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## Developing Irish Diaspora Studies: A Personal View

Many interests and preoccupations shape my interest in the development of Irish Diaspora Studies.<sup>1</sup> One of those background interests is my study of the nature of academic disciplines, and the problems that arise when we try to develop an interdisciplinary approach to a specific area of research or concern. I can well understand why it might be necessary to chop up “the human condition” into bite-size chunks so that each academic discipline can apply its own ground rules, use its own methods, and respond to its own preoccupations. But why, when the time comes to put the patient back together, are there no longer any ground rules?

Those of us who engage in these debates often find ourselves quoting Thomas Kuhn—without having to agree wholeheartedly with him—and in turn echoing Kuhn’s own quotation of the description given by Copernicus of the field of astronomy before his own breakthrough: “. . . it is as though an artist were to gather the hands, feet, head and other members for his images from diverse models, each part excellently drawn, but not related to a single body, and since they in no way match each other the result would be more monster than man.”<sup>2</sup> We enter, of course, immediately huge debates about the nature of knowledge, how some kinds of knowledge seem to be able to click together, to be genuinely cumulative, while others seem to need to go over the same ground again and again. Irish Diaspora Studies forces us to interrogate much that has passed for science in the past, or still passes for science, and much that passes for

1. This article began as an informal seminar paper at the Centre for Migration Studies, Ulster-American Folk Park, October 2001. A version of this article appears, translated into Galego (Galician), in the journal *Tempo Exterior*, 3, 5 (2002), 67–88, published by Instituto Galego de Análise e Documentación, Baiona (Pontevedra), Spain. For further background to the issues raised here see the six volumes of *The Irish World Wide*, ed. Patrick O’Sullivan (London: Leicester University Press, 1992–1997), and see the web site [www.irishdiaspora.net](http://www.irishdiaspora.net).

2. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 83

knowledge. For example, one of the themes we are still teasing out is the effects of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century theories of “race” on the study of the Irish, and on the Irish understanding of ourselves.

My own approach to these debates is quite prosaic. No one academic discipline is going to tell us everything we want to know about the Irish Diaspora. The study of migration, emigration, immigration, population movements, flight, scattering, networks, transnational communities, diaspora—this study demands an interdisciplinary approach. This statement is echoed throughout the study of migration and diaspora.<sup>3</sup> The study of diaspora can be regarded as a specific subsection of the more general study of the human condition. It is the nature of the phenomenon under study that demands the interdisciplinary approach. If we look at the more extreme statements of the interdisciplinary ideal, then the ideal is quite impossible.<sup>4</sup> Yes, interdisciplinarity is impossible, but it happens all the time. The easiest way to show that the interdisciplinary process happens all the time is to invent some new verbs: for example, the verb “to Foucault,” the verb “to Lacan,” the verb “to Baudrillard.” If your particular discipline has been Foucaulted, then you will know exactly what I mean. If your discipline has not yet been Foucaulted, then we wait with anticipation, and sympathy. And yet we can note in passing how some at first seemingly radical observations by Foucault have very quickly become received wisdom. Knowledge is shaped by power? Yes, of course it is. What else did we expect? This observation has particular resonance if we study—or are members of—a powerless group: peasants, women, children, immigrants, minorities . . . the Irish.

Since, whether we like it or not, interdisciplinarity happens all the time, the choice for scholars is fairly simple: we can be its victims or its masters. Part of the charm and the intellectual pleasure of the interdisciplinary approach is that we can watch and map the spread of specific theories, and buzz words, across the different disciplines. Acting as the intellectual equivalent of a virus warning, we can alert colleagues to likely dangers and likely effects. Of course there is nothing so practical as a good theory. The interdisciplinary approach is constantly searching for good theory, theory that will marshal our material or open up new lines of thought and enquiry. We are wary of theories that try to demonstrate the impossibility of knowledge, although our project demands that we are

3. My own statement can be found in the general introduction, in *Patterns of Migration*, the first volume of *The Irish World Wide*. The editors of *Migration Theory* assert, “Migration is a subject that cries out for an interdisciplinary approach . . .” *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines*, ed. Caroline B. Brettell, James F. Hollifield (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. vii.

4. Moti Nissani provides a helpful summary of the arguments in “Ten Cheers for Interdisciplinarity: The Case for Interdisciplinary Knowledge and Research,” *The Social Science Journal*, 4, 2 (1997), 201–216.

often critical about what passes for knowledge. In a sense, we have cut one knot by being specific about our desire for knowledge. What is it that we want knowledge of? The Irish Diaspora, its causes and consequences.

If no one academic discipline is going to tell us everything we want to know about the Irish Diaspora, then one possible defence of Irish Diaspora Studies is that we demonstrate a postmodern approach to postmodernism. Making use of the new verb “to Lyotard,” I could say that we try to distinguish “noise” from “knowledge.” And the amount of “noise” around the study of the Irish Diaspora can be overwhelming.

