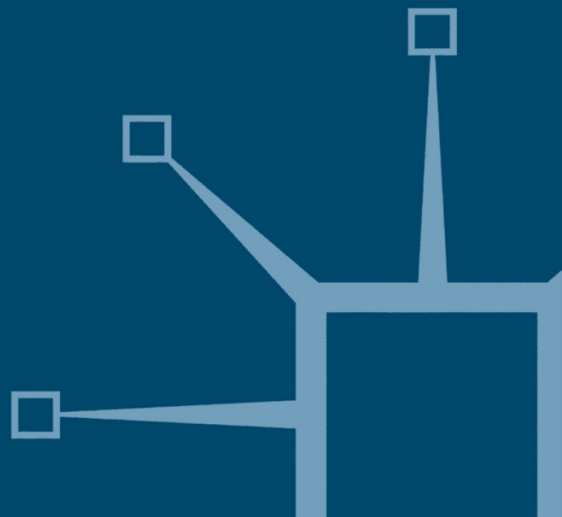# The Celts

The Construction of a Myth

Malcolm Chapman

THE CELTS

Also by Malcolm Chapman

THE GAELIC VISION IN SCOTTISH CULTURE
THE VOICE OF PROPHECY AND OTHER ESSAYS
  BY EDWIN ARDENER (*editor*)
HISTORY AND ETHNICITY (*edited by Elizabeth Tonkin and
  Maryon McDonald*)

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THE CELTS

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Acknowledgements

The work is not any conventional kind of ethnography, but my experience of living and working in 'Celtic' areas has been crucial to working out the themes discussed herein. Acknowledgements to those areas where I have lived are, therefore, of immediate relevance. My involvement with Scottish Gaelic began some time ago, but the insights gained have been vital to my subsequent work, and I would like to thank all those who helped me learn the language. The process began in joint tuition with Edward Condry, in Edwin Ardener's kitchen. It continued in courses run by An Comunn Gaidehealach in Stornoway, and by Sabhal Mor Ostaig in Skye. I am particularly grateful to Miss Gwendoline Mulholland, Miss Annie MacLeod and Mr Alasdair Duncan.

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I have not taken all the good advice that I have been offered. I am also well aware that not all those that I have referred to above will agree with what follows. I hope at least that they will find the argument of interest. The task that I have set myself is, I believe, a genuinely difficult one, and some at least of the deficiencies of this book arise from this difficulty. Some of the deficiencies, however, were doubtless avoidable, and for these I have no-one to blame but myself.

Preface

I have tried, in this book, to bring social anthropology and Celtic studies into a fruitful meeting. The resulting hybrid is not part of any genre, and has few precedents that I know of. J. R. R. Tolkien wrote:

> To many, perhaps to most people outside the small company of the great scholars, past and present. 'Celtic' of any sort is . . . a magic bag, into which anything may be put, and out of which almost anything may come. . . . Anything is possible in the fabulous Celtic twilight, which is not so much a twilight of the gods as of the reason.
>
> (Tolkien, 1963: 29–30)

I have tried to deal here with a great range of material, and have put a foot into many pointed controversies. I have, moreover, left undone a great deal that I would have liked to pursue, failing to find either time in life or room in the book. When I look at all this, I wonder if the Celtic madness to which Tolkien refers might not have afflicted me, in spite of all my efforts to deny it. It is no exaggeration to say that all the chapters of this book, and even many of their subsections, want to be books themselves.

I am very aware that the greater the attempted scope of the work, the greater will be the deficiencies. There is also a risk that the social anthropology will be over-familiar to the social anthropologist, and the Celtic material banal to the Celticist. Nevertheless, I hope that the intrinsic interest of the material, and of the meeting of subjects, will compensate for this. I have also tried to make this work an introduction to some major themes of modern social anthropology – themes which are illustrated, and I hope given life and interest, by detailed examples. This book was not conceived as a primer in social anthropology, but I like to think that it may, at least in some small part, serve this function.

The book grows out of a rather unusual combination of interests and experience. I have learned two Celtic languages, Breton and Scottish Gaelic, through having carried out four years' fieldwork in western Brittany and the Scottish Highlands and Islands. I have a long-standing interest in the relationship between language, history and ethnicity, which I have studied largely through Celtic material.

I have been interested in the relationship between intellectual studies and ordinary life, both in the past and the present, and this too I have studied through primarily Celtic examples. I have a professional training in social anthropology, for good or ill, and I have a deep interest in Celtic matters, without necessarily being inspired by, or enthusiastic for, Celtic themes *per se*. The result is a work that owes little to conventional disciplinary boundaries. I am not as well-qualified to attempt this work as I would have wished; ideally, it would have been undertaken by a committee of specialists. No such committee exists, however, and if I had not attempted this work, probably nobody else would either. It is in this spirit that I offer the present work, aware that there must always be more to do, and more to learn.

This book is about 'the Celts'. There is, however, a strong bias to those examples that I know best – the Scottish Gaelic and the Breton. It would take a much longer book to deal explicitly with all the examples. Nevertheless, I am confident that the approach can be applied to the generality of Celtic material. I hope that readers with more intimate knowledge of the Irish and Welsh examples (not to mention the Manx, Cornish and Gaulish) will do the comparative speculation for themselves. The material relevant to my concerns in this book is potentially limitless. The specific selection presented here is, then, to some extent arbitrary, resulting in part from accidents of my own experience. I have, however, a wide enough experience of comparative material not presented here, to be confident that even if I had written the book around entirely different examples, the same conclusions would have emerged.

There are, as already intimated, many things which this book would like to be, but is not. I began with the intention of concentrating on classical dealings with the Celt. All the questions of definition and interpretation could have been fought in the classics: the same questions recur, however, in the modern material, which is why I have reduced the classical component to a chapter.

The American angle is also more or less unexplored. I make occasional reference in what follows to North American dealing with the Celtic fringe, but this is rarely more than incidental. The place of the Celtic fringe in the North American conceptual space is a fascinating topic; its exploration, however, would require another book.

There is also a wealth of unexplored comparative examples. There is, for example, in popular reporting from north-western Europe

(from say, France, Germany and Britain), an apparent similarity in reported character of the Celtic, Latin and Slavonic peoples of Europe – all of them inconstant, emotional, eloquent, moody, unreliable, free from structure, overlapping into nature, and so on. I argue below that, in principle, we might expect *all* 'other' people to be perceived in this way. It is not surprising, therefore, that from a single point of view, there will be a continuous surrounding peripheral zone, apparently sharing the same characteristics. I leave open, however, the question of what is at the centre of this structure of perception in larger European terms, just as I leave undiscussed the many points of similarity between the Celtic, Latin and Slavonic examples.[1] This, too, must wait for another work.

When one is asking questions about the constitution of a particular concept or category, one is obliged to do so using other concepts and categories which may be equally problematic, but which are not themselves under scrutiny. In order to create motion in one part of the conceptual space, one is obliged to assume lack of motion in the other parts – to fit the lever, to find a fulcrum, one has to have somewhere to stand. A reader might well wonder, for example, why the Celts should come under such scrutiny when others are left alone – the English, the French, the Germans, the 'Indo-Europeans', and so on? There is no reason, of course, other than the practical limitations of argument and space. A like approach to other categories of European ethnic and linguistic analysis is invited, and could only be welcome.

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Who Are the Celts?

This title has a familiar ring. It might announce a very different kind of book, one of a series through which a publishing house hoped to turn ethnic variety into book sales. The series might include other titles like 'Who are the Greeks? – the Egyptians? – the Germans?' The form of the books in this series would be similar, telling the story of a people from their origin to modern times, passing, with illustrations, through the ups and downs of history.

What I provide here is not at all this kind of book. Indeed, this volume might be regarded as a deliberate criticism of such a publishing exercise (and of the academic enterprise associated with it). 'Who are the Celts?' is an honest interrogative, and what I give here is not a scholarly answer to a magisterial and rhetorical question. I present, rather, a series of interlocking puzzles, out of which a ghost-like presence emerges, to which we have given the name 'the Celts'.

