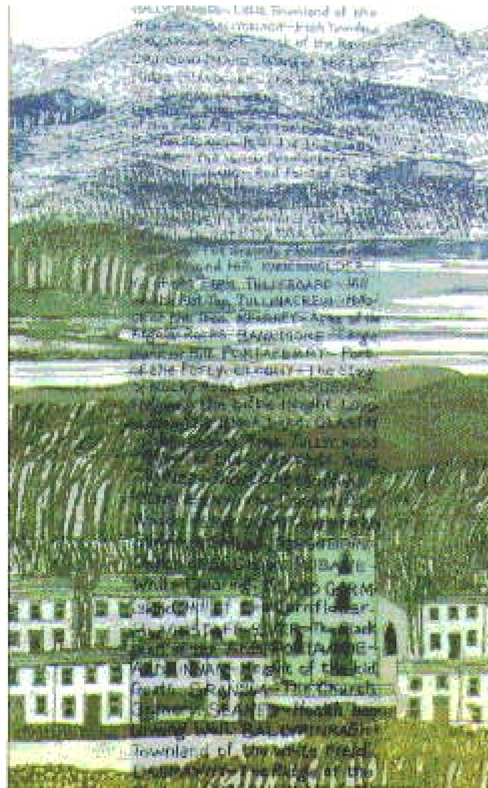
Whither Cultural Diversity?



by Maurice Hayes

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Overlapping universes

So much of what passes for discussion of political, social and economic issues in this community consists of mere assertion, the rehearsal of entrenched positions, or the dissemination of carefully tended myths, that anything that encourages the uncovering of issues, the dispassionate examination of source material and data, the deconstruction of stereotypes, the challenging of received wisdom and a healthy iconoclasm towards myth is much to be welcomed.

On the other hand, Irish Studies cannot be seen in isolation. We are part of a wider world - of several overlapping universes. These islands have never been immune to the movement of people and ideas, the shrinking of the world through modern communications means that no society can stand for long isolated from the great intellectual movements of the day. One has only to look at what is happening in Eastern Europe to see that no country can seal itself hermetically from ideas, or to the current GATT negotiations, to see that no economic system is watertight, to sense the degree of interaction, cross-fertilisation and interdependence.

To say that Irish Studies have tended to be neglected by our institutions is merely to make an observation. We did not succeed in providing much in the way of cosmopolitanism either. It is important, however, not to swing the pendulum too far, to maintain a balance between the cosmopolitan and the domestic, to distinguish, as Patrick Kavanagh had it, between the parochial and the merely provincial.[1]

I don't think either that we should take ourselves too seriously, and should remember that our deliberations are taking place under the shadow of momentous events in the Gulf that make our local difficulties of cultural diversity and division, of conflict and accommodation, seem very puny in a global perspective. There are also great movements in Eastern Europe, the break-up of monoliths, and the emergence in a virulent form of ethnic nationalisms, and Muslim fundamentalism in Asia.

But for the purpose of this evening, it is perhaps sufficient to warn against isolation from important mainstreams, against insularity, at a time when Europe appears to poised on the edge of important developments, when the role of the United Kingdom in Europe is the stuff that topples premiers. Indeed, the definition and the role of the United Kingdom and Ireland in relation to Europe, Europe's relationship to America and the unique position of the UK and Ireland as a bridge, economic and cultural, between Europe and the English-speaking world are the important issues which determine the context of many of these debates.

Sectionalism and sectarianism

I wish to talk about cultural diversity, primarily in Northern Ireland, but in a wider framework. My remarks will be based on the hypothesis that a society is enriched by difference and range of choice, and that pluralism, openness to change and tolerance of diversity are more likely to provide a basis for mutual trust and resolution of conflict than insularity and protectiveness.

Very few people in Northern Ireland can be unaware of sectionalism, if not sectarianism, as a debilitating and stultifying fact of life, even when this does not manifest itself in conflict or overt violence. I remember, growing up in a fishing village in Co. Down before the war, two brothers who were partners in a rowing boat in which they fished for cod and whiting. By some accident of birth, one was Catholic and the other a Protestant. For most of the time, this did not seem to make much difference, but one 12th July, after a few drinks, one word borrowed another and the Catholic brother left the pub determined to dissolve the partnership. This he did in the most practical way possible by taking a cross-cut saw and sawing the fine clinger-built boat in two, shouting, as local tradition reported 'You can paddle your own canoe now, you Orange bastard'. It would have been artistically more satisfying if he has stuck more closely to the vernacular of the local dialect, and even more so if the Protestant brother had done the cutting, shouting in the words of Shem, which a visiting scholar assured the Joyce Summer School should be articulated in the tones of Mid-Ulster, 'To hull with the poop'.