There is a problem that I do not belabor in my own published work. Yet the size of the problem cannot be overstated, for there is the distinct possibility that the nature of this problem will distort everything we do. Perhaps the most interesting statement of the problem was made by the nineteenth-century Irish activist and polemicist, John Mitchel. Mitchel’s *Jail Journal* (1854), begins, “England has been left in possession not only of the Soil of Ireland with all that grows and lives thereon, to her own use, but in possession of the world’s ear also. She may pour into it what tale she will: and all mankind will believe her.”<sup>5</sup>

Throughout much of its modern history the island of Ireland has been a part of the British Empire, an entity which in its various manifestations demanded loyalty from its subjects and which defined disloyalty as treason. One “grand narrative” of Irish history sees that history as reaching its culmination in 1922, with the formation of an independent Irish state on part of the island of Ireland. Archbishop Mannix, Irish-born, Irish nationalist, and the influential leader of Australian Catholicism at the time of World War I, said in 1916: “Our loyalty is freely questioned. The answer is that Irishmen are as loyal to the empire to which, fortunately or unfortunately, they belong, as self-respecting people could be under the circumstances. . . .”<sup>6</sup>

Circumstances change. Patrick Quinlivan, the historian of the Fenians, the Diaspora-wide, secret Irish revolutionary organization of the late nineteenth-century, has said that the aims of the Fenians have been largely achieved, whilst the aims of the nineteenth century British Government are “filed with those of Nineveh. . . .”<sup>7</sup> That entity, the British Empire—which shaped discourses, which poured tales into the world’s ear—no longer exists. Yet some circumstances do

5. John Mitchel, *Jail Journal* (London: Sphere Books, 1983), p. xvii. The original text was written from 1848 onward, when Mitchel was transported to Van Dieman’s Land (Tasmania) for “treason-felony.”

6. Quoted in Patrick O’Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, 3rd ed. (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2000), p. 269.

7. Patrick J. Quinlivan, “Hunting the Fenians,” in *The Creative Migrant* (1994), *The Irish World Wide*, 3: 149.

not change. In what fashion does awareness of the words “Ireland” and “Irish” enter the consciousness of the world in our own time? Certainly it does so through news coverage of more than thirty years of conflict in Northern Ireland, that portion of the island of Ireland which remains part of the United Kingdom.

Reinforced by the recent decades of conflict, those centuries of conflict have left the strange legacy, of a cumulative English discourse of “the Irish” that portrays the Irish as both quaint and dangerous. I am not sure to what extent this pattern can be put into a comparative context. In the wider world, certainly this “Irish-English” duality is a part of the “native-settler” duality: this, influenced by Sartre and Fanon, I have analyzed elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> A colleague who shares my interest in the culture of Japan—another, former imperialist island nation whose people write beautiful poetry—tells me that the Japanese speak of the Koreans much as the English speak of the Irish.<sup>9</sup>

There are many dangers here for the scholar of Ireland and the scholar of the Irish Diaspora. Many of our sources for the history of the Irish are English, or are shaped by English perceptions of the “Irish Question.” For example, earlier this year the Irish Diaspora Research Unit was asked to give advice to the Public Record Office of England and Wales. The PRO intended to develop a web site with lottery funding that would demonstrate something of what was held in these huge archives about four immigrant groups in Britain: Jews from Eastern Europe, immigrants from the Caribbean, from South Asia, and from Ireland. Now, Britain—like, I think, most of the former European imperial and colonial states—has great difficulty in seeing itself as an immigrant-receiving country. So that this initiative, by the great archive of the British state, seemed to us well worth supporting.

Yet, after some preliminary discussion, we could already see familiar patterns emerging. We explained to the archivists that we already know what was held in the archives of England about the Irish. If you hit the search button marked “Irish” what you will get is much about the “Irish Question” as defined by that tradition within British statecraft and historiography. And you will get much about the Irish as a problem group within British cities. And so it proved. So, if it simply presented this archival material on its web site, there arose the danger that the PRO would simply collude with this systematic and systemic disparagement of the Irish within the research record.

We also explained to the PRO archivists that we are quite used to this pattern. Like many of those who study the hidden and the dispossessed, who try to hear

8. Patrick O’Sullivan, “The Irish Joke,” in *The Creative Migrant*, pp. 57–82.

9. See *Japan’s Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*, ed. Michael Weiner (London: Routledge, 1997).

the voices of the silenced, we are used to working against the grain of the research record and the archives. We also know that there is much inside those archives of interest to us. For example, it is in the Coroner's Court archives of England and Wales that my colleague, Frank Neal, has found authentic, first-person narratives of Irish Famine refugees and famine survivors of the 1840s.<sup>10</sup>

A recurring pattern within the native-settler duality is the use of humor, whereby the settler tells disparaging jokes based on the whimsical stupidity of the native. These jokes, in English culture, are traditionally told as Irish jokes. There is much of this sort of material in the archives. Anyone who loves traditional oral literature has great affection for these jokes and stories, but the telling of the stories in the Irish-English, native-settler context is an exercise in power, pure and simple. They are certainly part of the archive, part of the historical record—is the record to be denied or sanitized? There is a fairly obvious solution—a small number of key essays, by Christie Davies, myself, and others, have analyzed this kind of humour in its Irish-English context.<sup>11</sup> We have agreed to make our essays freely available to the web site of the Public Record Office, so that this sort of humorous material can immediately be seen in context.

John Mitchel spoke of England having “the world's ear.” Over the centuries, a long procession of commentators have visited Ireland, visitors from England or from other parts of the world, with good or ill will.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes these are very significant figures within English culture or literature, like Edmund Spenser, Arthur Young, or Thomas Carlyle. Non-English visitors will usually be guests of England, or guests of English landowners, and already have perceptions shaped by English sources. From the eighteenth century onward there is usually the background suggestion that England, with its powerful economy and dispossessed peasantry, is the norm or the ideal. In them we are often offered essentially psychological explanations of the woes of Ireland—analysis of the “personality” of the Irish peasant. Because these texts tend to be readily available, they have long been a major source within Irish historiography. It will be recognized that the point being made here is very like that made by Edward Said in *Orientalism*—a point which Said has himself acknowledged.<sup>13</sup> But the difficulty of applying a straightforward postcolonial approach to the history of

10. See Frank Neal, *Black '47: Britain and the Famine Irish*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

11. For example, Patrick O'Sullivan, “The Irish Joke,” cited in note 8 above, and Christie Davies, “The Irish Joke as a Social Phenomenon” in *Laughing Matters: A Serious Look at Humour*, ed. John Durant, Jonathan Miller (London: Longmans, 1988).

