

The Linguistic Geography of the Contact Zone: The Complementarity of Orality and Literacy in Colonial Ireland

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ABSTRACT: Language and linguistic expression are integral to formulating senses of identity and belonging for the individual. Transmission of language influences the character of such phenomena in terms of behaviour and relatedness. The circumstances of colonial Ireland and the concept of the colonial more generally, produced social, cultural, economic and political tensions. Contained within and throughout all these aspects was language use and in Ireland, an essential contrast between what Yeats believed was the oral language of the Irish and the lettered language of the English. Rather than a simple replacement of Irish with English, there was a contact zone in which orality and literacy complemented one another. Necessitated largely by the conditions of livelihood in the new scheme of things, this resulted in hybridity through features such as the performance of the increasingly popularised written language. Illustrated by literary examples of the time, its integration into traditional modes of behaviour tells more of quotidian adaptation than rigid opposition.

Language is an important aspect of identity, and the geography of linguistic affiliation has been used as a means of defining the limits of nations, as, for example, in Jones and Fowler's interrogation, "Where is Wales?"¹ Linguistic affiliation expresses what Lewis has described as geographies of human relatedness.² But the use of language also reinforces a sense of belonging and can have an important influence on behavior, as Kaplan shows for Canada's pluralistic society.³ The mutual development of the Irish and English languages in Ireland was inflected by class and colonialism and the study of this language geography illuminates the patterns of human relatedness and identity that were elaborated through that history of conflict, accommodation, and mixing.⁴ Colonialism produced what Pratt has referred to as a "contact zone," characterized by hybridity and complex cultural negotiations.⁵ White has even written of a Middle Ground where, for a time, the balance of forces is such that interaction creates some features of a shared social order, including pidgin dialects spoken on both sides of the encounter.⁶ A particular focus of this paper is the relations between oral and literary language affiliations. In colonial contexts, and through the eyes of the colonizer, oral cultures have often been seen as somehow less civilized, and the patterns of human relatedness they sustain, dismissed as merely traditional.⁷

These issues have a particular sharpness in Ireland where the Irish language and culture was, in its popular form, largely oral; written texts were the preserve of an elite of scholars, poets, story tellers, clerics, and clan chiefs.⁸ If English is the language of print and literacy, how then did such a language gain a hold in an Ireland defined by oral culture and an Irish language that had established itself along such channels? This is especially challenging if we imagine English literacy and Irish orality in opposition, as, famously, did William Butler Yeats.⁹ Learning to read and write through a system of formal education would initiate discourse and ideology but would require the complement of informality and the everyday beyond the schoolhouse to be

truly effective. In this paper, by examining aspects of the literary use of English, I show that the interaction was more complex than a simple replacement of Irish orality by English literacy.

While English was the language of literacy, in Ireland it developed along established oral lines to the detriment of the Irish language. For instance, the mid-eighteenth century *Drapier's Letters* of Dean Swift addressing an elite literate class saw a populist message of independence reach beyond those classes that were directly addressed. Ironically enough, the language of independence was not Irish but English. Ideas and ways of thinking that ran contrary to colonial ideas could nonetheless find their voice in colonial language.¹⁰ A century later, with literacy becoming ever more firmly established, examples from John Keegan's autobiographical *The Boccaugh Ruadh* and William Carleton's autobiography illustrate how the circumstances of everyday life do not necessarily change, but the language of such circumstances do. Comparatively, typical storytelling and the idea of a gathering, recounted in Keegan's case around a fireside and Carleton's performing a play in a field, continue while the language of these events changes. Relating their respective stories, the book becomes a record and even a performance of such common, everyday events; its language and topics the source of conversation. English becomes the language with which to make a living and the language with which to express quotidian circumstance; but it does so by having first taken up central features of the oral forms of cultural expression and transmission.

Material and linguistic geographies

The English language, itself incorporated into the everyday, becomes necessary for making a living in colonial Ireland. Standardized words enable and guide the movement of currency. Language – by means of a subtle complementarity between old ways and new forms – is integral to the development of an imperial economy, directing the strands of everyday experience in terms of work, culture, and society towards the centralized state by means of education in literacy and the English language. This moves language use beyond merely commercial matters. For instance in a report of 1835, the commissioners on national education concluded that a teacher should show “obedience to the law, and loyalty to his sovereign; he should not only possess the art of communicating knowledge, but be capable of moulding the mind of the youth, and of giving the power which education confers a useful direction.”¹¹

Incorporation, resistance and adaptability

Despite this idealized rendering there was historical opposition and some measure of dissatisfaction. This is well shown in the case of Swift's *Drapier's Letters*, a collection of pamphlets written in the 1720's as a reaction to the introduction of copper halfpence into Ireland. It lucidly illustrates the relationship between money and the printed word. Written on the questionable constitutionality of the coin's introduction to Ireland, the efforts to standardize perhaps might well have served to unite an Irish rebellion rather than an imperial sovereignty. Nevertheless, though well received among the Irish citizenry, the pamphlets being written and published in English betray an irony. English was the means of mass communication; any idea of rebellion was more against ideas than the manner of their expression. In Swift's case the problem was with colonial discourse and enlightenment ideas, bereft of an independent Irish quality, being foisted upon the Irish populace. For cohesion or acceptance of some degree of sovereign conditions, both inducement to a livelihood and room for idiosyncratic expression in adapting to the conditions of the same livelihood would be required. Vitally though, Swift realized that language, politics, economics, and culture were interlinked and with the increasing proliferation of books and printed material – such things were bound up with the ideals of the imperial state. Formal education, such as that illustrated in the commissioners report above, a century after Swift had

communicated his guidance in literary terms, demonstrated an Irish society increasingly growing accustomed to literacy by the functional necessity of adaptability.¹²