The main problem concerns the continuity of the Celts. The Celts are, in common usage, one of the great peoples of early Europe. They apparently emerge, from archaeological evidence, in central and southern Europe, sometime in the first millennium BC. They seem to have occupied or invaded the greater part of Europe during the centuries up to the birth of Christ. The Greeks knew them as northern barbarians, and the Romans knew them better, as northern barbarians who were progressively incorporated into the Empire. After the barbarian invasions brought about the collapse of the Roman order in western Europe, the Celts faded from the scene as a major European force, being thereafter confined to the far north-west – to the areas that came to be known as Wales, Brittany, Ireland and Scotland. These are the areas where rather small numbers of people today still speak languages that linguists call 'Celtic'.

I give below (see p. 6) a brief conventional historical survey of the Celts. Here, however, I shall pose the problem which lies behind this book, along with a few possible solutions. In Greek and Roman antiquity we find societies that were, like all societies, interested in their own frontiers, their own geographical and conceptual boundaries. The Celts formed, in a sense, the northern boundary for

1

both the Greeks and the Romans, and as such provoked interest and commentary. This must not be overstated, for both the Greeks and the Romans were immeasurably more interested in themselves than they were in northern barbarians. Nevertheless, the classical sources give a fairly consistent picture of what Greece and Rome thought about the Celts. This picture is interesting enough in itself. What is most intriguing about it, however, is that many modern commentators on the Celts find it applicable in its essentials to those people called Celts in the present day. There is a continuity, in judgement of the Celts, of well over 2000 years. What is the nature of this continuity? We can look briefly at a few possible explanations:

Explanation 1: To most people who have written about this, the question might seem fatuous, and the answer obvious. In the last century, it was a commonplace of thought that a race of people ('the Celts', for example) was biologically self-reproducing, and that the enduring cultural characteristics of a race derived from this biological continuity. Biology determined social characteristics for races of man just as much as for species of animal. No surprise, then, that the modern descendants of the ancient Celts should be much like their ancestors, in the same way as modern elephants are indistinguishable from the elephants that Hannibal rode over the Alps. This manner of thinking about human groups is now almost completely superseded within British academic anthropology. It is, however, still lively in the world at large, and is far from having lost all its power in other academic spheres. Criticism of this form of thinking is widespread enough for it to need little exposition here, although I deal with it briefly below (see p. 76).

Explanation 2: If the continuity is not biological, there may still be a continuous cultural tradition. The Celts, in antiquity, had a culture specific to them. Given that every new generation of Celts learnt this culture relatively unchanged from its elders, cultural continuity is discernible from earliest times to the present day.

In both these explanations, the continuity, however it is carried, is real and objective. Celts were really like that, and they are really the same today.

Explanation 3: Perhaps the Greeks and the Romans had a fixed idea of what they thought barbarians were like, and reproduced this in their writings, irrespective of what barbarians were *really* like. We

might further imagine that mediaeval and Renaissance European scholars simply reproduced classical commentary on the barbarian, out of respect for classical opinion. Given the great prestige of the classics, and the heavily classical bias of much education until recent times, this explanation has much to recommend it.

Explanation 4: We might argue that the Greeks and the Romans both represented societies which had a great interest in their own order, structure and propriety (as societies do). Both looked at the barbarians on their northern borders, and found there manners and habits which contradicted many of their own, and seemed therefore offensive, entertaining or absurd. This develops explanation 3, by allowing some real observation of barbarian habits to enter into the picture. European commentators, since the Middle Ages, found in the Celts a similar contradiction of their own order, and so found sympathy with classical commentary.

Clearly, the arguments so far presented are not exhaustive; nor are they mutually exclusive, and there may be elements of all of them in 'Celtic continuity'. It is principally explanation 4, however, which I pursue in most of what follows. I argue that the continuity of the Celts is not derived from anything intrinsic to these people, but instead derives from a particular kind of culture-meeting – a meeting between a self-consciously civilising, powerful, centralising culture, which produces written records, and a much less powerful culture which leaves no or few written records. The continuity in the characteristics of this culture-meeting gives us continuity in the Celts. It is in many respects fortuitous and arbitrary that the characteristics of culture-meeting in Europe over 2500 years, should have been such as to tie the modern 'Celts' so convincingly to their ancient 'ancestors'. This book might be seen, therefore, as an attempt to demolish certain kinds of interpretation of the Celt (those represented, say, by explanations 1 and 2). What survives at the end of the argument is less substantial than a living flesh-and-blood race, or an enduring and ancient culture surviving into the present.

One further general explanation is needed. Although of a different logical order from the other four, its consequences pervade them:

Explanation 5: The Celts have represented, and still represent, in the European order, manners and habits which are 'old-fashioned'. In the lineage of the Celtic peoples that is commonly drawn up, this has nearly always been true, with only limited reversals. The *content* of the material drawn into the opposition *modern/old-fashioned* has

changed continually, but the structure of the opposition has en-
dured. I must stress, in order to avoid vexatious misunderstanding,
that the judgement upon what is *modern* and what *old-fashioned* is not
my own: it is, rather, the judgement of those peoples and societies
that have bordered the Celts, that have been Celts, and that have
moved across the border in one direction or another.

CELTIC STUDIES AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

It is now a familiar notion, within social anthropology, that anthro-
pology, and some other aspects of humanistic study (notably lin-
guistics) moved from being almost uniquely historical studies in the
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to being primarily a-his-
torical or structural studies in the later twentieth century. This has
been discussed by a variety of anthropologists (see, particularly,
Evans-Pritchard, 1962). In the nineteenth century, anthropologists
cooperated with linguists, biologists and folklorists, all intent upon
the same enterprise – the reconstruction of the history of languages,
cultures and races (or peoples), and the explanation thereby of the
modern world. The history of those people that came to be called
Indo-European, after the language family of the same name, was an
intellectual preoccupation which united many disciplines, anthro-
pology among them, in a great and, in the linguistic sphere at least,
profoundly fruitful endeavour. The study of the Celts and the Celtic
languages was not the most important part of this scholarly effort,
overshadowed as it was by the study of the Italic, the Romance, the
Germanic, the Greek and the Indo-Iranian languages and cultures.
The Celtic languages and peoples were, after all, in many senses a
fringe issue. Celtic studies, however, although rather lately incorpo-
rated into the mainstream,[1] benefited from the effort of study in
historical linguistics, and added to its achievements.
    In the 1920s, however, within social anthropology, a revolution of
thought and method took place. Anthropology, according to
Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, was the study of primitive people
who *did not have history*. The various methodological and empirical
confusions which led to this position are too complicated for dis-
cussion here, but it is sufficient for our present purposes that social
anthropologists virtually abandoned the study of Europe, and at the
same time virtually abandoned the study of history. They went to

'primitive' peoples overseas, peoples which had no record of their history, and which could therefore be assumed to be changeless, as the functionalist model of social equilibrium required. Within Europe, however, the Celtic folklorists, linguists and archaeologists went on their historical and historicist paths, reconstructing with ever greater sophistication and erudition the history, language and culture of the Celtic peoples. For two generations, therefore, Celtic studies and social anthropology almost completely stopped meeting.

When social anthropologists again turned their attention towards Europe in the 1970s (with only isolated earlier attempts), they turned to the Celtic regions; not always, however, for very good reasons. The Celtic regions had the folk-reputation in Britain, France, Germany and elsewhere, as they had almost always had in the history of Europe, of being backward and faithful to tradition. Social anthropologists had become used to studying primitive and timeless people, and the Celts seemed ripe for the sickle. They began, therefore, to study Celts of various kinds by participant observation, and to construct synchronic studies of the structural relationship of institutions.[2] What anthropologists who ventured into these areas discovered was a formidable and sophisticated body of scholars and scholarship, and a tradition of historical, cultural and linguistic enquiry unbroken from the nineteenth century. To the synchronically minded anthropologist, the concerns of these scholars seemed outmoded, but there was no doubting their tremendous learning. To the Celtic linguists, folklorists and historians, on the other hand, the concerns of the synchronically minded social anthropologist no doubt seemed vacuous, and, given the ignorance of history and historical linguistics which an anthropologist typically takes into the field, presumptuous as well.

Post-war social anthropology slowly abandoned any rigorous theoretical formulation which excluded history and historical studies. The bias against them remains, however. Celtic studies, meanwhile, has never seriously departed from its nineteenth-century models. The time is ripe, perhaps, for bringing Celtic studies and social anthropology together. It seems absurd, in dealing with a people whose history excites such avid interest, to ignore this history. What I try to do in this work, at any rate, is to look at some aspects of the history of the Celts which seem to invite anthropological treatment, and where anthropological insights might be of general use.