I mention this merely to indicate the complexity of nuance that surrounds any family quarrel, and the difficulties associated with any dissolution of partnership, even a forced one. It is the very closeness of the communities in Northern Ireland, the similarity when seen from outside, the evolving nature of the relationship, the pressure of outside influences, and the sub-themes which have developed over time which make the expressed conflict so difficult of resolution. And clash of cultures becomes difference rather than diversity, of conflict rather than compatibility.

Culture and identity

There are, too, difficulties of definition. Culture can be looked at in many ways, and we are certainly talking about more than high culture and the arts. On the other hand, to extend the definition to include all the social, economic, historic and other influences which make people what they are at a particular time is to so over-extend the definition as to make

it meaningless. However, I am anxious, in I.F. Stone's phrase, to eschew the search for absolute abstraction where there are only complex realities.

What I will be taking about mostly is identity - the set of values which define a community, or a people, which is an amalgam of shared historical experience, attitudes to each other and to intruders, political and economic structures, religion, folklore and ethnicity. What I am interested in exploring is whether cultural pluralism is possible in a society, and to what extent this is separate from, or precedes, political systems. Whether it is possible for a polity to contain with a single system deep conflicts of values. Is Richard Rose right when in Governing Without Consensus he argues that the great unbargainables are allegiance and identity, that no consensus is available on these fundamental issues, and that Government without consensus can only be achieved by integration, assimilation or repression?[2] The thing to remember about culture is that it is not static, that it, too, changes as the combination and permutation of factors influencing and forcing cultural identity change over time. The Ireland of today, North or South, is not that of previous generations. Change is taking place almost, in many cases, despite the custodians of group and national values, and the Ireland of tomorrow will be different again and so will Britain. It is within this idea of a dynamic and changing cultural picture that I wish to consider cultural diversity.

Richness and diversity

My own view is that cultural diversity enriches and strengthens a society, that a society is strong in proportion to the number of disparate elements which it can contain without actually blowing apart. The figure I like to use is of a bubble - where there is just enough surface to keep the entity intact and to keep it floating, but where undue pressure either from within or without will fracture the fragile construction.

I find the same idea being expressed by AE Russell in an underrated and seldom noticed pamphlet, Thoughts for a Convention, which he wrote in 1917, with the added caveat against a majority-imposed dominant culture which suppresses differences.

He argued that the ideal to aim at was a diversity of culture, and the greatest freedom, richness and variety of thought. And for sensible political ends too.

The more richness and variety prevail in a nation, the less likelihood is there of a tyranny of one culture over the rest. We should aim in Ireland at the freedom of the ancient Athenians who, as Pericles said, listened gladly to the opinions of others and did not turn sour faces on those who disagreed with them... We should allow the greatest freedom in respect of cultural development in Ireland so that the best may triumph by reason of superior beauty and not because the police are relied upon to maintain one culture in a superior position.[3]

The ultimate expression of a monolithic centralised set of values is of course the nation state, which, it may be argued, has been the bane of European political and cultural development for the last century and a half.

Neither do I think of total assimilation as much of a recipe for dealing with cultural minorities. The melting pot theory has been fairly well discredited in the United States, not least by Glazer and Moynihan,[4] and it is interesting that those countries which are espousing multi-culturalism such as Australia and Canada are having to adopt more sophisticated legal and political arrangements - Canada perhaps being a useful current example of the real difficulty of accommodating deeply held differences - this time of identity expressed through language. Australia, too, is having difficulty in moving from an Australia white policy to multi-culturalism - and the work of Bullivant and others does not immediately endorse the curricula developed there for cultural awareness.

It is possible to maintain difference through economic pluralism, where the different groups co-exist separately and come together only in the market place, or structural pluralism where the groups maintain separate sets of structures for the major institutions, each set maintained and controlled by distinct groups; and there will always be a tension between the centralising forces of civism (expressed, for example, through state control of education) and pluralism where value systems and transmission mechanisms are controlled by groups in society.

Perhaps another way of looking at the relationship is to distinguish between the nation as a horizontal network of trust and identity, and the state as a vertical structure of powers. Sometimes the two come together and are identical as in the idealisation of the nation state, but not often, and not all the time, and other combinations and arrangements are possible.

Group identity

What is clear is that groups, as well as individuals, have identity problems - of learning who they are and what they are and how they relate to others. The solidarity of the group is an important support for the individual, who can often only realise himself through identification with the group. (The group can, of course, also be a constraint on individual freedom and development.) In the same way as an individual needs to be secure in himself, and this indeed is one sign of maturity, so groups, especially minority groups in society, need to develop self-confidence. A self-confident group, secure in its own values, can deal with other groups much more constructively than a group which is insecure, lacking in self-confidence, or which sees itself as oppressed or undervalued by the wider society.

Much of what presents as inter-group or ethnic conflict, is, I believe, determined by the self-perception of the groups concerned, their perception of others, and their preconceptions of others' view of them. Underlying most of these conflicts is a failure of communication, a lack of empathy and understanding which results in stereotyping and scapegoating, and a basic lack of trust without which no social, political or other contract is conceivable.