The old man who becomes a focus for a good part of Keegan's story published a few short years later, finds himself out of touch, without formal education in discourse and language. His adaptability is derived from the mechanics of orality together with a predisposition towards seeking functionality within society. The reconfiguration of existing modes of organization is achieved through standardization and commonality.¹³ Vitaly though, while the language becomes common, the means of its development depends upon pre-existing systems illustrating a complex interaction of power. While the colonial state can exercise power, its reception is dependent upon the power of tradition among the colonized to exercise malleability. Language informs the geography in the way land is understood while geography informs the language in the process of an idiosyncratic malleability.

In about 1920, Leonard Woolf, fairly anti-imperial in his outlook, published an analysis of economic imperialism entitled *Empire and Commerce in Africa*. He reasoned that, quite apart from issues of morality, "the power and organisation of the individual State should be directed against the world outside the State for the economic purposes of the world within the state."¹⁴

Standardization and states

Continuing briefly in the vein of reason and mechanics, it may be asserted that power requires a tangible outward movement. That is, power, for it to function at all, must be exerted over something beyond a thing itself. If it is not exerted over something, if it is not felt or wielded by force or subtler—even subconscious—means, then it ceases to be; it is in its essence dialectic. Whatever the manner of its manifestation, it requires a multiple to function. Its functionality depends upon some change or alteration, some effect on a constituent. Through the interaction of people and land, such effects manifest themselves territorially, socially, culturally, politically or economically. Distilling these effects independently from the complexity of a singular collective is difficult indeed.¹⁵

The idea of the nation-state is a good illustration of a singular entity formed in the interactive space of people and land. The character of the space is in the idiosyncrasy of power combinations.¹⁶ Such idiosyncrasy emerges in dialect through the blurred lines of the broader effects mentioned above. Standardization need not mean exactness; the effect is one of complementarity through continuity and change in the complex interactions of humans and land. Discourses on land management and organization—especially where integral to livelihood—influence the way in which people interact with the land they inhabit and the way a necessary discursive response blurs the lines of culture and identity. In other words, the interaction between people speaking English and people speaking Irish was mediated by, among other things, their shared activities in transforming land. If land and ideas regarding the use of land are reorganized through the influence of a colonial power, as they were in Ireland, then to function in the reorganized territory and to understand its discourses purely from the point of functionality, it is necessary to communicate. A close engagement with the texts of Keegan and Carleton shows that, though there was a change in language use, both in verbal form and literate manner (from Irish to English); there were elements of meaningful continuity in oral modes of learning and dialect (what has been called Hiberno-English).

Land and language

In a colonial vein, power most conspicuously takes the shape of organization and rearrangement of purpose through land and people.¹⁷ In the evolution from feudalism to capitalism for instance, the purpose of the colonized is directed from the subsistence of itself to the world of the colonizer and a world of markets, commerce, and profit. This merchant capitalist

experience encompassed a novel way of managing resources, economy, and space; separating producers from means of production, transforming labor and natural resources into marketable commodities.¹⁸ Consequently, the territorial emphasis of the state was of vital importance, creating profits with which a world—that is the people, societies and institutions within the territory—could be ostensibly improved and civilized. Such ostensible ideas took the form of new literate language that imperially combined with oral practice to further enable a pervasive information technology.¹⁹

The theme of combination is integral to the capitalist system as understood by Wallerstein: “Free labour is the form of labour control used for skilled work in the core countries whereas coerced labour is used for less skilled work in peripheral areas. The combination thereof is the essence of capitalism.”²⁰ In much the same way as Gaelic Irish oral traditions would be subsumed into a literate world, Ireland’s subsistence plot holders would find themselves unwieldy components of a modern commercial system, continuing in the manner of subsistence but changing for the terms of the market.

In large part due to literate information technology, merchant capitalism established connections—global links which facilitated agrarian capitalism.²¹ The produce separated from producers enters an enlarged trade network rather than staying with a local or subsistence producer. The challenge is to apply this mode of thought, generated in a new language within the world of the imperial state, to the world beyond. It is applied not only *to* the world beyond but *in* the world beyond—in among the local places, creating absorption through relevance and use. Initiated through print and dissipated through orality, this linguistic absorption illustrated the efficiencies of imperialism, in principle very much like colonial territorial systems built upon indigenous and ecclesiastical ones.²² The circumstance was less abolishment and enforcement than continuity and change with practicality and incentive bringing about a shift in priority from tradition to modernity.

