discovered” the fading rays of the Celtic twilight in a poetic folk culture.<sup>5</sup> His portrait of the “Western Island” set off an incredible flurry of self-narration in response—by the 1950s no fewer than sixteen books had been published by Blasket-born authors (from a population that peaked at several hundred). As the Irish historian Niall O’Ciosain recently argued, these works are not simple revelations of an ancient world (as they are still typically taken to be), but rather complex and often ironically reflexive products of interaction—of meeting outsiders and reading their works as well as those by other authors.<sup>6</sup> These “authentic” voices—as the Irish public generally hears them—of a pure, western, primitive wisdom may grace and often dominate the shelves of “Irish Interest” sections in Ireland’s bookstores, but the ironic reflexivity of Donegal publican Maloney’s observation could nonetheless be found in this Irish scene as well. While the national obsession with the western isles was the occasional target of criticism in the

press, it was taken up most devastatingly by the humorist “Flann O’Brien” (a.k.a. Brian O’Nolan, a.k.a. Myles na gCopaleen) in his Irish-language sham autobiography *An Béal Bocht* (*The Poor Mouth*), a send-up of islanders and visiting Irish or English folklorists alike.<sup>7</sup> In one chapter, a prize pig—so valuable that it wears overalls—escapes from its pen and blunders into a schoolroom where a folklorist is recording the local Irish idiom. The wild gruntings of the animal are taken by the outsider for the purest Irish he has ever heard, and, at the end of this episode, the pig goes home with a flask of whiskey and a five-pound note in its “hip pocket.”

Such satire notwithstanding, the west continues to be diacritical of Irishness for most members of the middle class over the age of forty; there, the national language is or should be spoken, and the old, definitive customs still practiced. In the *Gaeltachts*—Irish-speaking zones—the “Irish colleges,” which are not unlike the ethnic summer camps one finds in America, still welcome children from the north and the east, teaching them the language, as well as Irish dancing and singing, in the places where these cultural icons are supposed to be enshrined: “retribalization centers,” as my teacher Bill Arens called them.

It is to this western seaboard (though not always to a *Gaeltacht*) that most anthropologists, beginning with Arensberg and Kimball in the 1930s, have come. In all cases, their work has had the potential to enter into—wittingly or not—the national conversation about self-definition. In the 1930s, newly independent and perhaps postcolonial (depending on how one defines colonialism), the Irish were, not surprisingly, sensitive to descriptions from the outside. While Arensberg and Kimball’s work was criticized then on theoretical and methodological grounds by various social scientists within and without Ireland (but also touched off a very useful interdisciplinary debate on the nature of the “stem family”), these anthropologists never provoked the adverse national reaction that others would experience. Perhaps this was due—especially in the case of Arensberg’s brief and accessible *Irish Countryman*<sup>8</sup>—to their having described an idealized small farmer of County Clare, one who seems the very man that the framers of the 1939 Irish Constitution had in mind as the virtuous soul and basis of the new Republic. Indeed, that document’s principal author, then Prime Minister Eamon de Valera, was from Clare as well.

Subsequent anthropological sorties were not to occur until the 1960s and 1970s, but these were “into the west” as well, or to Northern Ire-

land. While some of the latter work— notably, Rosemary Harris's study of a mixed Catholic-Protestant rural community—has been widely read and cited, the Irish public reacted only to John C. Messenger's 1969 account of the smallest of the Aran Islands and, less so, to Robin Fox's 1975 study of Tory Island, which grew out of several articles published in the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> These research sites satisfied the romantic inclinations of anthropologists in search of the purest examples of Gaelic culture and the best-defined communities, inclinations which were certainly in line with the dominant Irish view of these places, but other elements of the anthropological perspective clearly were not. Messenger's account of personal and social life on Inis Oir depicted an almost paranoid insularity which, along with many other defects, was said to be the result of an intense sexual repression fostered by the Catholic Church. Freudian analyses are probably only welcomed by those who pay for them, so it is not surprising that this portrait of Irish inner life on the outer edge was not happily received by the locals.<sup>12</sup> The location, together with the argument concerning the Church and repression, ensured that it would offend many Irish far beyond the tiny island.