12. The essential guide to “writing Ireland” is David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

13. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (1978; London: Penguin 1995). For Said on Ireland, see his *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature—Yeats and Decolonization* (Derry: Field Day, 1988).

Ireland are obvious—since the Irish, like many of the small nationalities of Europe, are victims, accomplices, and beneficiaries of British and other European imperialisms.

Sometimes these foreign commentators on Ireland are just plain wrong. The liberal German Moritz Julius Bonn describes Michael Davitt as a fanatic with “burning eyes”: “He belonged to a group that had advocated the use of physical force, and had lost his arm in one attempt.”<sup>14</sup> In fact, Michael Davitt lost his right arm at the age of eleven in 1857. He was a child worker in a textile mill in Lancashire, England, where machinery crushed his arm.<sup>15</sup> So, in interpreting the empty sleeve, what was a narrative of the maimed, migrant child worker becomes evidence of Irish violence and irrationality. Thus the world reads “Irishness.”

Representations of Ireland and the Irish in cinema provide another example, where the plots and conventions of film noir have been relocated to a site of current conflict—Northern Ireland.<sup>16</sup> Again we see notions of loyalty-disloyalty built around the Irish persona, the terms defined by Britain and its Empire. Of course, Irish people do have issues about loyalty-disloyalty. But all diasporic peoples face such conflicts, as families fragment, new families are formed, old countries make demands, new countries make new demands.

We Irish have a national day, St. Patrick’s Day, which we value and which we have taken with us all over the world. Indeed, in the work of Cronin and Adair in *The Wearing of the Green* (2002), we have a diaspora-wide study of St. Patrick’s Day, and the changing nature of the celebrations over time and in different places. Cronin and Adair show clearly that there have long been quarrels over ownership of St. Patrick’s Day, for those who control the celebration control definitions of Irishness.<sup>17</sup> Complete the following sentence: You cannot really be Irish, unless you. . . .

14. Moritz Julius Bonn, *Wandering Scholar* (London: Cohen and West, 1949), p. 94.

15. As a young man Davitt had been a member of the Fenians in England. He served a lengthy prison sentence, and, on release, threw his influence behind Charles Parnell, the leader of Irish parliamentary nationalism. The standard study of Davitt’s early life is T. W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution 1846–82* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). See also Carla King, *Michael Davitt*, (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1999).

16. There is a considerable literature on cinematic representations of Ireland. I say to students: Do not expect to learn much about Ireland and the Irish; do expect to learn about the demands of genre. On “film noir,” for example, see John Hill, “Images of Violence,” in *Cinema and Ireland*, ed. Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons, John Hill, (London: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 147–193.

17. See Mike Cronin and Daryl Adair, *The Wearing of the Green: A History of St. Patrick’s Day* (London: Routledge, 2002). See also Sallie A. Marston, “Making Difference: Conflict over Irish Identity in the New York City St. Patrick’s Day Parade,” *Political Geography*, 21, 3 (2002), 373–92.

What are we to make then of the weird and worrying representations of St. Patrick's Day on television, particularly in American situation comedies or cartoons? Recently I have watched, open-mouthed, St. Patrick's Day episodes of *The Simpsons* and *Happy Days* on cable television. So much alcohol, so much stupidity. . . . It is possible to respond with anger to this mix of prejudice and lazy thinking—and anger is always available as a source of energy. The danger for scholarship is more subtle. Given the nature of the evidence, the archival record, the sources, the discourse so far, it is in fact far easier to study anti-Irish prejudices and stereotypes of the Irish than it is to study real Irish people who actually lived. This would be to develop a media studies approach to Irish Studies and Irish Diaspora Studies.

You cannot really be Irish, unless you . . . speak the Irish language. Political and cultural activists must build their projects with the material to hand. I might use the French word *bricolage* (“handyman’s work”) if it had not already been copyrighted by Levi-Strauss. The Irish activists of the nineteenth century focused on the declining Irish language as one marker of identity, and Irish writers and poets in the twentieth century have maintained a troubled relationship with the language. Article 8 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ireland says that “The Irish language as the national language is the first official language,” and “The English language is recognized as a second official language.” Attempts to halt the decline of the Irish language have not been successful. One shrewd commentator has observed that task of maintaining the Irish language was given to two groups of people who had little power to shape events: teachers and children.<sup>18</sup> The focus on Irish as a “national language” within Ireland means that we have lost sight of Irish as a diasporic language, and I am anxious to develop projects to track the use of the Irish language outside Ireland. Yet, we must listen to an Irishman, writing home in the nineteenth century, in Irish, from America: “I gcuntas Dé múin Béarla do na leanbhain . . .” (“For God’s sake teach the children English.”) And he continues, in Irish, “Without English the children will be blind like the other fools who have come out here. . . .”<sup>19</sup>

Over the past two centuries, the Irish Diaspora, for the most part, has been a phenomenon in the English-speaking world. In the nineteenth century, the main country of destination was the United States with Britain also very important. In the twentieth century, the main destination was Britain, with the Unit-

18. There is a considerable literature on the Irish language movement: see Tony Crowley, *The Politics of Language in Ireland*, (London: Routledge, 2000). See also the controversial work of Reg Hindley, *The Death of the Irish Language: a Qualified Obituary* (London: Routledge, 1990).