Money and maps

Much of the success of the colonial enterprise and the capitalist mode of production it champions depends upon order and fixity, upon an area of land that contains people rather than a people that contains an area of land. Papering a quantifiable territory with information through formal education and informal learning sees a linguistic and discursive standard emerge. Standardization necessitated by the range of the market economy and effected through the rise of a monetary economy enabled an expanding interregional and foreign trade. This would ultimately see the usurpation of common rights and pressure placed upon a peasant class. This in turn resulted in a modern structure of landlords (owners) tenant farmers (renters) and landless wage laborers all dependent upon this standardized system. The gathering of valuable land and territory beyond the state by legal and political means and configuring it to the purposes of the world within the state requires standardization of money, measurement, and—most importantly of all in terms of effecting a standard—thought and language. There was a growing discourse around best practice in the use of land and the arrangement of people and resources. For this discourse to grow at all, communication is required beyond a basic legal claim to ownership of a quantitative space to a place sanctifying the qualities of a market economy.

In the case of Ireland and its relationship with the English state, this had a number of implications. Firstly, English was the language of the new capitalist world—a world of towns, markets, and trade. Due to a separation of produce from producer, money was required to live and a commonality of language was therefore required, a standardization of words that expressed functionality in the new market economy. One of the efficiencies of the capitalist mode of production was creating value out of materiality such that the printed word in the

form of a material book or pamphlet for instance, was a product that could be practically and efficiently traded in a capital market. This was in contrast to spoken words that (save perhaps in the case of a professional storyteller) could not. Words, in printed form saw the creation of a print industry which supplied a growing necessity for literacy.²³ This had implications for a culture whose means of communication was primarily oral; it involved a separation of discursive produce and producer. If the land and territory is functionally keyed into a literate discourse, the initiative of oral tradition is lost in a widening chasm between those steeped in folk traditions and a land that is increasingly unreceptive to them. Functionality in the relationship between people and land saw a sensory expansion to include sight rather than a shift from sound to sight. The words sighted were not Irish words, but English words, making the functionality of sight dominant. Consequently, the written word caused the traditionally spoken Irish word to retreat, fundamentally altering the geographical relationship between Irish territory and Irish people.

The pragmatism of print

Printed words, having the power of economic functionality, exceeded the insular and indigenous cultural power of the native tongue. If we talk of an Irish state for instance and the growth of trade, of foreign markets within which Ireland had a vital strategic purpose, the terms of commonality had expanded wildly. Irish was no longer a common language, befitting a nation or a “world” as Woolf might have called it. The particular characteristics of an Irish nation in terms of myth, memory and public culture are challenged. If the idea of a nation-state is an idea that fuses ideas of community and territory, then the value of the territory supersedes the value of the community. With a thriving economy in the second half of the eighteenth century and a premium placed on Irish goods beyond the boundaries of the island, a similarly high premium was placed upon literacy as a means of conducting trade in the towns and markets, the nucleus of territorial value and discourse.

Commonality in language provides access to information and the incentive towards commonality is livelihood. In this respect the power of words and the cultural, social, and ideological cache they carry is altered and so the dissemination of discourses of civilization; improvement and aspiration follow on. As Fabian explained: “A language never spreads like a liquid, nor even like a disease or a rumour.”²⁴ The momentum is rather more the other way and people spread towards a language, so that there must be acceptance and will. This will enables complementarity since the means of learning beyond the formality of the schoolhouse rely on pre-existing ways. It is not so much that the language spreads, but that the people spread into the world of the language for livelihood and the sight of improvement. As Ó Ciosáin noted: “[A]n ability to read was essential to the success of even small-scale farmers or weavers.”²⁵ The question was how to generate success and livelihood out of existing ways and means.

That information could be mined in reading material made print a valuable resource among a growing population of literate consumers, formally educated in the culture of the Modern English State. This in its way led to an attempt at reformation of popular culture and an inculcation of standardized bookish order and orthodoxy rather than the intangible, diffuse orality of myth, magic and superstition.²⁶ Such things obstructed the channels of statecraft and efficiency of production. Tradition and folk memory though, would see reformations reaching only the heights of an attempt since ritual, habit and systems of belief long held were often difficult to obscure with modernity. Though the incentive was now to make a living—to earn and accumulate—the pull of the past and the traditions held within its speech were, and are, continual. In many ways the oral traditions feed into a literate one, lending meaning to use.

Literature and the oral tradition

About the time of Leonard Woolf's comment on how the power of the state should be wielded for the use of the world within the state, W. B. Yeats, with an interest in the meaning of folk tradition and myth, presented the situation of the Irish poet by contrasting the spoken knowledge of Irish stories with the written knowledge of English literature. For Yeats, the relationship was an antagonistic one where old geographies of meaning gave muffled rattles within new geographies of use. The incentive to functionality challenged old imaginings:

Irish poetry and Irish stories were made to be spoken or sung, while English literature, alone of great literatures, because the newest of them all, has all but completely shaped itself in the printing press. In Ireland today the old world that sang and listened is, it may be for the last time in Europe, face to face with the world that reads and writes, and their antagonism is always present under some name or other in Irish imagination and intellect.²⁷

The challenge to Irish imagination and intellect was a challenge to place names, memories, stories, and songs. The loss and sense of separation between people and place would inspire Yeats to describe the people of Galway as living "upon these great level plains . . . a community bound together by imaginative possessions, by stories and poems which have grown out of its own life."²⁸ If one can talk of character, then the storied character of a place like the Galway plains of which Yeats wrote is elided through a standardization effected in no small part by formal education. This education would center on books and the essential skills of reading and writing. To be learned and scholarly is to be literate. The language crafted in the printing press, to shape the character of occupation and habitation in new ways, symbolizes civilization, and improvement. Lore and the past became the preserve of old folks, wondrous in their way but lacking the practical virtues of modern use. This in turn encouraged a pragmatic neglect of the language among institutional bodies of the time, marginalizing the Irish culture of older people as mere myth and legend.