The infinitely superior ethnography of Tory by Fox was also the result of a search for cultural survivals and the most clearly defined local community. Donegal folklorist Seán Ó hEochaidh told me that he advised Fox to "go to Tory—that's the closest thing to a 'tribe' he could find in Ireland." While Fox's description and analysis of Tory concerned itself with the standard issues of social organization and kinship, it also raised the unusual issue of noncohabitation by a significant number of married couples (what I call sibling solidarity with a vengeance), which was enough to offend the locals. Interestingly, in the Irish imagination Tory is a rather wild, piratical enclave— partly because of its extreme northwestern location, no doubt— where the kind of "savagery" to which Fox briefly alludes in *Encounter with Anthropology* (i.e., *brawls*) would be expected. At any rate, what Fox says of the Tory Islanders is presented as true only of them; they are not taken to be a microcosm of Irish society and culture. For that reason, and perhaps because Fox is not an American, public reaction to his study was minimal.

This was not at all the case, of course, with Nancy Scheper-Hughes's exploration of mental illness in west Kerry.<sup>13</sup> Should we be surprised that the natives were put off by a book with a title which, amending the ancient epithet "Isle of Saints and Scholars," adds the alliterative "Schizophrenics"?

First of all, this anthropologist struck at the very heartland in the symbolic geography of Irish identity: the west of the west, the seaboard of Kerry. She could only have done worse by penetrating the Gaeltacht of Dingle, for the Blasket Islands had been empty since the 1950s. But Scheper-Hughes was in fact complicit with the "pure Ireland" reading of her research site: it had such high rates of mental illness, by her analysis, precisely because it combined the most "traditional" forms of Irish family structure and relations with the most rapid collapse of the very social/cultural world that had produced those relations. Thus the people of west Kerry were the simultaneous victims of Freudian repression (à la Messenger, though certainly more credibly documented and described) and Durkheimian anomie. This interpretation, coming from the outside and in a work with such a title but not a trace of humor, ensured that the book would be read as a national indictment. Scheper-Hughes was understood to be talking about Ireland in general not because her research site was a representative microcosm, but because it was an epitome of the island. That such a book, which had the additional appeal of being well-written and generally accessible to the educated but nonspecialist reader, enraged many Irish people should come as no surprise.

But the negative reactions to Scheper-Hughes and those who came before her are rooted in the wider field of Ireland's symbolic geography. This concern with, and sometimes hair-trigger sensitivity to, the external view certainly has a longer history than that of anthropology in/of Ireland, and it springs from two, very different sources: the commentary of travelers, especially British travelers, who began "othering the Irish" with Geraldus Cambrensis in the twelfth century; and the observations, oral and written, of emigrants returning from North America. Ireland's identity was formed between England and America, that is, in opposition to and in conjunction with their views, in a way that makes Ireland a rather distinctive European case. Whereas the French tell jokes about Belgians, the northern Italians about the southerners, and the English about the Irish, the Irish tell jokes about Kerry men (who are stand-ins for the country as a whole) and Americans. Their American jokes are a familiar genre; in fact, several have variants that can be found in structurally similar situations elsewhere in the world. They concern the sophisticated but ultimately naïve American who is sometimes bested and always befuddled by the "simple natives." To give but one favorite example, a tourist from Texas is told by a Connemara peasant

ant that the rocky little quarter-acre in which he is laboring is his "farm." "Why, back home in Texas," the incredulous Texan replies, "my farm is so big, if I leave at daybreak and drive my truck from one end to the other, I don't get back till nightfall." Paddy pushes his cap back, saying in wonder, "Sure, I had a truck like that myself, but I sold it!"