19. Quoted in Karen P. Corrigan, “‘For God’s sake teach the children English’: Emigration and the Irish Language in the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Irish in the New Communities, The Irish World Wide*, 2:151.

ed States still very important. The Irish are now an English-speaking people in a world where English has become the global language. A number of commentators have observed that the very language we speak contains within it those “native-settler” patterns outlined above, where the word “Irish,” and associated words like the popular first name “Patrick” or “Paddy” are associated with violence, bad temper, stupidity, and untrustworthiness. The very word “Ireland” offered a pun to the pun-loving sixteenth-century English poets—the land of ire, of anger. There is an English expression, still in common use—behavior that is totally unacceptable, unforgivable, uncivilized, is described as “beyond the Pale.” “Pale” is a simple English word meaning “fence” or “boundary.” In the times of English conquest of Ireland, “The Pale” circumscribed the city of Dublin and marked the then extent of English rule. “Beyond the Pale” lived the wild, unconquered Irish.

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We can now look at some of the ways in which research material is collected and organized, at organizing ideas and structures. Some of these structures will be the traditional academic disciplines themselves—some (acknowledging that by now we are well and truly Foucaulted) will be actual physical buildings. To a certain extent we are continuing our theme of hitting the search button marked “Irish,” gathering material about the Irish as we find it within specific disciplines and systems of research and discussion. These are often very difficult to unpack, because you can have layer after layer of unquestioned research and assertion going back for several decades.

To give but one example of the ways in which we who study the Irish must master these wider debates, let us look at the influence of what is called Weber’s Protestant ethic thesis: briefly, that there is some sort of connection between the rise of Protestantism and the rise of capitalism. A great amount of research and commentary has arisen around this suggestion. And I should alert you now to one of the miseries of the interdisciplinary approach: we are going to have to wade through huge amounts of verbiage on one specific theme, master it, and perhaps ultimately decide that it is not helpful or that it is irrelevant. But, of course, at that point that theme will have shaped, or distorted, the research record.

Historians of Europe have lost interest in the Protestant ethic thesis. Braudel said that he was “allergic” to it.<sup>20</sup> The plain truth is that we now know too much about the rise of capitalism in Europe to be overimpressed by Weber’s suggestion. Historians of the United States of America, however, do remain

20. Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce*, trans. Siân Reynolds (1975; London: Fontana, 1985), p. 568.

impressed. Indeed, Weber's Protestant ethic thesis has become one of the foundation myths of the United States. The social sciences generally still like their Weber—partly, I think, as a corrective to Marx. Weber is taught to show the importance of ideas in shaping history and behavior. Weber turns up again and again in management theory and in some, often lazy, management research. In this mound of literature on Weber's Protestant ethic thesis, the Irish find themselves in a curiously vulnerable position. As the neighbor of the first industrialized state, England, conquered by that state, and incorporated into the United Kingdom, Ireland is continually involved in compare-and-contrast exercises that contrast England's prosperity with Ireland's poverty—and England's Protestantism with Ireland's Catholicism.

Indeed, a possible area of exploration might be how far Weber's Protestant ethic thesis is simply one manifestation of standard Protestant anti-Catholic polemic of the late nineteenth century. Important parts of Weber's own evidence come to him from English sources—Thomas Carlyle, for example—and from nineteenth-century Britain's renewed interest in English Protestant polemic of the seventeenth century. One key quotation in Weber is from Cromwell's Declaration of War against the Irish. In the social sciences—particularly in research into work and management—the Irish, as mostly Catholic, conveniently English-speaking, find themselves dragged again and again into pieces of research, often very tiny, but cumulatively giving the impression that there is indeed something here to be studied.

There remains one odd thing about all these words about capitalism in its Protestant and Catholic manifestations. There were in England and in Ireland from the seventeenth century onwards a series of laws for “the suppression of popery.” These laws controlled or limited Catholic ownership of land, access to land, and access to the professions. Versions of the laws in England also controlled where Catholics could live. These “anti-popery” laws are remembered in traditional Irish historiography and in folkloric versions of Irish history as the Penal Laws. While opinion as to the true purpose of these laws varies, as does opinion as to their effectiveness, the fact remains that there was a series of laws that mounted an assault on the economic power and the economic activity of Catholics. Weber's Protestant ethic thesis is a suggestion about economic power and economic activity. Yet there is little or no mention of the Penal Laws in all the discussion of Weber's Protestant ethic thesis. In fact—acknowledging the usual difficulty of proving a negative—I have yet to find any mention of these Penal Laws in Weber-influenced works of sociology.

We have, of course, sidestepped the moral, ethical and the practical issues, about the seeking of profit, “globalization,” and the spread of predatory capitalism. Further, there is always a temptation for Irish and Catholic commenta-

tors to, in effect, embrace Weber's Protestant ethic thesis, and see here evidence of the religiosity, the otherworldliness, the spirituality of Irish Catholics. My own conclusion is that "if the migrant Irish, Catholic and Protestant, go forth with any single worldwide task then (and I do not know whether to report this with pride or shame) that task is to disprove the Weber thesis."<sup>21</sup>

As we progress, we find a number of these tangled knots of research and assertion. Indeed, each of these knots would require its own article, or book, to elucidate fully the complexities and to clarify in what ways they shape the discourse of the Irish. For example, there is a tangle of material which focuses on the fact that "the Irish were a rural people in Ireland, a city people in the United States," as if that were some sort of anomaly.<sup>22</sup> But that is precisely how cities work—the recurring gift of free adults from rural areas to the growing city powers city prosperity.<sup>23</sup> In the background here we can detect the influence on historians of Chicago School sociology, with its focus on the "problem" of the immigrant, as well as the influence of another American foundation myth, the valorization of the West in Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis." This, oddly, connects with another foundation myth, another valorization of another West within Ireland, which sees the rural lifestyle of the West of Ireland as the quintessence of Irishness.<sup>24</sup>