The imaginative possessions of which Yeats spoke were, and are, increasingly characterized by dependence upon preservation as opposed to the free perpetuation of old ways. The oral past seeks preservation in increasingly literate minds. This serves to create an oral present. Yeats' lament is more for matter than form. The work of the artist in language is not simply to show things already revealed, but to explore the possibilities of the language in a broader framework, be that framework in the shape of poetry or other narrative styles. In Yeats' time, a great many possibilities were lost with a dominant language of print. A very particular set of ways to express a particularly Gaelic Irish generative pattern of culture, identity, and imagination were lost. Places and the words used to render such places beyond earth and stone were steadily decaying.

Stories and lore around traditional issues such as places and names were no longer things in a proper time and place. Removed from such propriety, they become fossilized. In state management, one should strive to be logical and rational, with a place for everything and everything in its place. Things learned and ways of learning continually veer away from what Yeats acknowledged as the vibrancy of stories and folk memory. Literacy and reading feed into social convention, crafting something like an oral literature. Such complementarity results in the accretion of new meaning upon a modern sense of use. Geography, in the sense that it is something crafted in the relationship between human and land, was changed utterly with the influence of imperial discourse. The terms of validity in such a relationship were written anew. The way places were written about, and the very fact they were written, created a new imaginative space in the gaps of an increasingly established sense of belief.

Increasingly, the burden of proof of validity fell upon the bearer of folk tales, particularly where the teller was from the oral culture. Laoisman John Keegan's recollection of his youth in *The Boccough Ruadh, A Tradition of Poorman's Bridge* was written in 1841, a good many years before Yeats felt compelled to comment on the situation of orality and print and presents just such a scenario.²⁹ It illustrates a sense of complementarity, but orality seems to occupy a place of lesser status. Reading from a statistical survey, Keegan finds the meaning behind a place-name has gone unrecorded. At this point an old man claims knowledge of the story behind the name. The richness of the storied old world has the power to beguile and astonish beyond modern expectation, illustrating a shift in the expectations of normality in a relationship between people and land. Lore and folk memory are astonishing in their detail because of their superfluity and imaginative luxury in an age where they find themselves treated more as cultural enhancement than as cultural establishment. When the old man raises laughs with his indignation at the failure of a book to recount such details, it illustrates a disparity between past and present senses of value.

The fireside gathering had arrived at and necessitated the introduction of the statistical survey when the "old crone who had astonished us with the richness and extent of her fairy lore" ran out of material: "[T]he quantity of earthly spirits she had put in, entirely put out all memory of un-earthly spirits, and sent her disordered fancy, all confused as it was, wool-gathering to the classic regions of *Their-na-noge*." When she finishes her storytelling, the author picks up a book, a copy of Sir Charles Coote's *Statistical Survey of the Queen's County*.³⁰ Commenting on the questionable ability of such a work to entertain, the author declares he is "well aware that the dry details of a work professedly and almost exclusively statistical were little calculated to amuse or interest *such* an audience."³¹ Quite apart from issues of class, such a comment indicates a distinction of purpose. The book establishes knowledge of a kind that might require the complementarity of Yeatsian Romantic lore.

The author nonetheless ploughs on and reads a passage concerning a bridge local to the house: "Poor-man's Bridge over the Nore was lately widened, and is very safe, but I cannot learn the tradition why it was so called."³² The old man sitting nearby listening to the reading, comments indignantly on this point. For the cataloguer or the statistician, the bridge is interpreted in terms of improvements and safety, an established way of knowing in much the same way as we can talk of an established church. The name and how it came to have such a name as The Poor Man's Bridge are but embellishments, entertaining but of no real value. For the old man, the exact opposite is the case. His way of knowing the bridge is through its history and beyond that a community of knowing, such as Yeats later described for the plains of Galway, accessed through its moniker: the improvements rendered are rather more secondary and speak increasingly to a new generation.

"He cannot learn the tradition of Poor Man's Bridge-*inagh!*" said the old man with a sneer; "faith, I believe it not; I'd take his word for more than that. But had he come to me when he was travelling the country making up his statisticks, I could open his eyes on that subject, and many others too."

Some of those present laughed outright at the old man's gravity of manner as he made this confident boast.