THE CELTS – A CONVENTIONAL AND CONDENSED SURVEY

My purpose here is not to give a full archaeological and linguistic survey of Celtic origins and continuities. Some background is needed, however. What follows, both in relation to the origins and early history of the Celts, and to the histories of the modern 'Celtic' peoples, is, it must be stressed, highly condensed, and necessarily passes over many difficult questions of interpretation.

It is also worth noting that *any* picture of early Celtic Europe is necessarily based upon a rather comprehensive ignorance. I make this point, since one could be forgiven for thinking, after reading one of the many illustrated books on the Celts,[3] that the authors had been round pre-Roman barbarian Europe with camera and tape-recorder. This is unfortunately not the case. Our ability to portray the early Celts is partly a tribute to the great effort of scholarship within Celtic studies over the last hundred years or so. It is also, however, and predominantly, a tribute to the modern imagination – a subject to which we shall return.

The Celts, as defined by commonly accepted archaeological or linguistic criteria, might be said to emerge from prehistoric darkness in the first half of the first millennium BC. Different authorities give remarkably different figures for this emergence, and Professor Ellis Evans, a leading Celtic scholar, and professor of Celtic studies in Oxford University, has recently observed that: 'The quest for the origin of both the Celtic and Germanic peoples brings us face to face with what we can only describe, if we are honest, as problems of profound obscurity' (Evans 1980–2: 233).

Characteristically, however, the more obscure the problems, the more scholarship, argument and speculation have gathered around them. There is an immense body of scholarship devoted to the archaeological and linguistic aspects of Celtic 'origins', and to attempted reconstructions of the many and various aspects of Celtic life in the pre-historic period. A look at any of the major periodicals (*La Revue Celtique, Zeitschrift für Keltische Philologie, Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, etc.) will give some idea of this. It is worth noting some conclusions of this work under two headings – archaeology and language.

The Celts – from archaeology

In archaeological terms, the Celts are associated with three different 'cultural periods', as defined by modern archaeology. The first of

these is centred upon urnfield cremation sites, and is dated to the
end of the second millennium BC, with expansion through large parts
of Europe in the early first millennium BC. The second centres upon
the first evidences of iron-working in Europe, called 'Hallstatt' after
the small town in Austria where the first major relevant archaeologi-
cal finds were made, mostly in the 1870s. The third, like 'Hallstatt',
takes its name from a relatively insignificant modern location, this
time La Tène in Switzerland, where archaeological finds were made
in the late 1850s. 'Hallstatt' culture is commonly reckoned to take
Celtic Europe from *c*.800 BC to *c*.600 or 500 BC. The more artistically
and culturally refined 'La Tène' culture then emerges in the middle
of the millennium, and lasts in some form or another until the
Roman occupation of much of Europe in the last century BC (after
which it is progressively diluted, lingering longest in unoccupied
Ireland). All three 'cultures' appear to have begun in limited areas,
and then to have spread widely. By the mid-third century BC, some-
thing identifiable on these definitions as 'Celtic' culture had spread
to most of Europe.

The Celts – from linguistics

In linguistic convention, Celtic is a term used to describe a branch of
the Indo-European languages. If we adhere, for brevity, to the
dendritic model of historical linguistics, then we can call the Celtic
languages a branch of the Indo-European tree, of the same status as
the Germanic or Italic language groups. These three branches can
then be grown back into an earlier Western Indo-European, although
this is little more than a fine-sounding name for ignorance. The
relationship between the Celtic, Germanic and Italic linguistic groups
has been much debated, and again the conclusion must be one of
agnosticism, albeit of the most erudite kind.[4] In the absence of writ-
ing, which barbarian Europe in the first millennium BC effectively
lacked, almost no linguistic record survives. The classical world
eventually spread a knowledge of writing to much of Europe, but by
then the three major language groups of western Europe, the Italic,
Celtic and Germanic, seem to be already well-differentiated, and
attempts at reconstructing earlier events have not produced any
general agreement.

   With the advent of writing, exiguous linguistic evidence from
Celtic areas starts to appear. Writing was, however, virtually all in
Latin or Greek. The main sources for Celtic are the use of names of
people and places which are Celtic within Latin and Greek texts, and

memorial inscriptions. With the Roman expansion into Celtic Gaul, a good deal of such evidence becomes available. Again, much extremely subtle scholarly effort has gone into the attempt to make the most of these slender evidences.

Gaulish is the earliest Celtic language to have attested forms, and is the only Continental Celtic language of which anything substantial is known. All the other surviving evidence is from the insular Celts, or from off-shoots of these ('insular' is used, in the Celtic context, to distinguish the Celts of Britain and Ireland from those of Gaul and the rest of the European mainland). Gaulish is the Celtic language assumed to have been spoken throughout Gaul at the time of the Roman invasions in the middle first century BC. Gaul became a prosperous and peaceful Roman province, and remained so for several hundred years, but no connected prose in the Gaulish language has survived (to the great frustration of modern linguists). The longest extant text is on the large bronze known as the 'Calendar of Coligny' (found in 1897 in a vineyard in Coligny, in the department of Ain in south-eastern France), which is often taken for an instrument of druidical astronomy, and contains over sixty words (some repeated, however, and none in obvious syntactic relationship to one another). By the end of the Roman period, Gaulish had been abandoned, and the language spoken was a variant of the vulgar Latin of the Roman Empire, which became, in the course of time, the language we now know as French.

The modern Celts

The modern Celtic language group is divided into two parts, often called p-Celtic and q-Celtic. The p-Celtic languages (otherwise known as Brythonic, Brittonic or British) are Welsh and Breton. The q-Celtic languages (otherwise known as Goidelic) are Irish and Scottish Gaelic. Until this century, a form of Gaelic lingered on in the Isle of Man, and was called Manx. Until the very late eighteenth or early nineteenth century a form of p-Celtic survived in Cornwall, and this is commonly called Cornish. Both Cornish and Manx must now be regarded as extinct, although attempts are being made to revive them.[5] The distinction between p-Celtic and q-Celtic derives from the observation that many words which begin with 'p' in Welsh or Breton, begin with a 'k' (or, in earlier orthographic convention, a 'q') in Scottish or Irish Gaelic. Familiar place-names provide a simple example. The q-Celtic word for 'head' or 'top' is *ceann*; the p-Celtic is *penn*. This word

has been incorporated into many place-names in the British Isles. In its q-Celtic form it has been Anglicised as 'kin'-, and is present as 'end', 'extremity' or 'head' in many place names in Scotland and Ireland – 'Kintyre', for example, means, 'land's end' ('-tyre' representing an Anglicisation of the genitive of *tir*, meaning 'land'). In its p-Celtic form it is found, with the same meaning, in place-names throughout England, Wales and Lowland Scotland – 'Penrith', for example, means 'head (or main) ford' ('-rith', see Welsh *rhyd*, meaning 'ford').

The 'p-'/'q-' alternation is thus of a simple kind, although its origins are fiercely debated. An earlier 'Common Celtic' is assumed, but no consensus exists on when the p/q division occurred, or where. It has in the past been common to argue that the 'q-Celts' (if we may, for the moment, so personify a linguistic abstraction) were the earlier occupants of Ireland and Britain, displaced in the south and east by later waves of 'p-Celtic' invaders. More recently, attention has focused on the possibility that the 'p' and 'q' dialects are an entirely insular development, deriving from a split in a single phoneme, separately developed on either side of the Irish Sea, at a relatively recent date (see Hamp, 1962). There is no space here to go into this, but it is worth drawing attention to the very different anthropological consequences of these two linguistic explanations. The first involves the clamour of invasions and displacements, with all its associated paraphernalia of argument about superiority and inferiority, priority and modernity, origins and destinies, and relative chronology. The second substitutes instead a quiet linguistic change, perhaps hardly noticed by those living through it, and not even reflected in different orthographic traditions until long after it had occurred. Much argument has gone into the rights and wrongs of the first explanation, and the second is a useful counter to it. We shall meet some rather similar problems when we look at the 'origins' of the Celts.