Much of the historiography of the Irish in Britain focuses on the Irish working poor, in an agenda that was, in effect, set for us by "the condition of England" debates of the 1830s. Many debates within Irish Diaspora Studies are statistics-led, and this can be a good thing. For example, through statistical analysis the importance of women within the patterns of Irish migration was most effectively brought to the attention of the scholarly world. But a statistics-led approach unintentionally precludes a more complete analysis of the Irish migration experience. Statistics will identify clusters, which will, of course, be

21. Patrick O'Sullivan, Introduction, *Religion and Identity* (1996), *The Irish World Wide*, 5: 8.

22. William V. Shannon, *The American Irish* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 2.

23. These issues are discussed at greater length in Patrick O'Sullivan, Craig A. Bailey, "London and the Union: Ireland's Capital, Ireland's Colony," in *Hearts and Minds: Irish Culture and Society under the Act of Union*, ed. Bruce Stewart, Princess Grace Irish Library 13 (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2001), pp. 291–308.

24. See, for example, Irish leader Eamon de Valera's St. Patrick's Day speech of 1943 and his oft-quoted version of the "Ireland that we dreamed of": "the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit." Quoted in Terence Brown, *Ireland, A Social and Cultural History* (London: Fontana, London, 1981), p. 146. The connection between the two valorizations of the two Wests is simple. Both are, in William Empson's nice phrase, "versions of pastoral." See also Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), Chapter 22, "The Myth of the Garden and Turner's Frontier Hypothesis."

clusters of Irish working poor in slums—in the familiar pattern through which migrants enter cities. The danger of simply colluding with the “condition of England” and similar debates is obvious. The result may be simple repetition—albeit with cautions and shaking of heads—of the by now familiar and well-studied hostility towards the Irish poor that portrays them as job-stealing, fever-carrying, morally contagious, violent, lazy, and rebellious.

Similar, and connected, tangles of research and assertion occur around other themes. You will find much about the Irish as a “martial race,” which has been linked with an Irish search for acceptance and self-esteem, but which seems ultimately to arise out of the migrant search for work and the tendency of empires to find useful the notion of the “ethnic soldier.”<sup>25</sup> There is a cluster of material around the Irish and mental health issues, especially problems of alcohol abuse. There are delicate issues here, which the Irish Diaspora Research Unit is exploring in a series of research projects.<sup>26</sup>

It should be clear by now one could spend an entire scholarly or academic lifetime—indeed, several lifetimes—studying prejudice, preconceptions, stereotypes of the Irish and the ways in which these have entered academic structures and distorted the research record. In an Ireland that is now economically successful, and no longer a gross exporter of human beings, the Irish are increasingly protected from all this. It is, perhaps, a peculiar defense of political independence that, at the very least, it means that you are not insulted in your own country.

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By the late 1980s I had, for some time, been tracking the ways in which the Irish Diaspora was discussed, researched, studied, taught, and written about. I had been making my own contributions to that study. In the 1990s I was able to put in place networks to develop, edit, and publish, with Leicester University Press *The Irish World Wide*. The six volumes appeared regularly from 1992 to 1997, and the paperbacks appeared from 1997 to 2000. The vicissitudes of publishing a scholarly series in the publishing climate of the 1990s were many, but the project was seen through to completion, and it is a tribute to the courage of the publishers and the patience and hard work of the contributors that the project was completed.

25. See the discussion in *A Military History of Ireland*, ed. Thomas Bartlett, Keith Jeffrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially the editors’ own chapter, “An Irish Military Tradition?” pp. 1–25.

26. See Patrick J. Bracken, Patrick O’Sullivan, “The Invisibility of Irish Migrants in British Health Research,” *Irish Studies Review*, 9, 1 (2001), 41–51.

That project was both a report and a demonstration. It reported on the “state of play” in Irish Diaspora Studies in the early 1990s. It demonstrated which academic disciplines were contributing to that study, and how they were contributing.<sup>27</sup> It also explored the nature of their contributions, trying to see patterns and gaps in the research record. One of the things that became clear as *The Irish World Wide* project came together was that it would have been quite wrong to simply present the edited chapters without context or background. Some chapters came from the very center of the debates, and tangles of comment and research, outlined above. Much work went into the general introduction to the series and the six individual introductions to the six themed volumes. I had, for example, to decide how to reference those instances where the study of the Irish Diaspora connected with a knot of research literature. It would have been insufficient to source the debates simply within the latest manifestation, with the latest buzzwords. This would have had the effect of hiding from the reader the complexity and the long history of these debates. So, there arose my “something old, something new” style of referencing—just enough to not ignore the complexity.

In writing my own introductions, I began to think about two words which I had met, again and again, in discussion and reading: “oppression” and “contribution.” In much writing about the Irish Diaspora, oppression is presented as the sufficient and only cause of Irish emigration, linking with the description of emigration as “exile” in ways that precluded other kinds of analysis, and often with scant regard for the normal rules of historical evidence and chronology. In studies of the Irish in the new, host countries, their contribution to the well-being of their new country is stressed—usually economic contribution, but often military service. This is what I have called the “argument from Fredericksburg” and is a very strong theme within Irish-American historiography.<sup>28</sup>

I recalled that I had seen the two word, “oppression” and “contribution,” elsewhere as part of a continuum: oppression, compensation, contribution. My source was feminist historian Gerda Lerner who pointed out that most writing

27. The academic disciplines that did not contribute to *The Irish World Wide* were, curiously, psychology and folklore. I was not able to persuade the folklorists to become involved, which will seem surprising, since Ireland has much folklore about emigration (for example, the “American Wake,” which transfers to the departure of the emigrant for America customary practices around death).