"You need not laugh-you may shut your potato traps," said the old man indignantly "Grand as he was, with his gold and silver, and his coach and horses and servants with gold and scarlet livery, I could enlighten him more on the ancient history and traditions of our country than all the *boddaghs* of squireens whom he visited on his tour through the Queen's county."³³

There are a number of significant points in this passage. Firstly there is the distinction between the elite statistical writer with the trappings of capitalism as imagined by the old man, and the popular culture of the peasant class from which he might easily have learned the story of the bridge. Secondly, there is a distinction between the old man and the younger people, who laugh at the old man's seriousness. The confidence of the old man in his qualitative knowledge is incongruent with the certainty of statistics. While Keegan presents the scene almost facetiously and the old man appears almost a caricature, the exaggeration, if we assume that there is one, is telling. For the old man there is a disparity between the manner in which he professes his knowledge and the manner in which it is received. Yeats' idea of a collective imaginative possession appears more the deluded ramblings of an old man out of touch. Finally, though the tone of the old man's utterance of 'Queen's County' goes unknown for the reader, the old man uses the language of the state, the Queen's English. Its use by such a character illustrates a popularization of the language at the time, at least in terms of speech if not quite literacy. Readings such as that presented in Keegan's account encourage a dissemination of the language through a removed literacy. Literacy provides a source for broadcasting the language. If one can read, there is the potential to read to someone. A figure such as the old man presented by Keegan picks up the language of the new system in a familiar manner of storytelling. In the writing and reported speech there is a very real sense of the Irish and English contact zone. Although expressing a facility with the language, Keegan's peppering of the text with Irishisms shows an engagement on the fringes of commonality in the shape of dialect and a level of contact between the languages that stops short of bilingualism. This is perhaps even to the extent of excluding a literary elite, well-read and formally educated in the Queen's English. With echoes of Swift, there is a subtle advantage given to Irish readers familiar with colloquialisms and turns of phrase showing perhaps a broader, more enhanced understanding than a purely formal perception might allow. An enhanced functionality with the language of standardization and quantification in the everyday requires adaptation rather than obliteration; opposition or recalcitrance are ultimately self-inhibiting since one is depriving oneself of the means to be functional: the shared end of systems old and new.

In the passage quoted above, Leonard Woolf continued after his assertion of state action to comment upon its opponents who show that they unconsciously support the system they attack, illustrating more a difference in means than in end.³⁴ The support is perceived to be unconscious because the ultimate goal of functionality within society is the same. The scene in Keegan's *The Boccaugh Ruadh* illustrates that English is the language of the majority while Irish is in the minority, a reversal from the previous century.³⁵ The necessity to survive, thrive and make a living was and is, continual. The means of achieving that end were at this point beyond transition from traditional to modern, not quite perhaps paradigmatically marked but significant enough to bring about a scene such as Keegan presents us with. The old man requests at one point for the account of the Poor Man's Bridge to be read again, indicating that though he might not be literate, he is nonetheless proficient in English albeit a form peppered with idiosyncrasies like "inagh", illustrating more a change in source than of flow. The words of the book seep into the language of speech, changing subtly what one speaks about but not necessarily how or why one speaks, making for a confluence of orality and literacy.

The old man, for all his sneer and indignation at Cooté's lack of folk knowledge, still speaks the language, rendering the landscape, superficially at least, in the terms of the colonist. All those in the house are effectively English surrogates by virtue of the "new tongue." The invocation to "shut your potato traps" illustrates that ancient history is indeed that, something no longer interesting or relevant. The potato, at the time something common and typically Irish in the colonial context, in turn perhaps amplifies a perceived view of the Irish as insignificant and simple. The old man leaps to the English language and its received contemporary codifications,

distancing himself with the self-importance of one who might dish out such a scolding and warning those who would laugh at his tales not to get ideas above their station. In doing this, he accepts the new scheme of things almost despite himself, ironically belittling the qualities of his own local knowledge in the process and the authority he might claim with it.

If the contrast between Ireland and England is, as Yeats might put it, one between speech and print, then storied speech is no longer relevant, while the things read in black and white are. In addition, there is the question of authority. The printed word holds sway over the rambling tale and perhaps most pointedly of all, such sway is held in the most intimate of homely communicative spaces, at the hearth. The channels of communication are straitened in print and the technologies of organization and quantification see an efficiency that is not removed but increasingly intimate in its administration, percolating throughout public and private spheres. The old man's address shows an acquiescence of sorts in his acceptance of the new scheme of things, proclaiming his authoritative local knowledge yet dealing his words and more particularly his barbs, in the currency of the colonial world.

While Keegan's rendering of the story may have a touch of reassurance about it, witness Ó Ciosáin's valid observation that such accounts of a peasant class were designed to convince middle and upper class readers of the feasibility of popular reform. The class system befitting a colonial world might well be progressing and the swipe to "shut your potato traps" records this awareness of societal structure within the popular classes. The oral tradition of folklore, myth and stories is perhaps seen as primitive and simplistic in light of progressive reason and rationality and this is a view shared among elites and lower classes. Print facilitated the communication of the colonial order and its success both in popular terms and among the elites. The possibility of a more typically English social and economic structure to replace the archaic chiefdoms may appear enlivened.³⁶

Given the forum for publication in the short-lived *Irish Penny Journal*, the account may well be illustrating a more subtle cause, a lament for the decline of storied tradition and forms of knowledge ostensibly laughed off in company but perhaps quietly valued for the enhanced functionality a blended Hiberno-English language might afford. The English written word could become a quiet product of resistance where Irishisms are a means to befuddle and confuse.³⁷ Eleanor Ruggles' account of young people fooling Gerard Manley Hopkins with Irishisms is in this vein.³⁸ Such a display of subterfuge would illustrate that it was not beyond a colonial official to fall into a native trap. The conditions of dialect and hybridity enable a linguistic challenge to authority, be it in the perceived self-importance of an old man trying to assert himself in a new system or a state official trying to assert himself in an old one. In its way this can function as something of a leveler, demonstrating different, but perhaps equal values in terms of storied quality and statistical quantity.