Changing the question

It is an old chestnut of English political commentary in the 19th century that every time the English came near to solving the Irish question, the Irish changed the question. However, the obverse is that when an issue is insoluble or defies resolution, perhaps it is necessary to change the question, or to redefine the issues, or to put them in a different context. This is particularly true of conflict where the issues are stated in absolute terms which are in themselves irreconcilable. The only possibility then is to try to change the context.

This brings us, after some delay, to Europe. Many people in Northern Ireland supported British (and Irish) membership of the European Community in 1973 in the belief that the local conflict could be resolved more easily in a European framework, that Europe would de-magnetise the polarity of the Irish/British duality, that common functional and structural interests would override local political divisions, and that conflicting local allegiances could be subsumed in a wider common European identity.

In a way, I suppose, the unstated argument went: if one group holds that it is a British problem to be solved within a UK framework, and the other that it is an Irish problem to be solved within the island, let's put it in a European framework.

It has to be said that this has not happened up to the present. Indeed, the common Irish perception of Europe seems to be of a piggy-bank which is to be raided on every possible occasion. It has to be said that there seems to me to be more of a sense of European connection in Dublin than in Belfast, but even there the sense of being part of a European common culture is not particularly pervasive. However, 1992 is upon us and Europe seems poised on the edge of another significant development. It seems appropriate to ask, therefore, whether the new Europe will be more conducive to the development of cultural diversity in Northern Ireland, and on the island, and to the accommodation of various expressions of Irishness and Britishness in ways which dull the edge of conflict, but capitalise on the synergistic effect of interaction of different cultural traditions and group identities.

Problems and solutions

There is always a temptation when writing about a conflict situation like Northern Ireland, to stress either the extent of conflict or the lack of it. On the one hand, we like to think of our conflict as unique, as having parallels nowhere else in the world, as being bigger, better, more long-lasting or more intractable that other quarrels.

Another real difficulty is to get people to agree on a name for the place. An important indicator of allegiance is whether we talk about 'the province' or 'the mainland' - although it is fair to say that the number who think of continental Europe as the mainland is very small indeed. Again, there is what one means by 'Ulster' although it is worth nothing that this, too, is a concept of territoriality which has regularly expanded and contracted over the centuries.

There is, too, in the political commentaries, a tendency to lurch from total pessimism - 'The problem is there's no solution' - to an optimistic act of faith that out there there is a simple answer, if only we could find it, or that there is a guru who can tell us what to do if only we can find him. My own favourite (and slightly pessimistic) figure for the difficulties associated with the latter is found in Tom Kinsella's wonderful translation of the Tain, in a passage which also exemplifies the historic cussedness of the Ulsterman.

Cuchulainn has been killing the Connaughtmen and they send representatives to sue for peace. First they offer him all the noblest women and all the milkless cattle out of heir plunder, which he refuses. Then they return to offer all the slave women and all the milch cattle, which he also refuses. In exasperation they ask whether there is any offer which

he will accept. 'There is', says Cuchulainn, 'but I won't say what it is. If you can find anyone who knows what I mean, I'll agree to it.'[5]

Viewing the problem

We encounter the same sort of conceptual difficulty when we begin to consider relationships within Northern Ireland. There are proponents of the two nations theory, or two communities, or a single Northern Ireland community. We can think of community as a territorial description, people occupying contiguous bits of ground, or as people sharing a set of historic experiences or cultural influences, or as people with a shared interest and aims either historically or at a moment in time. We can see this, too, as free-standing within Northern Ireland or as the outreach of, or being linked to, outside communities with similar characteristics. And we can talk in terms of minority or majority, in political, economic, social or demographic terms. Or, more subtly, as Harold Jackson saw it in the early seventies, as a double minority: the Catholics as a minority within Northern Ireland and fearful and insecure as a result; the Protestants as a majority within Northern Ireland, but potentially part of a minority in an All-Ireland situation, in which the Catholics would form part of a national majority. Thus both groups exhibit the worst features of both modes - the insecurity of a minority and the arrogance and insensitivity of a majority. In another frame of references one can view both groups in Northern Ireland as a minority within the United Kingdom.[6]

There is a similar tendency to see the cultural map of Northern Ireland in simple black and white (or rather orange and green) terms, to talk about 'the two cultures' or the Planter and the Gael as if this was a sufficient typology. There is Louis MacNeice, in *Autumn Journal*,

> And we read black where the others read white.
> His hope the other man's damnation.
> Up the rebels, to hell with the pope.
> And God save - as you prefer - the King or Ireland.[7]

MacNeice at least has the perceptiveness to link politics and religion. Some popular interpretations express the ability to accommodate religious difference rather that political allegiance, to receive the Catholics qua Catholics rather than qua Nationalists within Northern Ireland, and by offers to protect the religion of Protestants in a United Ireland without realising that their Britishness needs to be protected too.