28. During the American Civil War, at the Battle of Fredericksburg (1862), the Irish Brigade advanced to destruction against a well-defended Confederate position. In 1988, in the United States, a representative of the Irish Immigration Reform Movement commented on the fact that only 800 Irish people per year were allowed to enter legally the United States: “That number is less by 120 the number of Irishmen who died storming Marye’s Heights in Fredericksburg on December 13, 1862, in defence of this union . . .” See Patrick O’Sullivan, Introduction, *Patterns of Migration* (1992), *The Irish World Wide*, 1: 4.

on women fell into those three categories: accounts of male oppression of women led to the search for compensation—accounts of “famous” or “extraordinary” women—and a report on women’s contribution, economically or politically. This meant that the study of women’s history was shaped by the oppressor, and gave no account of women “functioning in that male-defined world on their own terms.”<sup>29</sup> My conclusion was that Lerner had noticed a general pattern. When an oppressed group, any oppressed group, begins to collect material about its own history, and begins to write that history, we get a historiography which falls into the pattern: oppression, compensation, contribution. The reasons for such an approach are understandable, but it is an approach that conspires with the oppressor to let the oppressor shape the agenda, it is tendentious, and it leaves out a great deal.

This, as theory goes, is fairly rough and ready, but I am told that students like it—it has the merit of categorizing material before it even reaches us.<sup>30</sup> It also has predictive value, if we are going to go down that “scientific” road.<sup>31</sup> In Lerner’s formulation, oppression, compensation, and contribution are not categories of experience—they are kinds of writing. There does not seem to be any way of avoiding this kind of writing, and I am not sure that we would really want to. But it can be transcended. Like some of the dangers listed above, the problems of the sources, the danger of studying only prejudice, the danger of the media studies approach, once we are alerted, we can see ways forward. And, yes, the next time we hear a joke about a stupid Irishman, we can compensate by listing Yeats, Shaw, Beckett, Heaney—our four Irish winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

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Despite vicissitudes, *The Irish World Wide* project seems to have done its work. It was, for example, gratifying to be sent a recent special issue of the *Journal of American Ethnic History* containing a series of articles on “Teaching Irish-American history,” and to see there the chapters of *The Irish World Wide*, used in

29. Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp 145–8.

30. So I am told by Graham Davis, who has developed Irish Studies at Bath Spa University College, England. See Graham Davis, “Models of Migration: The historiography of the Irish Pioneers in South Texas,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 99, 3 (1996), 327–48; and Graham Davis, *Land! Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2002).

31. Two recent books about Irish migration are precisely predicted by the theory: Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland’s Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996); Sean O’Callaghan, *To Hell or Barbados: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ireland*, (Dingle: Brandon Books, 2000).

teaching and working as they were designed to work.<sup>32</sup> *The Irish World Wide* was originally planned as a five volume series. And it is a mark of the courage of the publishers that they did not blink when I said I wanted to add an extra volume on the relationship between the arts and diaspora. This became *The Creative Migrant* (1994). This volume includes chapters on autobiography, poetry, the theatre, cinema, music, and dance as phenomena of the diaspora.

Ethnic identities tend to coalesce around leisure activities. Rural and customary work practices rarely transfer from the old country to the new country. It is in spare time that identity can be nursed and comforted. We have seen the example of St. Patrick's Day. Other things happen. There is often an overt commodification of culture—as the sometimes covert commodification of culture in the homeland become more visible. Sometimes the diaspora will value parts of the culture that the homeland has no time for.

From 1903 to 1922, Francis O'Neill, an Irish-born policeman in Chicago, published five compilations of Irish folk music, and two further books of reminiscences. O'Neill discovered that he was ideally placed in Chicago to be a collector of Irish folk music, for there could be found “exiles from all of Ireland's thirty-two counties. . . .” O'Neill himself never expected his efforts on behalf of Irish traditional music to be appreciated or understood, “in the face of both racial and national indifference. . . .” In fact, O'Neill's main collection, *The Dance Music of Ireland: 1001 Gems*, is now revered as “The Book” by Irish musicians. The precious Captain Francis O'Neill Collection of Irish Music is housed in the library of the University of Notre Dame. This collection would not have been possible—and would most probably have not been valued—in the Ireland of O'Neill's lifetime.

In 1914, Michael Coleman, a fiddle player from Sligo, Ireland, settled in the United States. The burgeoning American recording industry of the 1920s went to the Irish dance scene in the large American cities, to make sound recordings for the “ethnic” market. Records by Coleman and other Sligo fiddle players were sent back to Ireland by Irish immigrants. All over Ireland these “cultural remittances” spread the “Sligo fiddle style”—jaunty, flamboyant, highly ornamented—and all but destroyed the more austere music styles of other regions. One player has told how, anticipating the techniques of the ethnomusicologist, he would slow the rotating disc with his finger so that he could catch all the detail of Coleman's ornamentation.

There are very significant and dynamic processes going on here, which folkloric notions of authenticity or timelessness find of no interest. I remember at the time trying to explain all this to an academic colleague, and failing. In 1994,

32. Kevin Kenny, “Teaching Irish-American History,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 21, 4 (2002), 30–39, with following comment by Jay P. Dolan, Marion R. Casey and Timothy J. Meagher.