This sensitivity to language and its workings in the colonial system may be likely given the journal's founder George Petrie's active interest in Irish antiquity. The work of Petrie and O'Donovan, among others, with the Topographical Department of the Ordnance Survey would certainly support a valued approach to storied antiquity but it reinforces a developing literary nature and written record, one materially recovering the living breath of oral tradition but espousing philosophies of quantification, classification, fixity, and order. For the purposes of a market it separates product from producer but also records the inter-play of words for posterity where orality may struggle.

Although there were other similar journals, the brief run of the *Irish Penny Journal* through 1841 might hint at a limited demand for topographical description and the luxuries of lore. However, that is not to say there was not a sensibility regarding preservation and distribution of oral knowledges in literary forms. Indeed much as in the spirit of Swift's *Drapier's Letters*, Keegan

too was of a nationalist inclination and would be of the same company as the nationalist poet, James Clarence Mangan. In Keegan's obituary printed in *The Irishman*, the passing of "his friend and fellow poet James Clarence Mangan" some weeks before was immediately noted.³⁹ Gaelic oral tradition is not without its worth but the language of improvement and the discourses that follow it are hewn from English.

Discourses of landholding, production, and profit are more relevant and practical than myth and memory. Stories and scenery do not provide a means of survival. This passage illustrates a societal transition in terms of practice, focus, and the means of expression. When speech and talk burn themselves out around the hearth, the book inveigles its way in. While there may be some resistance to the skills and arts of quantification and "statistics," especially demonstrated when the author doubts that Coote's account would be amenable to "such" an audience, there is a grudging acceptance. The old man, for instance does not actively resist the reading, he does not demand it be stopped but, in fact, asks for it to be read again. The resistance is a passive one. Quite apart from anything else, a book such as this has a presence in the house. Though the books may be few, there are nonetheless books, and books of a type such as Coote's. The purpose of the old man's knowledge needs defending in a new world of books, letters, and improvement that is not without practical benefit. The benefits of knowing in the English way and expressing that knowledge in the English way outweigh the benefits of knowing in the Gaelic way and so also the way in which that way of knowing is transmitted. To know and to be open to knowing requires a cause. Here, the cause is functionality. Seeking this functionality creates knowledge and enlightenment. Finding the knowledge requires literacy which in turn feeds speech with new words and new language, crafting new experiences of the local and beyond that, in the capitalist world, a demand and a trade.

In support of such a market, much of the success of Coote's account and the lack of an energetic, articulate defense against it is precisely because it shares a vital element with the old man's account; the common element is one of locality. The old man does not criticize what is written but rather what is left unwritten and unrecorded. While statistics reflect a national discourse, they are locally specific and therefore relevant. The two ways of knowing the local area and the specific feature of the bridge, are simply two different ways of knowing the same thing. So, there is the creation of new knowledge, a new localized, elite knowledge that trumps old knowledge in its relevance. New roots are taking hold, perhaps lacking in the subtleties of meaning but resplendent in use. The oral tradition through which the old knowledge was related suffers as the new knowledge is transmitted in a different way. Vitally though, there is an intermediary in reading aloud that retains the practice of old knowledge, therefore retaining the habit or the ritual but changing the material. In the case of Keegan's story, a literary form presents itself as a written account of the old, oral, way of instruction. Literate minds can access orality but oral minds cannot access the literate, therefore creating a demand for literacy as a skill. Facilitating this demand in the eighteenth century, Ó Ciosáin asserted that "schools were the principal response to a demand for literacy."⁴⁰ In addition to formal education there was the more informal and independent approach which supplied this demand, arguably more successfully than the formality of the school house.⁴¹

The whole exchange of *The Boccaugh Ruadh* illustrates another aspect of a distinction between Irish orality and English literacy. There was not an immediate paradigm shift from orality to literacy; rather there was a co-existence of sorts. The dissemination of printed material very often created the subjects of orality or, an oral literature as it were. Reading aloud too, created the conditions for informal education. From about the same time as Keegan's *The Boccaugh Ruadh*, William Carleton's story "The Hedge School" includes a disapproving listing of chapbooks studied in the schools of the author's youth, material considered of quite an inferior

sort to Coote's *Survey of the Queen's County*.⁴² Among these was a play called *The Battle of Aughrim*. Though studied in the hedge school, the effects ripple outward from child to child by the virtue of knowing 'by heart'. Therefore orality interweaves with literature where new material feeds traditional ways. Carleton (who, like Keegan, had written for the *Irish Penny Journal*) recalls the experience. There is desire to learn and its cause is simply a child's sense of fun. Literature forms part of that experience and throughout, Carleton finds himself with a purpose directing children in their roles, part of which direction involved learning through reading. The core skill of the oral tradition – memory – is of vital importance here. The free perpetuation of English as a language of meaning, beyond mere use, comes less in literacy than it does in the imagination the words conjure. Literacy may have initiative but orality ensures continuance.

The English language becomes part of the imaginative mental life. The language of letters grows to a position of dominance through pragmatism and societal use but it also grows in a more subtle way, utilizing the spirit of an olden Gaelic oral culture. For Carleton in the following passage there is a mix of orality and literacy. He reads *The Battle of Aughrim* to the point where he can recite in the tradition of old, if not in the language of old.