The modern 'Celtic' languages are as follows:

Irish Gaelic
Irish Gaelic tends to be regarded as the indigenous language of Ireland, since virtually nothing is known about the language of the 'pre-Celtic' inhabitants (who are known through archaeological and, to some extent, mythological, sources). Irish Gaelic (once commonly known in English as 'Erse') was, as far as we know, the language spoken across Ireland for most of the first millennium AD. It was never the language of urban Ireland, since urban settlements were first

made by Norse traders and settlers in the ninth century AD, and these
were subsequently taken over by Norman French, and later English,
traders and settlers from the late twelfth century onwards. Irish has,
therefore, in some senses, been in *social* retreat for over 1000 years.
The linguistic situation was, however, for many centuries fairly stable,
as the majority of the Irish population remained rural and Gaelic-
speaking (with a strong association, in the post-Reformation period,
between Catholicism and Gaelic). It was not until the nineteenth
century, and particularly the mid-century potato famines, that the
slow retreat of Gaelic turned into a rout. Assessment of the modern
linguistic situation is complicated by the fact that Irish Gaelic has
been, since 1922, the first official language of Independent Ireland,
and has been much taught in schools. This has done little to halt the
rapid decline in the number of habitual speakers of the language, but
it has produced a large number of people who have *some* knowledge
of the language. This sometimes leads to very inflated claims of the
number of speakers. In fact, those who use Gaelic as a normal me-
dium of everyday communication, outside the university corridors,
now number about 20,000, many of whom live in areas in the south
and west designated as the official 'Gaeltacht'.

Scottish Gaelic
Scottish Gaelic is now thought to have been carried to south-west
Scotland by emigrants from north-east Ireland in the fifth and sixth
centuries AD, as part of the great flux in the populations of Europe at
the time. Roman power was retreating, leaving behind a more-or-
less Romanised and Christian p-Celtic-speaking population, for which
no truly adequate term exists in modern English. The term 'ancient
Britons' will not do, conjuring up as it does images of naked barbar-
ity and woad. 'Roman Britons' has a rather alien feel, although it is
perhaps the best term available. A term is needed to express the
indigenous nature of the population ('British' in the same sense that
the Irish were 'Irish'), and at the same time convey the sense of self-
conscious civilisation of a people that had, for several centuries,
formed an important part of the Roman Empire.

   This society in Britain had long been troubled by incursions of
'Picts'[6] from the north, Angles and Saxons from the east, and Irish
from the west. It has been plausibly argued that the Gaels came from
Dalriada in Northern Ireland, by invitation of some post-Roman
British power, to provide a political and military buffer between
British power in what is now Cumbria, Galloway and Strathclyde,
and the perennial military nuisance of the Picts to the north. At all

events, the Gaels came, settling first in the islands and coastline of what is now Argyll (as well as the Isle of Man). Over the next few centuries, British power in northern England and the Scottish Lowlands was gradually eclipsed (lingering longest in Strathclyde), squeezed between Gael and Anglo-Saxon. The invading Anglo-Saxons occupied most of what is now England, as well as large parts of the Lothians. The Gaels, for their part, expanded into most of Scotland, incorporating (by a rather intriguing dynastic procedure) the Pictish kingdom (or kingdoms) of the north, and conquering the British kingdom of Strathclyde. By the middle of the eleventh century, Gaelic was the socially dominant language of large parts of mainland Scotland north of the Forth-Clyde line (excepting the Norse northern and island areas), and of parts of the western area between Clyde and Solway.

There were, however, substantial remnants of British-speakers in the south-west, and the western and northern islands and seaboard were largely Norse. Moreover, from the early eleventh century (and the process dates from well before the Norman Conquest of England), the Scottish Gaelic court had begun to look south for its models of sophistication. The influx of Anglo-Saxon aristocracy immediately after the Conquest, and the subsequent Anglo-Norman arrivals, introduced French and English as the languages of the court, of vernacular literacy, and of social advancement and aspiration. The social supremacy of Gaelic in Scotland was brief and incomplete, and by the twelfth century it was well on the retreat. The Highland line, a major geographical boundary, became a kind of *de facto* boundary between English and Gaelic, with a measure of socio-linguistic stability: English (or, say, a Germanic dialect closely related to English, which some prefer to call 'Scots') was the language of the Lowlands of the south and east, and of the major political and social forces in Scotland; Gaelic was the language of the Highlands and Islands to the north and west. The eclipse of the independent political power of Clan Donald in the fifteenth century was the end of any Gaelic-based independent political power in Scotland. Since then the history of Scottish Gaelic has been one of continuous social and geographical retreat,[7] a retreat which has only been accelerated by compulsory schooling and modern media of communication.

Today, the language is almost entirely confined to the Inner and Outer Hebrides, a few remote peninsulas of the western mainland, and the emigrant communities of the larger Scottish cities. There are about 90,000 Scottish Gaelic speakers, although they are an ageing

population. Only in the Outer Hebrides do children still commonly speak the language, and is it present in strength in schooling.[8]

Welsh

Welsh is considered to be the indigenous language of Wales, in much the same way that Irish is of Ireland. The claim of Welsh is, however, grander still, since it can be seen as the descendant of the language(s) spoken throughout the areas now known as England, Wales and Scotland, until the time of the Roman invasion, and in many areas and social strata until much later. Latin only replaced the native p-Celtic language in Roman Britain in the highest social spheres, and a Celtic language remained the vernacular of the majority. The 'Roman British', after the withdrawal of Roman power, were, as we have seen, accosted from virtually all sides. The sociolinguistic history of Welsh, however, is commonly thought of as tied more to that of Anglo-Saxon (and of its modern descendant, English), since it was Anglo-Saxon or English that eventually replaced British in most of its range (the less-enduring replacement of British by Gaelic in Strathclyde is less commonly dwelt upon, for reasons which we will come to). With the relentless incursions of the Anglo-Saxons from the middle of the fifth century onwards, British retreated to the west. By about the middle of the seventh century, the Anglo-Saxons had reached the sea at the Bristol Channel and west of the Pennines (see Jackson, K. 1953:208–9). Henceforth, the once-common British language was divided into three effectively peninsular forms – Cornish, Welsh and Cumbrian. Cumbrian survived until perhaps the fourteenth century, and Cornish until about 1800. Only Welsh survives today, and its social and geographical retreat is still continuing. It is, however, still widely spoken in Wales, particularly in rural areas and in the north. The population of Wales today is about two million, and the number of Welsh speakers about 400,000; the proportion of Welsh-speakers has recently fallen, for the first time, to below 20 per cent of the population. Nevertheless, although the language is undoubtedly still in long-term decline, the picture for Welsh is much more hopeful than for any other Celtic language, with a lively presence of Welsh in many Welsh schools, and at university level.

Breton

Breton is widely spoken in rural parts of western Brittany. At the time of the Roman invasions of Gaul and of Britain, a 'Celtic' language was spoken in Gaul, and was apparently closely related to the

language spoken in Britain. The modern Welsh (or at least the modern Welsh-speakers) are commonly regarded as the descendants, ethnically and linguistically, of the British whom Caesar encountered on his first foray into Britain. It might seem reasonable to regard the Bretons, similarly, as survivors of the Gauls. This explanation of their presence, however, although long-held, is not now favoured. The consensus today is that the Breton language is descended from the language spoken by immigrants from Britain, who came during the troubled period of the collapse of Roman authority and administration in northern Europe (the question is still contested, however).[9] Faced with civil disorder, and invasion from barbarian Irish in the west and barbarian Anglo-Saxons in the east, Roman-British Christian civilisation went in strength to Brittany, giving Brittany and Breton their names. The nearest relations of the modern Breton-speakers, from this point of view, are the modern Welsh-speakers. The ancient Gauls are only rather distant cousins. As in the other Celtic-speaking areas, during the formation of feudal Europe the native aristocracy was either dispossessed, or abandoned its Celtic language in favour of the language of a more powerful and, so it seemed, a more sophisticated neighbour. Although Brittany maintained its independence as a Duchy until the middle of the sixteenth century, its aristocracy had been French-speaking for several centuries previous to this. Accordingly, the Breton language has long been in social and geographical retreat, but the densely populated rural areas of western Brittany remained, until this century, a stronghold. Since the introduction of compulsory schooling (almost always in French), however, and the ready availability of French-language media, Breton has declined rapidly. Today, virtually all its speakers are bilingual, and the great majority are over 40. There are perhaps nearly 500,000 Breton-speakers today, which makes Breton, in these crude terms, the most spoken Celtic language. The age-structure of the Breton-speaking population, however, and the nearly complete absence of new recruitment, make Breton also very vulnerable, and unlikely to survive in any strength into the twenty-first century.