I was idly watching the Eurovision Song Contest when *Riverdance* happened, and made it all visible—one lead dancer from Chicago, the other lead dancer from New York. But too late for me to mention *Riverdance* in *The Creative Migrant*. Also in 1994 was established the Irish World Music Centre at the University of Limerick, Ireland. Meanwhile, and especially since 1997, the Irish music and performing arts part of the program at Boston College, has grown. From these and other centers we have seen a sequence of new research by new scholars. The theoretical and practical tensions remain, but the work is being done. Captain Francis O'Neill would be pleased.

Some time ago I was asked why I had not joined the International Association for the Study of Anglo-Irish Literature (IASAIL). I replied that I had not joined because I could not think of anything new to say about W. B. Yeats. IASAIL was founded in 1969, and held its inaugural meeting in 1970. It changed its name in 1998 to the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL), “to reflect the real diversity of its members’ interest in all traditions of writing on the island in Irish and in English as well as new Irish literature in Britain, America and elsewhere.” So, IASIL has broadened its remit to include the literatures in both the Irish and the English languages. IASIL has also acknowledged that there will be writers outside Ireland who themselves acknowledge Irish writerly traditions, and place themselves in some sort of discourse with Irish history and literature—particularly, of course, the history of emigration, and the literature of emigration. IASIL is thus now a diaspora-wide scholarly organization. Indeed, its most recent 2002 conference was held in Brazil. But of course IASIL remains firmly bedded within the academic discipline that has coalesced around the study of literature—a discipline which has been well and truly Foucaulted, and which still tends to focus on the task of creating new comment on a small canon of readily available texts. However, I did finally think of something new to say about Yeats and—with the change of the organization’s name—I am now a loyal member of IASIL.

Founded in 1960 as an interdisciplinary “committee” of scholars, the American Conference for Irish Studies is now the leading Irish Studies organization in the United States, annually holding regional meetings and a national meeting on campuses across the nation. There are now a number of sister organizations, the British Association for Irish Studies, Societe Francaise d’Etudes Irlandaises, the Canadian Association for Irish Studies. There are hopes for the creation of an Australian Association for Irish Studies. Note that there is no Irish Association for Irish Studies. The concept of Irish Studies is not particularly well developed in the Republic of Ireland, an observation which would need yet another paper to explore. In Northern Ireland, there remains a skeleton of the Institute of Irish Studies, at Queens University, Belfast—founded in 1965. I

should also mention the hardworking Society for the Study of Nineteenth-Century Ireland. And there is now (2002–2003) the European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies (EFACIS), which will slot into European Union cultural and educational programs.

So, in an odd sort of way, the spread of Irish Studies is itself a diasporic phenomenon. But these developments in Irish Studies do not mean that there have been similar developments in Irish Diaspora Studies. We do now, at last, have one Professor of Irish Diaspora Studies—a personal chair held by Bronwen Walter at Anglia Polytechnic University, England. In the Republic of Ireland we have Piaras Mac Éinrí's brave Centre for Migration Studies at the National University of Ireland, Cork. In Northern Ireland, we do have the Centre for Migration Studies at the Ulster-American Folk Park, Omagh, which, under Brian Lambkin has made important links between Irish Diaspora Studies, museum studies, and family history.<sup>33</sup>

It is possible to detect a number of tensions at different levels. Some of these tensions might be predicted. First of all, Irish Studies is itself often under attack by their core disciplines. We know, at an anecdotal level, that some of the institutional developments outlined above were opposed within institutions by the traditional academic disciplines. Further, there are really precious few careers in Irish Studies—the academic career structures remain within the traditional disciplines. So, for example, it is a constant complaint within the Irish Studies associations that when teachers of Irish history retire from a university they are unlikely to be replaced within that university by another teacher of Irish history—they may well be replaced by a teacher with some other specialization. The long-term strategy of Irish Studies must be to dig in—and become, in effect, institutionalized, to have its own funding and its own buildings. A notable achievement here—though not necessarily a model that can be followed elsewhere—was the creation of the Glucksman Ireland House at New York University, officially opened in 1993.<sup>34</sup>

Irish Studies has tended to have at its core an interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature and history. The relationship between literature and history is, perhaps, clearer in Ireland than in many other countries. When W. B. Yeats wrote “Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?” he was asking a real question, one that not many poets are required by history to ask of their own work. I will leave it to the reader to decide which poet lives in happier circumstances—the poet with political influence and moral responsi-

33. During the tourist months, the Centre for Migration Studies at the Ulster-American Folk Park employs a researcher to greet visiting families, listen to their family history queries, and take them through the first steps of searching the databases and other resources.

34. Consult <http://www.nyu.edu/pages/irelandhouse/>.

bility, or the poet without. But this dynamic is certainly interesting, and certainly worth exploring—students like it. But, once again, we are working within certain definitions of Irishness, we are working within a restricted literary canon and within one grand narrative.

It is a constant complaint of those who study the Irish Diaspora that it is all too easy to have an Irish Studies conference organized by one of the associations, like the American Conference for Irish Studies, at which there will be no paper on the diaspora. Increasingly, scholars of the Irish Diaspora have tended to try and organize their own conferences, with varying results. These things take a lot of time. Great costs and distances are involved. Also, there is a tendency to have to start each time from square one. There is no agreed agenda or approach. An excellent conference organized by Piaras Mac Éinrí in 1997 at University College, Cork, did produce an excellent book—*The Irish Diaspora* (2000)—which I like to think of as continuing the tradition of *The Irish World Wide*.<sup>35</sup>

In 1997, I was invited by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the United Kingdom's leading funding and training agency, to attend a meeting to launch a major new research initiative on "Transnational Communities." Nearly four million pounds was spent over five years on nineteen research projects. It was very striking that these research projects were shaped by the preoccupations of the individual academic disciplines, especially by anthropology, and not by the needs and wishes of any individual transnational community. On our planet, life is lived within nation states of one sort or another. The study of a planet-wide phenomenon is likely to take place within a nation state, be funded in some way by that state, and be shaped by the state's current fears and preoccupations. In 2002, I attended the final public event of that five-year, 3.8 million pound, ESRC research program and saw discussion collapse into a debate about current British asylum and immigration policy, a debate that, in Britain, is shaped by right-wing newspapers.