There are indeed broad as well as narrow divisions in the society and there is a sense in which divisions in housing, in employment, in schooling and in recreation tend to reinforce the different perceptions of history which have been handed down. Jack Magee has spoken of much popular history as 'ancestral voices, prophesying wars', but, as he says, 'different ancestors, different wars'.[8] Even more reinforcing of division is the differential interpretation of the same wars, particularly as both communities reflect on the events of the past two decades.

But to see the two main cultural groupings as monoliths is to erect stereotypes and much of the difficulty in understanding Northern Ireland is not only in the creation of stereotypes by and for outsiders, but the fact that we create our own stereotypes, and then begin to live up to them and believe in them ourselves.

Complexity of the divisions

In Culture and Anarchy Lyons identified 'at least four' cultural traditions in Ireland.[9] These were the English tradition, embodied in law and administration, the Gaelic/Catholic/pastoral/rural tradition, the Anglo-Irish tradition of a colonial governing class, and the Northern Protestant. He went on to say that he could have mentioned others - based on class differences, on an east/west split, or rural/urban. And if Lyons could see 'the collision of a variety of cultures within an island whose very smallness makes the juxtaposition potentially and often actually lethal' how much more explosive must the mixture be when compressed and confined within the parcel bomb that is Northern Ireland. Even the differences he indicates are insufficient to cope with the complexity of the North. There you have the four elements he mentions - but are they the same? To what extent are they different? One can see within each of the main traditions in Northern Ireland a range of cultural experiences which interact to a greater or lesser degree before we begin to consider whether or not they also interact across what is seen as the great community divide between Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Unionist.

Keith Kyle, in a perceptive article a few years ago, talked about Northern Ireland as 'the overlap of nationality', as the place where 'Irishness' and 'Britishness' merge and over-lie each other like filters on a lens.[10] This would not be unusual in a border area. Neither would it be unexpected to find that the zone of transition from one culture to another straddled the political and administrative boundaries and occluded the actual point at which one moved from one state to the other. The position in Ireland is complicated by the absence of a land-frontier, by the fact that the cultures are

disposed on two islands, and that the culture of the larger island extends into the smaller producing the Northern Ireland situation of whom Seamus Heaney spoke in Act of Union regarding the 'tall Kingdom over your shoulder'.[11]

Even this idea of overlap is an over-simplification. It ignores the extent to which both Britishness and Irishness have affected each other over time and the extent to which the model is three-dimensional in time and space, reflecting the flow and reflux of peoples and ideas across the narrow sea in both directions over many centuries. It is also possible to argue that what we have in Ireland, North and South, can be expressed as regional variants of a common British Isles culture, or increasingly mid- or trans-Atlantic, and there is some force in this, especially given the vehicles of mass culture and newspapers, television, popular sports and employment patterns. It is also true that the juxtaposition of cultural traditions in North Eastern Ulster is not the result merely of present day Britishness confronting modern Irishness, but has been achieved over the centuries as successive waves of invaders, settlers and incomers have suppressed, or been absorbed by the constantly mutating indigene. What we have is not the result of successful colonisation or plantation, but its failure, not once but many times over a couple of millennia.

Ulster identities

Another model of the Northern Ireland political construct is of two groups locked in mutual suspicion and antagonism looking outside for support to parent groups, in the case of the Protestants to London and of the Catholics to Dublin, to reference groups whose values they no longer really share, and who have more in common with each other than either has with its ‘grandfather’ society- in Estyn Evans’ words ‘more British than the British, more Irish than the Irish’.[12] This model, too, is an over-simplification, and is used as a cultural basis for the independent Ulster approach. However, there is an element of truth in it and it exemplifies the fact that, apart altogether from the effect of cohabitation over the centuries on the communities in Northern Ireland, the fact of forced marriage in a single polity over the past seventy years has produced its own cultural entity.

John Wilson Foster in an article in a recent Irish Review, ‘Radical Regionalism’, speaks of:

> Ulster’s inability to decide whether it is a region of Ireland or region of Britain. It is, of course, both - a fact that has yet to assume a unique cultural form.[13]

And Bernard Crick, writing as a political scientist:

> While nationalisms are real and authentic in these islands, yet none are as self-sufficient as most of the adepts claim. In Northern Ireland most people are, in fact, torn in two directions: ‘torn’, that is, while their political leaders will not recognise that people can, with dignity, face in two directions culturally at once, and refuse to invent political institutions to match.[14]

There is also Edna Longley’s view of Ulster as a cultural corridor with the unionists trying to block one end and the republicans the other:

> Culture, like common sense, insists it can’t be done. Ulster Irishness and Ulster Britishness are bound to each other and to Ireland and Britain. Only by promoting circulation within and through Ulster will the place ever be part of a healthy system.[15]