2

'A Branch of Indo-European'

The adjective 'Celtic' has its most respectable and formal use within linguistics. The idea of the Indo-European languages is a result of the increasingly scholarly and scientific study of language in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Similarities between otherwise very different languages in Europe had long been noticed, with erudite Romans speculating on the relationship of their own language to Greek.[1] Gerald of Wales made some thoughtful suggestions about the relationships between disparate languages in the late twelfth century, which have been seen as an early attempt at comparative Indo-European linguistics.[2] Only in the late eighteenth century, however, did thoughts on this subject begin to assume their modern form. Before then, attempts to understand the relationships between different languages had usually aimed at derivation from Greek or Latin (as privileged languages of ancient scholarship), or from Old Testament Hebrew. In 1786, however, William Jones, in a now famous address to the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, noted that Sanskrit, the language of Indian religious learning, had remarkable affinities with Latin and Greek. He further suggested that these three languages, and indeed other European languages, and Persian, had a common origin. As Lockwood says, 'the modern science of comparative philology had begun' (Lockwood, 1969:22).

The progressive scholarly elaboration of these ideas represents, perhaps, the greatest modern intellectual achievement in the humanities.[3] The group of related languages to which Jones had drawn attention came to be called 'Indo-European' (although, in studies written in German, as many were, 'Indo-Germanic' was also commonly used). The theory of the Indo-European languages supposed that there was, behind all the modern Indo-European languages, a single common ancestor language (a 'Common Indo-European'), from which all the different modern languages had, over the years, diverged. This 'Common Indo-European' was not attested, in that no record of it survived, but increasingly sophisticated study of the earliest recorded forms, and of the laws of sound change, enabled the construction of hypothetical common forms. From this recon-

14

structed 'Common Indo-European', the rest of the languages of the group were then derived, according to systematic developments of various kinds. So, from the 'Common Indo-European' of very early date developed the ancestor languages of the major different modern groups of languages – 'Common Germanic', 'Common Slavonic', 'Common Celtic', 'Common Italic', 'Common Hellenic', 'Common Indo-Iranian', and so on (as well as the ancestor languages of historically attested languages or language groups which have now disappeared – Tocharian, Anatolian, and others). These then gave rise, over time, to the languages we know today: for example, 'Common Germanic' produced German, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian and English; 'Common Italic' Latin, and thence French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Catalan and Provencal; 'Common Slavonic' Russian, Polish, Czech, Serbo-Croat and Bulgarian; 'Common Celtic' Welsh, Breton, Irish and Scottish Gaelic; and so on.

This is to put the matter crudely, but a crude understanding is also a common one, and as such is useful in dealing with popular handling of these ideas. The development over time of the Indo-European languages is often expressed figuratively in a dendritic model (Figure 2.1). This figure represents only a selection of western Indo-European languages, and the full picture is very much more complicated. A more detailed picture, for the Celtic languages, might look like Figure 2.2.

The model of the development of the Indo-European languages was elaborated in Europe during a period of strenuous and strident nationalism and nation-building. The nineteenth century in Europe is justly called an 'age of nationalism', and efforts in linguistic scholarship were closely tied to the political and ideological sphere. Before this period, the relationship of language and political institutions was far from close. The phenomenon of the 'nation', so normal now as to seem virtually part of the natural order, is of relatively recent date, deriving from the gradual transformation and decline of

Figure 2.1

Indo-European

Germanic   Hellenic   Slavonic   Celtic

German Dutch English Greek Russian Polish Gaelic Welsh Breton
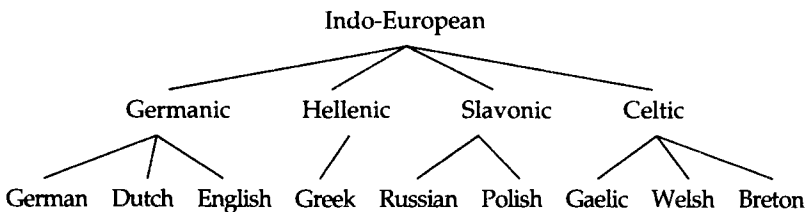
Figure 2.2 (extinct languages underlined)[4]

Celtic

Continental Celtic   Insular Celtic

Gaulish   P-Celtic   Q-Celtic

Welsh   Breton   Cornish   Cumbrian   Irish Gaelic   Scottish Gaelic   Manx
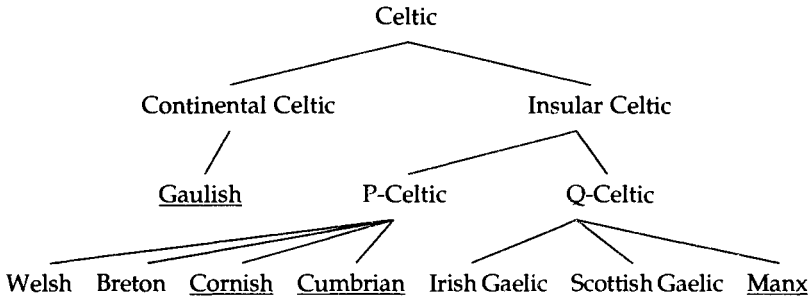
the power of the Catholic Church in Europe, much accelerated after the Reformation. The nations (if we may call them such) of pre-nationalist Europe were united as much by the common interests of an aristocratic or mercantile class, as they were by the common language and culture of all the inhabitants. The language spoken by the lower orders was often a matter of indifference to the upper orders, and some of the major political entities of Europe were linguistically exceedingly diverse (the Hapsburg Empire, for example).

Gradually, however, the idea developed that a nation should be characterised by a common language, spoken by all that belonged to it; and the same idea developed its reciprocal form – that every language *was*, or ought to be, a nation. Much has been written about these developments in recent years, in the general reappraisal of nationality that has followed the two devastating European wars of the twentieth century, wars for which nationalism might be blamed.[5]

Within the notion that a language was a nation, the dendritic model of language development provided by the Indo-European theory was not only a genealogy of languages – it was also a genealogy of peoples, races, nations and cultures. A near-mystical theory of the identification of race, nation and language was developed. The origins of this theory were rather diverse, but it is often credited to Herder, writing in German in the late eighteenth century.[6]

The model of the development of the Indo-European languages was, within this framework, a kinship genealogy of the grandest kind. The figurative branching model was taken, quite literally, to represent demographic and geographical expansion. The political consolidation of nations which had names from within the model, seemed only like a realisation of the natural order. Language, cul-

ture, people, race and nation were, in important senses, the *same thing*. So, the fortunes of a language, of an ethnic or national label, or of an archaeologically definable culture-type, were all taken as evidence of one another, or rather of the same thing – the fortunes, so to speak, of the race. If a culture or a language seemed to expand, then this was taken to be evidence of the growth and vigour of a biologically definable human population; if an ethnic label moved across the map, this was taken to be a movement of flesh-and-blood people, carrying their language and culture with them.

Closely tied to the linguistic and nationalistic models of development were theories of human development of the most general kind. The notion that man had developed from more or less animal origins, through barbarism, and thence to civilisation, was an old one. In eighteenth-century Europe speculation upon this subject became particularly fashionable, and much was written about the relationship between modern European society, as it then was, and both the 'savage' societies discovered overseas, and the ancient barbarian societies attested by classical and mediaeval Latin and Greek sources.[7] The idea that modern society was a refinement and a sophistication of an earlier and natural crudity came very readily to mind, and received various and diverse expressions.[8] 'Civilisation' was generally regarded as a desirable development away from 'barbarity'; a development, however, that was neither inevitable nor irreversible (with the image of the decline and fall of Rome always in the imagination). There was also, however, a recognition, which Tacitus had developed in detail, and which was frequently echoed subsequently, that civilisation was not all gain: that while earlier society might have been less refined, it was also the better for it – more honest, natural, straightforward, and so on.[9] Material concerning the Celts, increasingly available as it was both from modern and ancient sources, figured prominently in these discussions.[10]