I had *The Battle of Aughrim* off by heart from beginning to ending. This came to be known, and the consequence was that, though not more than ten years of age, I became stage director and prompter both to Catholics and Protestant amateurs. In the mornings and in the evenings such of them – and there were not a few on both sides – as could not read spent hours with me attempting to make themselves perfect in their parts. It is astonishing, however, what force and impetus such an enthusiastic desire to learn and recollect bestows upon the memory. I had here an opportunity of witnessing this, for the quickness and accuracy with which they prepared themselves was astonishing.⁴³

This piece from Carleton's autobiography is revelatory in a number of ways, especially in terms of religion and education. It also tells us something about the elusive forms of ritual. If the generative pattern of culture in a pre-literate world is orality and the formation and promulgation of an Irish culture was disseminated along those lines of ritualistic speech and performance, conditional on an inherited framework, then for any language to succeed culturally, it must possess a ritualistic or habitual malleability. That is to say, the generative pattern of culture shifts from an oral one to a literate one but the transmission of the language of literacy is conditional on patterns of orality. The question of "what" may have changed: in Carleton's instance a printed copy of *The Battle of Aughrim*. But the question of "how" possesses continuity in a persistent ritual of orality, leading to a sense of complementarity between orality and literacy. Orality and literacy encourage one another in terms of habit and ritual: a habit and ritual which find regeneration in education. Children are taught to read in the schoolhouse and then beyond the schoolhouse, they speak and perform what they have read, thereby encouraging the skill of reading to culminate in a microcosmic manifestation of Woolf's assertion of the logical mechanics of statecraft discussed earlier.

Irrespective of moral and ethical concerns, if, as Woolf suggests, the power of the state should be directed at the world beyond for the benefits of the world within, then there must be some possibility of benefit. In the case of the Irish in colonial Ireland, there was less prospect of benefit than the pressing necessity of mere maintenance. In order to maintain and continue a standard of living, there was an obligation to be proficient in the new language of print. If the world beyond was guided towards the world within more in terms of produce than mode of production, then the guidance of that produce was channeled through markets. It was therefore

necessary for the small farmer and the cottier to understand the language of the market in order to ensure continued subsistence. In the case of Keegan's autobiography discussed in the course of the paper: the discourses of education, the idea that one might be learned, the idea of practical value, had established themselves in aspirational terms at least. The old language and the stories that comprised the folktales of old now served as archaic enhancement within literate culture, rather than as continuity within the oral culture. The loss of such material would cause Yeats to lament the character of Irish identity in the form of its imagination and storied communities.

Though there was undoubtedly loss and perhaps a lack of cultural incentive to continue these traditions among lower classes, such that their preservation would ironically enough depend on the literate world of antiquarianism, there was a survival of the forms of the oral tradition. With the example of William Carleton's autobiography we see an established literary tradition but we also see that language of literacy echoing out along the old storied lines of orality. While the material spoken of may have changed, the way in which it was spoken of was preserved. In such ways there is a complementarity at work between orality and literacy.

The relationship between orality and literacy, as a component of the colonial world more generally, provides an insight into colonial dynamics. If there is complementarity then it is a complementarity typically defined by tensions between tradition and modernity. Put more specifically, these tensions involve orality and literacy, aspiration and subsistence, and proximity and distance. The attempt is to overcome distance in these things and find a way to function in a world order sufficiently distant to sound different, but not so distant as to be out of sight. Language that contains the subtly powerful, double-edged variability of local distinction such as is illustrated in examples throughout the paper, enables colonial functionality while courting independence. This independence would be realized by 1922, its functionality shaped by the language and letters of colonial experience and its character shaped by Irish cultural characteristics.

NOTES

- 1 Rhys Jones and Carwyn Fowler, "Where is Wales? Narrating the Territories and Borders of the Welsh Linguistic Nation," *Regional Studies* 41, no.1 (2007): 89–101.
- 2 Martin W. Lewis, "Elusive Societies: A Regional-Cartographical Approach to the Study of Human Relatedness," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81, no.4 (1991): 605–26.
- 3 David H. Kaplan, "Population and Politics in a Plural Society: The Changing Geography of Canada's Linguistic Groups," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 84, no.1 (1994): 46–67.
- 4 Jeffrey Kallen, ed., *Focus on Ireland* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: John Benjamin, 1997); Breandan S. MacAodha, "Aspects of the linguistic geography of Ireland in the early nineteenth century," *Studia Celtica* 20–21 (1985): 205–20; Tony Crowley, *Wars of Words: The Politics of Language in Ireland 1537–2004* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- 5 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2007).
- 6 Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- 7 Vanessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth-Century Textual Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Harvey J. Graff, *The legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
- 8 Huw Pryce, ed., *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