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After 1997, and the end of *The Irish World Wide* project, I began work on a narrative history of the Irish Diaspora—working title, *Beyond Ireland*. Inevitably I found myself looking for ways that I could continue to "contribute." I could see that we might use developments in information technology and in computers to develop dialogue between scholars in different parts of the world or within different disciplines, to build a cumulative research record, to get the Irish Dias-

35. *The Irish Diaspora*, ed, Andy Bielenberg (Harlow: Longman, 2000). Consult <http://migration.ucc.ie/>.

pora on research agendas—to get beyond square one. In November, 1997, building on the networks put in place for *The Irish World Wide*, I started the Irish Diaspora list—in essence moving communication from paper to email, and making communication practically instant and cumulative. In computer jargon an email “list” is “traditionally” called a “list” because a piece of software on a mainframe computer keeps a veritable list of the e-mail addresses of the people who are part of the group, and who are entitled to send and receive email messages through that group. Increasingly commercial organizations are abandoning the word “list” and using words like “community” or “network” or “group” instead. Generally, the scholarly community continues to use the word “list.”

The Irish Diaspora List was started with no resources, other than a small team of volunteers. Technical problems we have solved, one-by-one. For example, existing archiving solutions were very expensive in terms of time, money, and expertise. The obvious solution always was a database with its own email address. With the assistance of Dr. Stephen Sobol, of the University of Leeds, we were able to create just that—we now have more than four years of Irish Diaspora list messages and discussion in a password-protected, searchable database, accessible through [www.irishdiaspora.net](http://www.irishdiaspora.net). This database is in itself an extraordinary research resource, and is constantly used by scholars who are members of the Irish Diaspora list or by approved guests.

A development of the same technology allows us to display material on the web the work of other Irish Diaspora scholars like the *Guide to Irish Military History* by Paul Walsh or the *Bibliographic Guide to the History of the Irish in South America* by Brian McGinn. McGinn’s *Guide* offers a case study of what can be accomplished. In March, 1999, McGinn, a very able independent scholar based in Washington, D.C., sent me his brief *Bibliographic Guide to the History of the Irish in South America*. He and I decided to take things further. In April, 1999, I circulated his draft *Guide* to interested scholars, some members of the Irish Diaspora List, some not, seeking additions and comments. By the end of April, Brian McGinn had collated all this new material, and in May, 1999, we published the complete *Bibliographic Guide* on the web. Within one month the shape of Irish Diaspora Studies, worldwide, had been changed. We could see what had been written about the Irish in South America. More important, as one eminent scholar pointed out, we could see what had not been written, thus encouraging him to undertake an important study of Irish settlement in Brazil.

The Irish Diaspora list has members spread over five continents. The number of members tends to hover between 200 and 300—not a huge number, but one representing a substantial proportion of the people in the world who have a scholarly interest in the study of the Irish Diaspora. As our rubric says, we are especially useful to more isolated scholars, and among these I would include

myself. The basic rule for all email discussion groups is: “Bad conversation drives out good.” The Irish Diaspora List is moderated: all messages are checked for content, tone, suitability, before being distributed.

At the beginning of the year 2001, the Public Record Office, the National Archives of England and Wales at Kew, made freely available on its web site the entire census records of England and Wales for the year 1901. So great was the interest in these hundred-year-old records that the system was immediately overwhelmed, crashed, had to be withdrawn and redesigned. In 2002 a more cautious, limited system is at last in place. The Public Record Office was simply not prepared for the amount of interest there now is in access to archives and records, and the interest, throughout the world, in family history and genealogy. If ethnic identities tend to coalesce around leisure activities, then exploring identity has in itself become a use of leisure time. Every scholar of diaspora and migration who has a web presence will regularly receive literally hundreds of emails asking for help with a family history query. Usually these enquiries come from people who are at the early stages of constructing their family history and who are simply not aware of the standard methods of the family historian and the difficulties of family history. Family history is, in fact, a most expensive, time-consuming kind of archival research. By now I have a standard reply to such enquiries, explaining the limitations within which my little research unit must work and the difficulties of family history. Usually people simply need to be made aware of guidance, networks and resources elsewhere on the web—Rootsweb, GENUKI, or the many local family history societies and clubs.<sup>36</sup>

But there us something more profound here. I would ask the reader to look back over the material outlined here—at the complexities, confusions, and the plain nonsense. And then imagine an individual person, an Irish person or a person of Irish heritage, trying to understand themselves, their families, and that heritage. Is it really reasonable to ask that person to enter and explore that maze without a map? The scholarly network, which I tend to think of as *irish-diaspora.net*—because that is the domain name—has no funding to speak of. It depends on the good will of its members, and will survive as long as it is useful. It has no power, but it does have influence.

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36. Two figures for people of Irish descent or heritage are bandied about: “44 million Irish” in the United States and “70 million Irish” worldwide. Type either of those two phrases into a web search engine, and you will see how the Irish Diaspora has become something to be commercially exploited. The statistical basis for the two figures remains obscure.