After 1859, such discussion was further fuelled, and given an apparently new and scientific legitimacy, by the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), which provoked a furious debate about the evolution of man and society, and the relationship of man to the natural world. This drew speculation about the history of society into the framework of biological evolutionary theory, with societies viewed as increasingly sophisticated adaptive mechanisms, which progressed from 'early primitive' forms to 'modern developed' forms. 'Modern' and 'developed' were usually taken to mean, unarguably, 'better' (although moral judgement is irrelevant to evolu-

tionary theory as properly understood). Observers and theorists
from modern Europe were strongly inclined to regard their own
society and social practices as the most modern and developed, the
'best', and so set themselves to cultivating evolutionary trees which
put themselves at the tops of the branches, and all other societies
somewhere lower down. The best-known writer of this tendency
was Herbert Spencer, a formidable Victorian polymath.[11]

Congruent with this discussion of social evolution, was a discussion
of the development of the 'races' of man. Mankind, it was argued,
was divided into biologically different races. It had already been
established, not without controversy, that all mankind was of one
stock, of one biological origin.[12] Nevertheless, the different races
within this one species were involved in a 'struggle for survival',
with the best and brightest coming to the top and forming great
civilisations, and the dunces lagging behind in the backwater of
Stone-Age savagery. It is easy, from our own vantage point, to see
that these theories were by and for Europeans, and their self-con-
gratulation and complacency has subsequently attracted a good deal
of ridicule. It is worth remembering, however, that the industrialised
European world in the late nineteenth century had undergone a
period of remarkable change; evenness of judgement about such
things could not have been easy. The stark clarity of the difference
between 'savagery' and 'civilisation' required explanation, and gave
an excitement and interest to all speculations on the subject. The
place of the Celts in nineteenth-century European thought must be
understood in the light of this.

Cultures and races were fitted, then, into an evolutionary scheme.
The Indo-European language model, with its forward dendritic
growth, seemed entirely congruent with models of the evolution of
society and race. The units of these disparate models were, indeed,
commonly understood to be essentially the same thing – races, that
is, with societies and languages proper to them. So the adjective
'Celtic' denoted a language, a society and a race, forging its unique
path through time.

This apparent unity of argument concerning the evolution of
species, race, society and language had the effect of collapsing and
confusing very different time-scales. The diverse ways in which
these merge into one another are often subtle, and could be the
subject of an entire monograph on metaphors and models of human
development. We can try to set up the problem, however: The dif-
ferentiation of the early hominids from the other hominoid apes

began perhaps 15 million years ago; hunting might have begun 3 million years ago; a man-like species emerges perhaps with the middle Pleistocene hominids assigned to the genus *Homo* and the species *erectus*, one million years ago; modern man might be said to emerge, in an anatomical sense, perhaps 50,000 years ago; agriculture begins in Mesopotamia about 10,000 years ago, and reaches northern and western Europe some 5000 years later; the beginning of the differentiation of the Indo-European languages might be set about 4000 years ago; the earliest recorded evidences of the Indo-European languages (Vedic religious texts), date to about 1000 BC; the Bronze Age in north-western Europe takes up more or less the second millennium BC, and the Iron Age in the same area begins in the sixth century BC; settled agriculture replaces pastoralism in many areas only in the last 1000 years; urban society takes over from an essentially rural society only in the last 100 or so years, in a process which is still far from completed, even in Europe.

These ideas are expressed without any of the refinement, elaboration and reservation which they demand. The reason, however, for assembling such a diversity of information, is to point out the consequences of allowing ourselves to luxuriate too uncritically in the notion that language, society and race all evolve together; if we do, it is all too easy to allow these different developments, and all their greatly disparate time-scales, to collapse into one apparently coherent picture. The biological features implied by the idea of 'race', allow the notion that one is dealing with the differentiation of man from the animals. The earliest linguistic records are readily confused with the origin of language itself. Language is often regarded as the prime difference between man and animal, and as such the question of the origin of language is as keenly interesting as it is obscure. It is both easy and tempting to think that the linguistic records we have will tell us something about this. The origin of human language might plausibly be put well back into the Pliocene period, several millions of years ago. There is every likelihood that men have been communicating in sophisticated languages for at least the last 100,000 years. Nevertheless, surprisingly sophisticated linguists have been prepared to talk about the earliest surviving linguistic evidences (which are 2000 or 3000 years old) as if they were very much closer to the origins of language than our own speech. This has its parallel in a long-standing tendency to treat the languages of existing 'primitive' peoples as if they, too, were languages only just out of the cradle.[13] The earliest literatures of the Celtic languages are, in this spirit, often

talked about as though they represented the infancy and springtime
of the human imagination. The Indo-European language model is,
strictly speaking, about languages and not about people at all; rarely,
however, does one find an account which does not, so to speak, fill
the language categories with mobile and expanding populations.
The development of the Indo-European languages, and their dis-
persal, is imagined as a branching and growth through time, and the
implication of the model is to derive both the languages and the
peoples speaking them from a point source – one of those holes in
the ground which models of this kind notoriously require. The de-
velopment and dispersal of *Homo sapiens* is imagined according to a
very similar pattern, and the peopling of Europe, and the peopling
of Europe with 'Indo-Europeans', tend to look very like one another,
although these are events of an entirely different conceptual order,
and take place within disparate time-scales.

I discuss below the general social tendency to judge 'other' soci-
eties as existing in a state of nature. This is a common feature of
social judgement, and it is one which has been multiply rendered in
intellectual accounts of our own past. Virtually all of the great changes
mentioned above, on time-scales varying from 10,000,000 years to
100, can be represented as a movement from 'nature' to 'culture'.
The earliest stages are, so to speak, a movement from beast to man,
with all that that implies in popular and intellectual discourse in the
loss of instinct and passion, the gain of rationality and judgement.
The earlier stages of *social* development are commonly characterised
as a continuation of this primal process. Hunting, as a form of
subsistence, looks like a 'natural' stage from within an agricultural
setting (even without the many confirmative images provided by the
survival of 'hunting' as a recreation within modern societies.[14]).
Pastoralism, with its movements, tents and animals, looks like a wild
social landscape from the settled agricultural village. And agriculture
and rural life, finally, look like a state of nature from the urban
setting. It is easy, therefore, when dealing with developments within
this sequence, to be unclear, and even unsure, of the appropriate
time-frame – in a sense, they will all serve, one at once or all at the
same time.

The Celts, therefore, have a long history of being tied up in a
discourse of race, language and culture – a discourse which has
indeed, in important senses, created them. Since the end of the
Second World War, the more unattractive aspects of racial discourse
are less conspicuous than once they were. The rethinking has,

however, to date been very local in its effects. The revision or denial of the concept of 'race', for instance, is one which has so far an interestingly limited social distribution, and in world terms those who are prepared to dissociate biological and cultural inheritance completely are probably only a small minority. In the European intellectual context, the rethinking of the concept of 'race' is typically carried out against an intellectual obbligato of discussions of Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa. On the political margins of Europe, however, in nations and areas that can feel that their role in the last war was one of virtuous innocence, and that they had no part (or no recent part) in colonialism and its works, a surprisingly innocent invocation of the desirability of purity of race can sometimes be found, along with an assertion of the necessary link between race, character, culture and language. Just shows this for Greece (see Just, 1989a), and the same is sometimes true in, for example, the Celtic areas and Scandinavia. The discourse is not, in such cases, supremacist in the old ugly way, but it is happy to invoke what one might call 'desirable difference'. I make this point, because it might be felt that the discourse of 'race', in its old style, was completely discredited.[15] This is true, but only in limited ways, and only in limited areas of thought.

Scholars today, however, often make at least some attempt to distinguish between different aspects of the once apparently unitary concept of race – language, culture, nation and people – and indeed to disavow the concept of 'race' altogether. Nevertheless, after all the disavowals have been made, the equation of language, culture and people is still regularly made, explicitly or otherwise. How else, after all, are we to take assertions of the kind:

> It is reasonable to accept that in the fourth and third centuries BC the Celtic peoples dominated northern and central Europe from the Black Sea to Spain. This is the message of the Greek and Roman authors, who, together with the archaeologists of the present time, are convincing on this point.
>
> (Rankin, 1987:10)

Or:

> It is a historical fact that the Celts in their heyday did traverse and occupy huge tracts of Europe in the second half of the first millennium B.C., ranging from Galatia in the east (beyond Europe) in

Asia Minor to Ireland in the west, from the Balkans and southern
Italy and the Hispanic peninsula to lands bordering the North Sea
and Scotland.