Rose and others have referred to the unionist community as a ‘fragment’ society as described by Harz, a group separated from its parent society and projected into a hostile environment where it develops a siege mentality and preserves in fossilised form the values of the parent society at the time of fragmentation. Rose cited the examples of the Southern whites in the USA or the South African whites. If this is accepted as true of the Unionist community in Northern Ireland, it must be realised that to an extent the Northern Ireland Catholics form a fragment society too, no longer in the main stream of southern Irish society, and that that society has developed in ways which rejects, or at least excludes, the Northern Catholic culture except at a rhetorical level in times of high crisis, when, in Joe Lee’s memorable phrase, the approach is to ‘walk noisily and carry a small stick’.[16]

The laager mentality or sense of siege of the Unionists has been well recorded, but it is a theme which recurs in Heaney too, either as

> wily Greeks, besieged within the siege, whispering Morse[17]

or the

> fanatical ignorant little fists cocked at me across the water. [18]

Cultural insecurity

Another well-hawked stereotype is of the Unionist as being insecure because he is unsure of his cultural identity. On this thesis, the Unionist does not know who he is, where he has come from or where he is going to, and this sense of alienation and bewilderment has been increased by the removal of the Stormont Parliament and the reduction of Unionist symbols like the 'B' Specials and Harland & Wolff, the sinking of the Titanic, and apparent rejection by Britain, particularly by Conservative governments. In this particular script the Catholic has no problem - he is secure in his identity as an Irishman and a Catholic, heir to, and participant in, a settled cultural tradition, sure of where he is going, even if not certain when he will get there. But I wonder if the Unionist is not as disorientated as this caricature portrays him. Neither, I suggest, is the Catholic so secure and certain in his identification with the South. And there are indications that this relationship, too, is becoming less certain.

Whatever the impact of recent Supreme Court judgements concerning Article 2 of the Constitution, successive opinion polls and one's own participant observation suggest that the point of view of the man in the street in Dublin to the sundered part of the national territory is not re-integration, but hope that the whole thing will float quietly away out to sea - unless, of course, when he is asked to express that opinion through a constitutional referendum, in which case, reaction is likely to rule. Indeed, the significance of the recent referenda on divorce and abortion might be to underline the fact that if the price of a United Ireland includes cultural pluralism southern Catholics are unwilling to pay it.

Two cultures

Having entered all the caveats about over-simplification, one cannot avoid the general nature of the debate which has centred on the existence of 'two cultures' in Northern Ireland. While these are the product of historic processes, there is little doubt that public awareness of difference was heightened by social and political developments of the 19th century. In the sense that much of what passed for Irish history was the artefact of political historiography in the 19th century, the same may be true of a lot of what passes for authentic Irish nationalist culture. The 19th century did produce, as Lyons has noted, a mainly English culture associated with the mainly Protestant Ascendancy, and one associated with the indigenous Irish population, leaving, it will be noticed, the Ulster Protestant rather to one side. While many of these did not readily identify with the Ascendancy, the fact that Irish literature, language, music and folklore became a resource for those alienated from the institutions of an English government, encouraged the Unionists to become more closely associated with the political security and imperial power represented by English cultural traditions. This was particularly the case, as Paul Bew has pointed out, under the Stormont regime, whether by the assertion and protection of majority values throughout the Flags and Emblems Act, or the prohibition of street names in Irish.[19]

This trend was reinforced by the different economic experience of the two communities (in Northern Ireland) and by a segregated system of education which brought with it residential and occupational segregation. One result was that Protestants tended to see expressions of Irish culture as belonging wholly to the Catholic community, and indeed as having been hi-jacked for political ends and because Britishness was so often expressed in terms of Englishness, Catholics tended to see this as something imposed on society, as an initiation test which they could not pass, or would not enter.

Also noteworthy is the absence in Northern Ireland of a youth counter-culture, as noticed by Nelson and others in the 70's [20] and by Desmond Bell in a recent study of young Protestant marching bands.[21] So, far from rebelling from parental values, the young people particularly in working class areas are seen to play an active and increasingly central role in the preservation of 'traditions'.

In Nationalist areas this has been exemplified by an increase in interest in the Irish language and in the development of all-Irish primary schools, ironically at a time when Irish is losing ground in the traditional Catholic schools and in the Republic. These two features, of a more assertive statement of Unionist values and the increasing adoption of Irish as a symbol of difference and alienation, are significant developments of the past few years.