Something of the same esprit can be detected in the reaction to anthropologists. Many an educated Irish person has told me, for example, of hearing that certain communities had totally succeeded in fooling anthropologists about the nature of local society—apparently for their own amusement. Imagine an entire village conspiring for months, acting out dramas and intrigues, all for the benefit of the gullible anthropologist. The point being made by those who relate such stories is clear: "You'll never know us." That such a vision is logically inconsistent with the complaint that anthropologists are objectionable because they unethically reveal the secrets of communal life seems to incommode no one. As the Irish expression goes, "You can't win for losin'." Thus, it seems to me, the negative reaction to anthropologists is one aspect of a more general reaction to Americans, and particularly Irish Americans, with whom many Irish, especially in the poorer west, have had an ambivalent relationship for more than a hundred years.

However, it is worth noting that the most virulent academic reaction in Ireland to Scheper-Hughes's book was that of the Irish American anthropologist Eileen Kane,<sup>14</sup> and while many of the "plain people of Ireland" were outraged by *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics*, the book had its supporters as well. Although they were sometimes more vocal in private than in public, internal critics of so-called traditional Irish society saw this account of madness in Kerry as providing an opportunity to question the more general gulf between the Irish self-image and Irish reality. This tendency toward self-critique has been increasingly apparent in recent years as Ireland has come to see itself more in relation to Europe—first becoming linked to its Community in 1973, then voting overwhelmingly for the stronger ties of its Union in 1992—and, perhaps, correspondingly less in relation to America.

Anthropology's fleeting appearances in these Irish dialogues and self-narratives should serve to make us aware of the general process by which its role becomes accentuated everywhere, thanks to the media, whenever national identity is contested, as is now the case in Ireland. The island today

seems no less a national community—a national conversation, if you will—than it ever was; more so, in fact, as families gather 'round the "electronic hearth," listening to the same two or three hugely popular call-in radio or TV talk shows, and reading one or both of Ireland's two national newspapers. But this national conversation focuses, heats up, and gathers definitive force whenever certain kinds of crises or cases erupt on the scene. These "affairs," as the French call them, seem in Ireland to magnetize everyone.<sup>15</sup>

Anthropology can be useful at these moments as a tool for uncovering a culture in action, in reaction, in formation.<sup>16</sup> One first identifies the general discourse that all participants share—an implicit agreement on what is significant and how it connects to other categories—and then the sub-discourses, or idioms, within it. One notes whose voices (in terms of age, gender, class, locality, etc.) are identified with which idioms. The crucial thing, however, is not to stop there, but to take such current anthropological notions of culture as contingent and as information seriously and thus to view the argument over time, attempting to locate the process, the changes, whereby both discourses and social class fragments call each other into existence. Take the following example, which is directly connected to the issue of national self-definition.

In 1992, Ireland was shaken by a series of events that assumed the significance of national moral crises. They might have been news anywhere, but perhaps would not have offered as much self-definition potential elsewhere. First, there was the "X" case, with all of Ireland following the unfolding story of an anonymous fourteen-year-old girl who had been raped and impregnated by her friend's father and was taken by her parents to England for an abortion. Although abortion is not only illegal in nearly all cases but also (as of 1983) unconstitutional, approximately 4,000–5,000 Irish women seek abortions in England every year. The public got to hear this particular story only because the girl's parents reported her rape to the police, who passed the information along to the attorney general. Although the latter's failure to pursue a case of child abuse by a priest would bring down the Irish government two years later, he nevertheless felt duty bound in this case to act on the illegal quest for an abortion. A writ enjoining the parents to bring their daughter back to Ireland before she had an abortion was issued and—to everyone's amazement—obeyed. Most would have returned only after the deed, and had that been the strategy in this case, many observers felt, the penalty would have been light at most. Such compliance

to the letter of a law regularly honored only in the breach, however, generated a national crisis that played out on the nationwide stage provided by the media. The Irish High Court quickly issued a ruling: the constitutional clause allowing abortion when the life of the mother was at stake applied in this case because the girl had spoken of suicide. But that ruling, satisfying few on either side of the abortion issue, only generated further debate. The contention was not only over the morality of abortion and the definitions of life and death—as it would have been in the United States, for example—but also over the very definition of the nation. Ireland was understood by all parties to be moving into the modern, secular world in a general cultural sense, a process much hastened by its increasing integration with the European Community. "Europe" was invoked by all parties to the debate—for some as a model of the "enlightenment" to which Ireland should aspire and in the face of which should find its own backwardness shameful; for others as the latest, most soulless secularism, a mega-state that would never really tolerate the presence of a distinctively moral national entity on its periphery. In that idiom, the European Community was just another empire poised to swallow up the nation and people of Ireland.