(Evans 1980–2:234)

If there is no transfer from a linguistic definition of Celtic to a
demographic definition, then how could a 'Celt' exist at all? Scrupu-
lous scholars may try to separate the various aspects of being Celtic;
many give primacy to the linguistic definition,[16] while others try to
stay with an ethnological definition.[17] Ellis Evans is firm that 'lin-
guistic doctrines should not be lightly mixed with ethnographic or
archaeological ones; to do so only means running the risk of com-
promising the more or less firm base of our views about [linguistic]
inter-relations and affinities' (Ellis Evans, 1980–2:255). He then goes
on, however:

Both Celts and Germans were in turn expanding, marauding, and
conquering peoples, markedly different from each other and for
ever, it seems, consciously or unconsciously rejecting each other
because of a deep-seated and pernicious incompatibility. They
came from different cradles and mercifully, I believe, are a very
long way from being indissolubly fused together.

(ibid.: 255)

Even allowing for the degree of hyperbole which we might expect in
a memorial lecture in the University of Wales, this is an unarguably
direct assertion of the existence of the people, the Celts, with their
own inalienable character and lineage, and who speak the language,
or languages, defined as Celtic.

It takes only a moment, however, to remember that adults can
change their language during their lifetime, and that children very
readily learn as their first language a language which is not mother-
tongue to their parents. People can change their 'ethnic' allegiance
during their lifetimes; can change the label by which they are known
and know themselves, according to biographical convenience. It is,
therefore, simply unwarranted to continue treating the spread and
survival of languages as being entirely congruent with the spread
and survival of named biological populations. There is every reason
to suppose that direct descendants of the unambiguously Celtic
Gauls that sacked Rome in 390 BC, rode with Alaric and Attila under
completely incompatible ethnic labels 800 or so years later; every

reason to suppose that direct descendants of the British who rose under Boadicea now live in Suffolk under Anglo-Saxon names. These points may seem obvious, but they go a long way towards emptying the category 'Celtic' of much of its content. Before looking more closely at the content of the category, I wish to look at some problems of naming.

3

Calling People Names

A continuity of naming is often the simplest continuity of all, and provides a thread through history along which other continuities – of race, language or culture – can be traced and imagined.[1] Those in the modern world who use the term 'Celt' to describe both ancient and modern inhabitants of Europe often allow this usage to imply continuity between the two very different ages – between pre-classical barbarian Europe, and the modern world of the Celtic fringe. The continuity, however, is retrospectively imposed. It is not a continuity which was lived by those people who are united, over the ages, under the title 'Celts'.

Before looking more closely at the early use of terms related to 'Celt', we must consider some general features of the naming of peoples. Modern social anthropology has come to recognise that an 'act of naming' is always specific to a particular context. The categories to which names are given, and the names themselves, are the product of a particular social viewpoint, with its own definitional requirements. This is as true for the naming of peoples as it is in all other areas of social life. It is commonly assumed, however, in looking at the histories of peoples, that naming is a simple reciprocal matter, and that groups of people have only one name, by which they know themselves and by which they are known to others. We can exemplify this simplicity if, for example, we take two groups, and define them formally as A and B; then A may have a vernacular term 'c' for itself, and a vernacular term 'd' which it uses for B; and B in its turn, uses the same terms, 'd' for itself, and 'c' for A. Thus:

Example 1

	terms used for A	terms used for B
terms used by A	c	d
terms used by B	c	d

We can exemplify this rare simplicity through the English-speaking Welsh and the English. Let A be the English-speaking Welsh, and B the English, thus:

Example 2

	terms used for A	terms used for B
terms used by A	Welsh	English
terms used by B	Welsh	English

So, the English-speaking Welsh call themselves 'the Welsh', and call the English 'the English'; the English call themselves 'the English', and call the English-speaking Welsh 'the Welsh'.

The names used by one group, however, by itself and for others, need not correspond with the names used by another group. If we take two groups, A and B; then A may have a vernacular term 'c' for itself, and a vernacular term 'd' for B; B may, in its turn, have a vernacular term 'e' for itself, and a vernacular term 'f' for A. Thus:

Example 3

	terms used for A	terms used for B
terms used by A	c	d
terms used by B	f	e

For a relevant real-life exemplification of this, let the Welsh-speaking Welsh be group A, and the English be group B; then:

Example 4

	terms used for A	terms used for B
terms used by A	Cymry	Saeson
terms used by B	Welsh	English

Or let the Gaelic-speaking Scottish Highlanders be group A, and the English (or Scots)-speaking Scottish Lowlanders be group B; then:

Example 5

	terms used for A	terms used for B
terms used by A	Gaidheal	Gall
terms used by B	Highlander	Lowlander

These examples invite extensive discussion of context, history, etymology, dialectal forms and so on. Nevertheless, if we content ourselves for the moment with the formal simplicity of the examples, we find that we have introduced a potentially devastating complexity into our reading of inadequate or exiguous sources, when we are

trying to reconstruct the histories of peoples. In examples 3, 4 and 5, all four terms are different, and histories and accounts written from within one tradition would give an entirely different impression from histories written within the other. In both these examples, we have some access to histories written within both traditions, and can be aware of the problem. Often, however, this is not so. Much of the history of early Europe is available to us only through one half of the terminology.

Examples 3, 4 and 5, complicating as they might be, nevertheless represent a reciprocality and symmetry which is uncommon, for they assume (or figuratively impose) a mutual agreement about the aptness of the bounded groups, and about the appropriate location of relevant boundaries. Where there is no such agreement, it is much more difficult to present figurative models. Consider, however, the following:

Example 6

terms used for:	A	B	C	D
terms used by: A	e	f	f	f
B	f	g	f	f
C	f	f	h	f
D	f	f	f	i

This is an attempt to render, in a formal manner, a situation where every group has a name for itself (the four groups A, B, C and D calling themselves, respectively, e, g, h and i), and has one term for everybody else (a term like, say, 'foreigners' or 'strangers'; we leave aside, for the sake of simplicity, the very strong possibility that the different groups speak different languages). The vernacular English usage of terms like 'continental', 'European', and 'foreign', has much in common with this figure. So also do the original meanings of the 'names' employed in examples 4 and 5 (see p. 56). Terminological usages of this kind are harmless enough when the linguistic and social background is very familiar, and the etymologies of the terms transparent. When these conditions do not hold, however, then we run a grave risk of misinterpretation. If we were examining, say, the location of 'foreigners' in twentieth-century Europe, some 1000 years hence, and using only very partial and ill-understood surviving records, it would be easy enough to make the assumption that the 'foreigners' were an ethnic group, a tribe perhaps, or a nation, which was scattered all over the European map, living in more or less peaceful co-existence with other peoples. One might find oneself arguing about whether a particular archaeological find, or a place-

name, was or was not 'foreign'. Departments of Foreign Studies might spring up. The more enthusiastic lecturers in Foreign Studies might trace their own ancestry to the foreigners, and argue their own thirtieth-century dignity and pride on the grounds that the Foreigners were the original inhabitants of Europe, who once ruled it from the Urals to Gibraltar, from the Hebrides to the Bosphorus. . . . And so on.

We can complicate the matter still further. Many of the terms used by human groups for 'self' and 'other' are purely relative: they move as the context of discussion moves. So, for people in a small village in Shropshire, the people in the next village are 'foreigners'. For people from these two villages jointly visiting Shrewsbury, all the people in Shrewsbury are 'foreigners'. For the people from all these towns and villages, watching Shropshire play another county in a cricket match, all the visiting team and their supporters are 'foreigners'. And so on, until the Martians arrive.

Furthermore, many terms which we might take for national or tribal identifications turn out, upon inspection, to rest upon criteria which are diverse, temporary and malleable – occupation, language and place of residence, for example. Ardener says:

> [D]ocumented cases are beginning to emerge of relationships between neighbouring peoples – different 'tribes' if you will – which spread the population dynamic over some aggregate much larger than any one ethnicity. Imagine that if you ran away to sea you became a German, or to become a Londoner you gave up your mother tongue.
>
> (Ardener, 1974:31).