Positive signs

Nevertheless, there are positive signs too. Whatever suspicions or scepticism one might have about centrally ordained core curriculum in schools, it is encouraging that schools are being encouraged to adopt programmes conducive to mutual understanding, that cultural diversity is being cherished and facilitated in the curriculum, that agreed syllabi are being developed for history and religion which encourage the earlier analysis of difference, the value of shared traditions and tolerance of others. Then there is the Cultural Traditions Group - where the main object was to promote discussion, debate about the validity of the various cultural traditions in Northern Ireland in a constructive and non-confrontational atmosphere. One shorthand was to help Protestants to contemplate the Irish language without necessarily feeling offended by it, or for Catholics to look on Orange processions without feeling intimidated. Of course

this rather begs the question that some Orange processions are indeed intended to assert a claim to territory, or to superiority, and sometimes to intimidate, and some manifestations of the Irish language are precisely employed in order to cause as much offence as possible to Unionists.

There is also the problem in a divided society much given to retrospective celebration of how to celebrate historic events of great symbolic importance to one or other community without increasing the sense of division and discord. There were, coming up in rapid succession, the tercentenaries of the Glorious Revolution, the Siege of Derry and the Boyne. The celebration of the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Rising and the collateral but quite separate Remembrance of the Somme, both had an effect in further dividing the community in the 1960's and one thinks of the bi-centennial of 1798 just over the horizon. Subsequently the public celebrations by the Derry City Council of the Siege, and the treatment by Belfast City Council and the Ulster Museum of the tercentenary of the Boyne, are encouraging signs of what can be done to celebrate the history of divisive historical events.

The Group's philosophy involves a general acceptance of the validity of all cultural traditions, the importance of tradition in the creation of a sense of identity, the importance of group identity as a means of self-fulfilment and to give a sense of security to the individual, that difference is not necessarily destructive or damaging, and can be positively enervating in the society, that Northern Ireland cannot ignore or suppress any of the cultural values, that there has been such a degree of interaction between the various elements of the culture that there is unlikely to be a pure-bred or pedigree version of anything and that life is likely to be richer and conflict more likely to be contained in a multi-cultural society with pluralist values.

As John Hewitt put it in *The Colony:*

> And would make amends, by fraternising
> And by small friendly gestures
> Hoping by patient words I may convince
> my people and his people we are changed.[22]

It is not prescriptive, but is grounded in respect for all traditions and all perceptions of tradition. It promotes people's rights to cultural self-appreciation and self-perception, and encourages the sharing of traditional and cultural values.

It might well be argued that the time is ripe for a similar debate about values in the rest of the island - both about the North and the communities there, but also about the validity and interaction of diverse (and largely minority) cultures within the state.

Need for wider horizons

There is a need, too, to widen horizons. Hubert Butler put it well in The Barriers, the Bell essay earlier referred to:

Whatever its political value, culturally this self-sufficiency has been, and will be, a disaster to Ireland as to other small states... A distinctive culture cannot exist without cultural intercourse... A nation cannot be created negatively by elimination or strategic retreats into the past. It must crystallise around the contemporary genius that interprets it... Self-sufficiency is in fact insufficient for a national culture.
Great cultures have always arisen from the interaction of divisive societies... The flowering period has been briefer and less abundant where it proceeds from a long interbreeding between two peoples, often involuntary and conditioned by geography rather than by mutual attraction.[23]

And part of Butler's answer, which I strongly support, is cultural exchange and increased travel abroad by young people and facilities to enable them to do so.

What kind of Europe?

But if Europe is to be the framework within which cultural diversity in Ireland can flourish, the question must be 'What kind of Europe?' A Europe which is simply a federation of nation states is more likely to reinforce differences than to resolve them. Neither is it very practical to think of a common European set of values, except in the most general terms. There is also the question of whether we are talking of the Six, or the Twelve, or some wider concept of Europe taking in the re-emerging states of Eastern Europe, perhaps deGaulle's Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals (although he may well have not noticed anything west of Brittany - unless it were French Canada). What will the effect in Europe be if Turkey joins the Community, where there are already 1,000 mosques in Germany and Britain is grappling with the problems of a multi-cultural society? Already the strains are beginning to show in the treatment of immigrant workers

in various parts of the Community, and in attacks on Jewish cemeteries in France. There is also the fulcrum position of Britain and Ireland between Europe and the English-speaking world - a redefinition of relations with America, for example as the pattern of movement from the island for the first time in centuries turns towards Europe rather than westwards.

These remarks give us a clue to the potential for change in the region within Europe. We can look, too, at the vertical/horizontal dimensions of state and nation, where the vertical axis is seen as political and economic and the horizontal to be mainly experienced in cultural and ethnic terms. The first requires some expression in political structures and some formulation as a set of economic principles; the second can exist as heterogeneity, mainly in the sense of cultural diversity in the private domain of family, neighbourhood, local association and community, together with their respective structures and organisations. On this model, while Europe would be centrally organised at one level, at another more vital and personal level there would be decentralisation. This would require a resuscitation of the local and the original, a Europe of regions, a mosaic rather than a melting pot. And this would produce a creative terrain more productive and vibrant than the sterility of the struggle one sees between centre and periphery. It would enable the periphery to contribute in more equal terms to the vitality of the whole.