This discourse, first generated by the "X" case crisis, dictated the terms of the national debate over the Maastricht referendum a few months later. The Irish people were faced with the question of whether or not to ratify the new European Unity treaty that would move its member states toward greater political and fiscal unity. Only in Ireland could the general discourse of the referendum debate have been centered on the issue and the practice, ideal and real, of abortion. If the question was that of Ireland's relation to Europe, then abortion in general and the movement in support of the "X" case girl in particular were unequivocal assets to the debate. They offered Ireland an opportunity to define itself as a nation, to define the Irish as a people by means of the contrasts between them and a Europe of which they were either a part or not. While the question of Ireland's neutrality was also raised, it was abortion that overwhelmed all other issues in the national debate over Maastricht, which is to say over Ireland's relationship to Europe. All parties to the discussion agreed not only that Ireland was defined vis-à-vis Europe by its unusual position on abortion, but also that the significance of the female body was in some way emblematic of the nation. Their respective idioms differed, however, as one might expect. Whereas the liberal rhetoric construed the assaults

on the "X" case girl's body as beginning with rape but continuing at the hands of a controlling, patriarchal Church and State, a conservative idiom used metaphors of purity and danger to depict Ireland as a virgin/mother whose boundaries, however mysteriously penetrated by the impregnating act, should not be subject to the further violation of (legalized) abortion. For conservatives, Ireland was the place by definition (hence the constitutional change) where abortion did not happen. England and Europe were the kinds of places where it did. For liberals, Ireland was the place where control over the female body was most complete and oppressive; Europe was a place where women could control their own bodies.

The vote went heavily for Maastricht; apparently, the hope for millions of pounds in economic aid overrode the fear of moral pollution or loss of identity for two-thirds of the voters. That outcome, however, should not blind us to the cultural impact of the discourses formulated in the process, for these continued to underwrite Irish conceptualizations of religion, women, Ireland, and Europe. This was made clear a few months later when it was revealed that the very popular and active Bishop of Galway, Eamonn Casey, was the father of a seventeen-year-old boy whose mother (the bishop's distant cousin) was an American. Casey had, moreover, misappropriated diocesan funds to pay for the child's education, apparently in return for the mother's silence. The nation was again divided, with all public forums becoming arenas of recrimination and approbation. It was not just a question of Casey's morality, of course, for a case this sensational appealed to competing views on the character of the Church, and in relation to women's bodies as well. Was the bishop's behavior evidence of an ultimately corrupt and hypocritical Catholic Church or of an ultimately empathy-inducing human frailty, as evinced by a great bishop's "fall" in a modern age of loose sexuality—here embodied in the sinister "American bitch," as she was described by Casey's defenders (and treated as such by the popular tv talk-show host Gay Byrne)?

While nineteenth-century Ireland was imagined as a community—to echo Benedict Anderson's apt phrase—in and through a religious idiom, the question suggested by these cases is whether Ireland can continue to imagine itself in such terms.<sup>17</sup> Its public narratives always afford a prominent position not only to the institution of the Catholic Church but also to *Catholicism*, as defined by the actions and discourse of right-wing lay organizations. In the crucible of these competing Catholic idioms, Ireland

is continuously defined as a political, cultural, and moral entity in relation to Catholicism as praxis. The Church revealed itself in the act of locating and patrolling the boundaries of both Ireland and the female body: the "X" case was related to the Maastricht referendum in terms both of the girl's having sought an abortion and of her freedom to leave Ireland and go to Europe. Control over women's bodies is, of course, not an exclusively Irish issue, but it has a special place in Irish nationalist discourse: the borders of the woman as the borders of Ireland.