- 9 William Butler Yeats, "Literature and the Living Voice" (1906) in *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume VIII, The Irish Dramatic Movement*, eds. Richard J. Finneran and Mary Fitzgerald (New York: Scribner, 2003), 97.
- 10 Jonathan Swift, *The Drapier's Letters and Other Works: 1724-1725* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1941).
- 11 Quoted in Michael C. Coleman, *American Indians, the Irish and Government Schooling: A Comparative Study* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 164.
- 12 See Sean D. Moore, *Swift, the Book, and the Irish Financial Revolution: Satire and Sovereignty in Colonial Ireland* (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 135.
- 13 Thomas A. Boylan and Timothy P. Foley, "'Next to Godliness': Political Economy, Ireland and Ideology" in *Political Economy and Colonial Ireland: The Propagation and Ideological Function of Economic Discourse in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992), 113-157.
- 14 Leonard Woolf, *Empire and Commerce in Africa: A Study in Economic Imperialism* (London: Labour Research Department, n.d.), 14-15.
- 15 John Allen, *Lost Geographies of Power* (London: Wiley, 2003). Though power is something that moves and therefore allows the use of terms such as "wielded" and "received", the nature of that movement is somewhat elusive. Power is not something centred and transmitted clearly, it something more diffuse and diverse. Though power may be generated in a collective, its communication and the uptake of values that enable the action of its wielding and reception run the gamut of human experience and nature, far beyond linear networks of enforcement or establishment.
- 16 The idea of a nation-state is useful in positing the idea of territory and people as distinct elements forming a collective; Mary Gilmartin, "Nation-State" in *Key Concepts in Political Geography*, eds. Carolyn Gallaher and others, (London: Sage, 2009), 18-27. This helps pose questions around the ways a nation (people) relates to a state (territory) to create a composite entity where communication between parts to form a whole is integral to its creation. In this instance of colonialism there is communication between peoples, influencing communication with a territory. Language is vital in this influence, creating discourse shaped by and shaping people and territory.
- 17 Lesley B. Cormack, "The Fashioning of an Empire: Geography and the State in Elizabethan England" in *Geography and Empire*, eds. Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 15-30.
- 18 Raymond Gillespie, *The Transformation of the Irish Economy 1550-1700* (Dundalk: Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, 1991).
- 19 Raymond Gillespie, *Reading Ireland: Print, Reading and Social Change in Early Modern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 39.
- 20 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System, I* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), 127.
- 21 Miles Ogborn, "Historical Geographies of Globalisation c. 1500-1800" in *Modern Historical Geographies*, eds. Brian Graham and Catherine Nash (London: Pearson, 2000), 43-70.
- 22 Frederick H. A. Aalen, *Man and the Landscape in Ireland* (London: Academic Press, 1978), 121; Paul MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland: Territorial, Political and Economic Divisions* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), 48.
- 23 Raymond Gillespie, "The Triumph of Print, 1650-1750" in *Reading Ireland*, 75-101.
- 24 Johannes Fabian, *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo, 1880-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 8.
- 25 Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750-1850* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1997), 32.
- 26 Boylan and Foley, "'Next to Godliness.'"

- 27 Yeats, "Literature and the Living Voice," 97; Boylan and Foley, "Next to Godliness," 119–20.
- 28 Yeats, *Ideas of Good and Evil* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1905), 337.
- 29 John Keegan, "The Boccough Ruadh, A Tradition of Poor Man's Bridge," in *Legends and Poems by John Keegan*, ed. John O'Hanlon (Dublin: Sealy, Bryars and Walker, 1907), 179–99, http://www.forgottenbooks.org/books/Legends_and_Poems_1000357489 (accessed September 1, 2013). Originally published in *Irish Penny Journal* 1/30 (January 23, 1841): 236–40.
- 30 Charles Coote, *Statistical Survey of the Queen's County* (Dublin: Royal Dublin Society, 1801). The seventeenth volume of a series of county surveys produced by the Royal Dublin Society. The name of this county (now Laois) recalls its having been shired by Elizabeth I in 1556 and planted with English settlers at that time.
- 31 Keegan, "The Boccough Ruadh," 182.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid., 182–3.
- 34 Woolf, *Empire and Commerce*, 15.
- 35 Louis M. Cullen, "Patrons, Teachers, and Literacy in Irish" in *The Origins of Popular Literacy in Ireland: Language Change and Educational Development 1700-1920*, eds. Mary Daly and David Dickson (Dublin: Department of Modern History University College Dublin/ Department of Modern History Trinity College Dublin, 1984), 15–44.
- 36 Pryce, *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*.
- 37 Patrick J. Duffy, "Colonial Spaces and Sites of Resistance: Landed Estates in Nineteenth-Century Ireland" in *(Dis)Placing Empire*, eds. Lindsay J. Proudfoot and Michael M. Roche (Aldershot, United Kingdom: Ashgate Press, 2006), 15–40.
- 38 Eleanor Ruggles, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1944), 193.
- 39 "John Keegan Obituary," *The Irishman*, July 14, 1849, <http://www.iolfree.ie/~johnkeegan/biography.html> (accessed September 1, 2013).
- 40 Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture*, 30.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 William Carleton, "The Hedge School," in *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry, Vol. II* (Dublin: William Curry, 1830), 109–210. In his essay "The Library of Ireland," Thomas Davis described the chapbooks as "the classics of tipsy Ireland" and "indecent trash", far apart from the publications of the British "Useful Knowledge Society" of the period; Thomas Davis, "The Library of Ireland" in *Thomas Davis: Selections from his Prose and Poetry*, ed. Thomas W. Rolleston (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1914), 223.
- 43 Carleton, *The Autobiography* (Belfast: The White Row Press, 1996), 35.