This presumes, however, a degree of decentralisation of real power and decision-making, both to reflect the cultural values of the region, and to conserve them. It calls for the sort of approach to local government that Tom Barrington has been arguing for years,[24] and Richard Kearney more recently.[25] It is noteworthy that while some of the more centralised European bureaucracies have been devolving to regions, notably France and Spain, both the United Kingdom and Ireland, despite the rhetoric, have increasingly centralised power and decision-making over the past couple of decades, and in both local government has been emasculated.

Multi-culturalism

It will be argued that I am providing a recipe for Balkanisation, for chauvinism, for the reinforcement of local prejudice and small-mindedness. Not so. I am arguing for openness, for an inclusive rather than an exclusive approach to culture. An individual can exist in several cultural milieu at once, and most of us define ourselves by several overlapping frames of reference. My argument would be for variety rather tan for singleness, for multi-culture rather than mono-culture, for poly-valency. It may be that we need poly-valent people to act as interpreters, like the Diviner in Heaney's poem,[26] who can pick up the secret messages from the underground radio stations, but it is certain thfat the more people who are literate in more than one cultural setting the more they can begin to open up society.

At a theoretical level, this has been described as the concept of pluralistic integration by an American academic, John Higham:

> In contrast to the integrationist model it will not eliminate ethnic boundaries. But neither will it maintain them intact. It will uphold the validity of a common culture to which all individuals have access, while sustaining the efforts of minorities to preserve and enhance their own integrity. In principle, this dual commitment can be met by distinguishing between boundaries and nucleus. No ethnic group under these terms may have the support of the general community in strengthening its boundaries. All boundaries are understood to be permeable. Ethnic nuclei, on the other hand, are respected as enduring centres of social action.

In this framework, Europe is not a set of political structures or economic agreements, but a frame of mind. That frame of mind can be open, expansive and generous, or it can be narrow and partisan. It is not an answer per se to conflict in Ireland. We must do the spadework ourselves. Like the pilgrim described by Sedulius Scotus in the 9th century,

> Who to Rome goes
> Much labour, little profit knows
> For God, on earth, although you've sought him
> You'll miss at Rome unless you brought him.[27]

There is no guru out there who will provide the magic formula.

But what it might do is provide a stimulus to an internal search for a more open, self-critical society which can cope with cultural diversity and differences in allegiance, identity, and tradition without actually tearing itself apart. It might enable us to replace Lyons' rather bleak conclusion that culture in Ireland can only lead to anarchy with Foster's more optimistic view of cultural diversity as a means of irrigating the political and social desert.

Cosmopolitanism

Maybe we can draw some encouragement from another underrated Irish writer of the 18th century, Oliver Goldsmith, who described himself as a citizen of the world and decried National Prejudices in his Essays, and, in The Traveller, described by John Montague as 'the first anti-imperialist poem in the period of England's greatest imperial expansion':

> And yet perhaps, if countries we compare
> And estimate the blessings which we share
> Though patriots flatter, still shall wisdom find
> An equal portion dealt to all mankind,
> And different good, by art or nature given
> To different nations make their blessings even.[28]

What if he did borrow liberally from Montesquieu and Marivaux, Goldsmith was expressing what was to be a fundamental value of the Enlightenment - cosmopolitanism.

What is clear, too, is that Goldsmith's cosmopolitanism does not require the extinction of the local and the distinctive.

Maybe it is time, with Louis MacNeice, to

> Put up what flag you like, it is too late
> To save your soul with bunting.[29]

But I prefer the metaphor in Paul Muldoon's Truce of the opposing warriors, little people, leaving the trenches to discover the signs of a common humanity and so expressing a desire not to be caught up in somebody else's war:

> It begins with one or two soldiers,
> And one or to following
> With hampers over their shoulders.
> They might be off wildfowling.
>
> As they would another Christmas Day.
> So gingerly they pick their steps.
> No one seems sure of what to do.
> All stop when one stops.
>
> A fire gets lit. Some spread
> Their greatcoats on the frozen ground.
>
> Polish vodka, fruit and bread
> Are broken out and passed round.
>
> The air of an old German song,
> The rules of Patience, are the secrets
> They'll share before long.[30]

The sad thing is that they are whipped back into the trenches by the officers and generals, where millions of them are to die, pointlessly and fruitlessly.