Contrary to some sociologists' reading of the declining attendance at Mass as evidence of "secularization," an interpretive approach to these national dialogues—and attention to the rise and politicization of the lay religious groups that are now political parties—suggests a more complicated and interesting dynamic. In Ireland events such as those described here could be viewed as opportunities to redefine Catholicism and Irishness in terms of one another, negatively and positively. The resulting narratives, however, would articulate the choices among possible Catholicisms and possible Irelands.<sup>18</sup> In the recent critique (and defense) of conservative Catholic Ireland, anthropology remained part of the picture. An October 1994 issue of the *Irish Times* carried a letter about an article criticizing certain features of contemporary Irish society and observing that outsiders often had a more accurate view of Ireland than the natives did. The letter writer, incensed, cited as evidence of this wrong-headed view Messenger's *Inis Beag* and Scheper-Hughes's *Saints, Scholars, . . .* (you know the rest of the title). If you think outsiders have an accurate view of us, remember those books, she argued, counting on their simple invocation to convince the reader of the rectitude of her position—and counting as well on the familiarity of the trope of the outsider anthropologist—a funhouse mirror for Ireland.

These national narratives—in which anthropology has played cameo roles—should and could be the focus of an interpretive anthropology that attends both to the textual qualities of the rhetorical idioms elaborated in the warring discourses and to the specific social formations and political agendas that invent themselves in the process. This strategy could provide a useful middle ground between social science and literary theory. The understanding of social Ireland, historical and contemporary, might well be enhanced by a more liberal application of postmodern cultural theory. It is not enough, however, to recite magically efficacious mantras (post-

colonial, subaltern, etc.) in confronting the awkward details of real life. The particularities of the Irish experience need to be engaged in a way that not only allows them expression within (what I hope I will be forgiven for calling) the hegemonic discourse of American literary theory, but that might in the end contribute to the actual growth of that vocabulary. In short, we need to ask not just what theory can do for Ireland, but what Ireland can do for theory.

## Notes

- 1 Tom Wilson, "Problems of Social Anthropology," in *The Unheard Voice: Social Anthropology in Ireland*, ed. P. Ó Múiri (Belfast, 1994), 1–5. See also Michael Herzfeld, *Éiríope Through the Looking Glass* (Cambridge, 1987); Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Cambridge, MA, 1968 [1940]).
- 2 *Irish Urban Cultures*, ed. Chris Curtin, Hastings Donnan, and Tom Wilton (Belfast, 1994).
- 3 Lawrence J. Taylor, "The River Would Run Red with Blood: Commons and Community in Donegal," in *The Question of the Commons: The Culture and Ecology of Communal Resources*, ed. Bonnie McCay and James Acheson (Tucson, 1987), 290–307.
- 4 See, for example, Chris Curtin, A. Varley, and K. O'Donoghue, "The Theory and Practice of Community Development in Two West of Ireland Community Councils," in *Rural Development: Problems and Prospects*, ed. H. Buller and S. Wright (Aldershot, 1991); and Chris Curtin and A. Varley, "Populism and Petty Capitalism in Rural Ireland," in *Rural Enterprises: Shifting Perspectives on Small Scale Production*, ed. S. Whatmore, P. Lowe, and T. Marsden (London, 1991).
- 5 See, for example, Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago, 1991); and my review of Feldman's book, *Irish Journal of Sociology* 3 (1993): 148–54. See also my *Occasions of Faith: An Anthropology of Irish Catholics* (Philadelphia and Dublin, 1993); and, for a brief anthropological treatment of religious discourse on the national level, see my "Peter's Pence: Catholic Discourse and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," *Journal of the History of European Ideas* 16 (1993): 103–8.
- 6 A. C. Haddon and C. R. Browne, "The Ethnography of the Aran Islands," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 3d series, 2 (1891–93): 768–830. See also C. R. Browne, "The Ethnography of Inishbofin and Inishark, Co. Galway," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 3d series, 3 (1894): 317–70; "The Ethnography of the Mulliet, Inishkees Islands and Portaslough, Co. Mayo," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 3d series, 3 (1893): 517–649; "The Ethnography of Ballycrov," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 3d series, 4 (1896–98): 74–111; "The Ethnography of Garumna and Lettermullen," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 3d series, 5 (1898–1900): 233–68; "The Ethnography of Clare Island and Inishurk, Co. Mayo," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 3d series, 5 (1898–1900): 40–72; and "The Ethnography of Carna and Mweenish in the Parish of Moyrius, Connemara," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 3d series, 6 (1900–1902): 503–14.