Or the quiet optimism of John Hewitt whose cast of mind was such that he was 'moved by institutions, intimations, imaginative realisations, epiphanies, which after all may not be the worst way to face life or its future in our bitter, hate-riven island':[31]

> This is our fate: eight hundred years' disaster,
> crazily tangled as the Book of Kells;
> the dream's distortion and the land's division,
> the midnight raiders and the prison cells.
> Yet like Lir's children banished to the waters
> our hearts still listen for the landward bells.[32]

Having started with figure from the Tain, I now, with some diffidence, draw on an as yet unrealised autobiographical study of which I am the anti-hero. It relates to hurling in Belfast in the 1940's. If you were in digs on the Antrim Road, and wished to play hurley in Falls Park, given the radial nature of the Belfast road and public transport system, there were a couple of routes you could safely take. If you had money, you could take a tram to the centre, and another out. If you had time you could walk that route. If you had neither, you could take a sectoral route which brought you across the Shankill Road - hostile territory for young hurlers. There you could either carry your hurley, and run if challenged, or you could, as I often did, stick it down the leg of your trousers and walk stiffly past -having, however, forfeited the option of flight. As a result, what geographers call the special distribution of ethnic groups, or others more crudely the tribal map of Belfast, is etched deeply and indelibly on the most sensitive parts of my anatomy.

And the lesson I draw is this: cultural identity is fine; you may flaunt it, if you have the footwork for fast evasive action; you may hide it, but at some risk of emasculation.

Footnotes

1 cf Terence Brown, ‘After the Revival: Sean O Faolain and Patrick Kavanagh’ in Ireland’s Literature (Lilliput Press, 1988).

2 Richard Rose, Governing Without Consensus: An Irish Perspective (Faber and Faber, 1972).

3 AE Russell, ‘Thoughts for an Irish Convention’ in The Irish Home Rule Question (Macmillan, New York 1917).

4 Glazer and Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot (Harvard University Press).

5 Thomas Kinsella, The Tain, translated from the Irish Epic Tain Bo Cualinge (Dolmen Press, 1969).

6 Harold Jackson, The Two Irelands- the problem of the double minority: a dual study of inter-group tensions (Minority Rights Group Report No.2, 1972).

7 Louis MacNeice, ‘Autumn Journal’ from Collected Poems (Faber and Faber, 1966), p.132.

8 Conor Cruise O’Brien, The Shaping of Modern Ireland (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p.22; cf Jack Magee, ‘The Teaching of Irish History in Irish Schools’ in The Northern Teacher (Winter 1970).

9 FSL Lyons, The Ford Lectures: Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939 (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1979).

10 Keith Kyle in The Listener (c.1971).

11 Seamus Heaney, ‘Act of Union’ in North (Faber and Faber, 1975).

12 Estyn Evans, The Personality of Ireland (Lilliput Press, 1992); cf Ulster: The Common Ground (Lilliput Pamphlets 2, 1984).

13 John Wilson Foster, ‘Radical Regionalism’ in The Irish Review No.7 (Autumn 1989), pp1-16.

14 Bernard Crick, ‘An Englishman considers his passport’ in The Irish Review No.5 (Autumn 1988), pp1-10.

15 Edna Longley, ‘Opening Up: A New Pluralism’ in Fortnight No.256 (November 1987).

16 Joseph Lee, Ireland 1912-85: Politics and Society (Cambridge, 1989).

17 Seamus Heaney, ‘Whatever you say, say nothing’ from North (Faber and Faber, 1975).

18 Seamus Heaney, ‘Act of Union’ from North (Faber and Faber, 1975).

19 Paul Bew, The State in Northern Ireland 1921-72: Political Forces and Social Classes (Manchester, 1979).

20 Sarah Nelson, Ulster’s Uncertain Defenders: Loyalists and the Northern Ireland conflict (Appletree Press, 1984).

21 Desmond Bell, Acts of Union: Youth Culture and Sectarianism (Macmillan, 1990).

22 John Hewitt, ‘The Colony’ in The Collected Poems of John Hewitt (Blackstaff Press, 1991).

23 Hubert Butler, ‘The Barriers’ from The Bell (July 1941); reprinted in Grandmother and Wolfe Tone (Lilliput Press, 1990).

24 Tom Barrington, From Big Government to Local Government (1975); cf ‘Frontiers of the Mind’ in Richard Kearney (ed.) Across the Frontiers: Ireland in the 1990s (Wolfhound Press, 1988), pp29-44.

25 Richard Kearney, Across the Frontiers: Ireland in the 1990s (Wolfhound Press, 1988), pp7-28.

26 Seamus Heaney, ‘The Diviner’ from Death of a Naturalist (Faber, 1969).

27 Sedulius Scotus

28 Oliver Goldsmith, ‘The Traveller or A Prospect of Society’ in Poems of the late Dr Oliver Goldsmith (James Magee, Belfast, 1775).

29 Louis MacNeice, ‘Autumn Journal’ in Collected Poems (Faber and Faber, 1966).

30 Paul Muldoon, ‘Truce’ from Why Brownlee Left (Faber and Faber, 1980).

31 John Hewitt, ‘No Rootless Colonist’ from Tom Clyde (ed.) Ancestral Voices: The Selected Prose of John Hewitt (Blackstaff Press, 1987), p.156.

32 John Hewitt, ‘An Irishman in Coventry’ from The Collected Poems of John Hewitt (Blackstaff Press, 1991).