- 7 Robin Flower, *The Western Island, or The Great Blasket* (New York, 1945).
- 8 Niall O'Ciosain, "Twenty Years A-Growing by Maurice O'Sullivan, *The Western Island* by Robin Flower, *A Day in Our Life* by S. O'Crohan, and *A Pity Youth Does Not Last* by M. O'Guibheen," *Irish Economic and Social History* 20 (1993): 129-33.
- 9 Flann O'Brien, *The Poor Mouth* (London, 1973 [1941]).
- 10 Conrad Arensberg, *The Irish Countryman* (New York, 1968 [1937]).
- 11 Rosemary Harris, *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster* (Manchester, 1972); John C. Messenger, *Inis Beag, Isle of Ireland* (New York, 1969); and Robin Fox, *Encounter with Anthropology* (New York, 1991 [1975]).
- 12 I met a group of fishermen from Inis Oir in a County Clare pub across the bay from their island home. When I asked (in Irish) if they had heard of a man named Messenger, their expressions and beer glasses froze. Finally, one of them lowered his glass with a thud and said, "Níl rabh sé 'all right'" (literally, "he wasn't all right"), implying mental deficiency.
- 13 Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics: Mental Illness in Rural Ireland* (Berkeley, 1979).
- 14 Eileen Kane, "Man and Kin in Donegal," *Ethnology* 7 (1968): 245-58.
- 15 This sort of crisis-driven national discourse is not, of course, limited to Ireland. For the Irish, however, the question of who they are and will become may be more pressing, and, as they wrestle with their relationship to the new Europe, their national identity is very much at issue. In America events are similarly read as chapters of continuing narratives, which obscures other readings, other understandings—a process that the media increasingly directs. So too in France, to pick another example, where an ongoing central story seems to be the French in relation to North African immigrants.
- 16 David Beriss's exploration of the national reaction to the "Foulard affair" in 1989, when all of France was discussing the case of a teacher who banned Islamic head scarfs from his classroom, is a good example; see his "Scarves, Schools, and Segregation: The Foulard Affair," *French Politics and Society* 8 (1990): 1-11.
- 17 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2d ed. (London, 1991 [1983]).
- 18 See Taylor, *Occasions of Faith*.

## Joe Cleary

### "Fork-Tongued on the Border Bit": Partition and the Politics of Form in Contemporary Narratives of the Northern Irish Conflict

In a poem titled "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," Seamus Heaney has written about the obligatory silences, reticences, and prevarications on sensitive political issues that are a condition of polite social conversation in Northern Ireland, observing that such constraints have left Northern Irish nationalists "fork-tongued on the border bit."<sup>1</sup> The phrase is suggestive. Read in the diminutive, "border bit" suggests a reflex position on a jaded topic of little consequence. But it could also mean the opposite. It may suggest that the border has grown deeply into the groove of nationalist consciousness; that it is a bit that chafes because, complex sentiments about it having had to be curbed for so long, a language adequate to their expression does not exist; that various modes of censorship, including self-censorship, have generated elaborate circumlocutions or forms of doublespeak that express positions on the partition question even when they appear to sidestep that uncomfortable topic altogether.

The border that partitions the island of Ireland has a long and contentious history. Its estab-