Ardener adduces African examples in support of this. His reference to Germans and Londoners was intended to be deliberately provocative, to prepare the mind for exotic examples; in fact, however, within these very familiar terms, we can recognise the processes. Much immigration to London has precisely had the characteristic that Ardener notes, with those that have lost their mother-tongue now being fully 'Londoners', both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others; and the notion of 'running away to sea to become a German' is strikingly similar to the processes of occupational recruitment to the label 'German' within the Hapsburg Empire.[2]

There can be no doubt that many of the terms and groupings with which we make sense of our history – Viking, Celt, Anglo-Saxon, Roman and so on – were subject to these kinds of process. To make

sense of this we must move away from the notion that a 'tribe', or an 'ethnic group', is recruited essentially from within, through its own biological reproductive power. Recruitment and disaffection, growth and diminution, result not *only* from biological features of demography, of birth and death, but also from processes of definition and redefinition – from the movement of people between categories, and the movement of categories around people. We must, therefore, abandon the idea that 'ethnic groups' have demographically 'hard edges', and are bounded like biological species against their neighbours. The edge of an ethnic group may indeed seem 'hard', from within the understanding of those that live on one or even both sides of it, but this is a conceptual matter essentially independent of biological recruitment; the 'hard edge' may in fact permit a continuous flow of individuals across it. It is in this light that we must look at the categories of ethnic ascription in the ancient world.

Many of the terms of social self-understanding, by which peoples make sense of themselves and of others, are the semantic substance of a boundary between the social and the less-than-social, the human and the less-than-human, the civilised and the less-than-civilised. Many perceptions, actions, ideas and words can be fed into this boundary distinction, but the existence of a perceived boundary between 'self' and 'other' is about as near as we come to a social universal. It has become commonplace within social anthropology to think of boundaries of this kind as consisting of a mental or ideological opposition between things on either side of the boundary; or, in other words, the boundary and the opposition are different forms of expression of the same phenomenon. These notions of boundary and opposition have come to be of great importance, so much so that they have a right to be considered the central feature of modern anthropology. Problems of boundary are not, as they might at first appear, a peripheral and abstract matter – they are, rather, the substance of society itself: a society is no more or less than a web of boundaries. And these boundaries are primarily located not in concrete reality, but in the mind.

When a society (if we personify it for the moment) is thinking about itself, it commonly defines itself within a system of oppositions, with itself as the most prestigious element. Thus, any particular society commonly thinks of itself as properly and fully human and civilised. It gives substance to this idea by opposing itself to the social and natural world around it. So we find a characteristic fabric of ideas built around oppositions like social/wild, human/sub-

human, human/animal, cultural/natural, civilised/uncivilised, well-mannered/ill-mannered, and so on. These oppositions are phrased very generally, to express a common feature of social representation (one multiply attested both from modern ethnographic work and from historical sources). A society uses the natural world around it within this kind of thinking, opposing itself to the plants, animals and spaces of the uncontrollable, unsocialised and dangerous wild.

A society, however, also opposes itself, in pursuit of its own self-definition, to other human societies around it – an opposition, say, between 'self and other'. So we have a few crude oppositions:

human/animal
self/other
culture/nature

It seems to be in the nature of human thought that apparently disparate oppositions, which share one only of their terms, are lined up with one another, and brought together in a single potent idea. The three oppositions listed above, for example, are commonly brought together as if they were one. So the human cultural self (or, say, one's own society) is opposed to the animal wild of the 'other'; neighbouring societies are rendered as wild, natural and animal-like; other manners can be construed as an animal-like lack of manners, other languages as an animal-like lack of language. Any differences in culture between one society and its neighbours can be drawn into this system of thought.

Ideas of this kind must be fed into all the arguments so far advanced about the definition of a group and its neighbours. Such ideas are not, it must be stressed, a curiosity, occasionally observed in exotic contexts – they are, rather, the very stuff of thought and theory about the bounding of human groups. Our own term 'foreign', in its etymology, contains the notion of a simple boundary between the human space of a settlement and the wild of the forest (from the Latin *foras*, meaning 'outside', itself derived from a term meaning 'entrance to a dwelling'; a term, therefore, that occupied the most significant boundary between the domestic space, and the wild outside). The 'foras', or the 'forest', was thus a space in which wild, natural and dangerous people, 'foreigners', might be found (cf. above, example 6). Words for dangerous 'others', based upon this kind of boundary distinction, abound in language – the merest domestic threshold can provide the conceptual substance of a category distinction which

will people the world with strange, threatening and anti-social al-
iens.

Herodotus' term for the northern barbarians, *keltoi*, is of obscure
origin; it was probably not a compliment, however. Stokes has
suggested that the word is related to terms in other Indo-European
languages meaning 'foreigner' or 'enemy'.[3] It has also been sug-
gested that 'Celt' is cognate with Old Norse *hildr*, meaning 'war', and
some sort of association with violence or disorder is not improbable.[4]
Many terms of ethnic ascription and self-ascription, which are not
open to etymological inspection, have, as their probable etymologi-
cal ancestry, some derogatory association with wildness, violence,
dirtiness, indiscipline, peculiar habits in food, dress, language, sex,
and so on (see p. 56).

In modern European vocabulary, we find a conspicuous difference
between polite terminologies for other peoples, and vulgar and de-
rogatory terms applicable to the same groups. In England, for ex-
ample, where textbooks and newspaper articles speak of the Irish,
Scots, Welsh, French, Germans and Italians, public-house conversa-
tions shout of Micks, Jocks, Taffies, Frogs, Krauts and Wops. We
might feel, in such cases, that we could answer the question 'Which
is the "real" name?'; the 'real' name would be the formal alternative,
the other a slang term of abuse. We might also discover, however, on
investigation, that the 'slang' term was the more commonly employed
in conversation, which makes the question of the legitimacy of the
two terms rather more problematic. At any rate, the polite term
would be much more common in written accounts, with the vulgar
term as a common spoken form. The records of the ancient world, of
course, leave us only written accounts, and it is tempting to suppose
that the terms of ethnic ascription employed in these accounts are as
polite and formal as those that we use in our own writings. This is
probably a mistake. There is no reason to suppose that there was, in
the ancient world, any sense of the need to be polite to barbarian
neighbours. The terms of abuse would, in all probability, have *been*
the proper names, and vice versa.

Many modern writers treat the Celts of early Europe as if the Celts
themselves knew who they were – knew, that is, that they were
Celts, and what a Celt was, and where the borders of the Celts
stopped and started. They assume, explicitly or implicitly, that the
Celts *called themselves Celts*. There is, however, very little evidence
for this. If the Celts did not know of themselves as such, however,
what is the nature of the grouping? Most modern authorities would
at least defend the legitimacy of the category on general grounds –

arguing perhaps that the Celts, whether they knew it or not, were a coherent and objectively definable ethnic group (or a grouping of groups), recognisable by its language (or languages), culture, art, archaeological remains, and so on. This is a modern, external, scholarly and retrospective definition, which does no harm as long as its limitations are recognised. This scholarly and retrospective definition, however, is constantly allowed to slide away into the notion that there existed a 'people', the Celts, who had some kind of definitional integrity beyond that accorded them by scholars many centuries later. The apparently coherent use of the term *keltoi* in Greek sources, and its echo in later Latin sources, is a ready support for this: why would the Greeks and Romans speak about Celts so frequently, if the Celts were not really there?

The earliest written accounts in Europe were provided by the Greeks and the Romans, and by those who learnt the arts of writing from them. The 'Celts' were, in the first place, entirely outside this world. Terms ancestral to 'Celt' and 'Celtic' first appear in Greek texts from the fifth century BC, and denote barbarians living to the north and west of the known and, to the Greeks, civilised world. There is no evidence at this stage that the term was accepted by the people to whom it was applied, that it was a *self*-appellation, or that there was a unitary 'Celtic' language. The term, rather, was used by the Greeks to describe obscure barbarity. It is worth quoting the lexicon on the variety of meanings of the adjective *barbaros*, to get some idea of the mixture of linguistic, cultural and moral disdain that it expressed:

> Barbaros: barbarous, i.e. not Greek, foreign: as substantive barbaroi, all that were not Greeks, or that did not speak Greek. Plato divides mankind into Barbarians and Hellenes, as the Hebrews gave the name of Gentiles to all but themselves. 2. From the Augustan age, the term was applied by the Romans to all nations except themselves and the Greeks: but the Greeks still affected to look upon the Romans as barbarians.
>
> (Liddel and Scott, 1890: 127)

The Latin dictionary gives us the following (among others):

> Barbarus: foreign, strange, barbarous, opposed to Greek or Roman; foreign, strange in mind or character; uncultivated, ignorant, rude, unpolished; wild, savage, cruel.
>
> (Lewis and Short, 1886: 222)

We are here in familiar anthropological terrain. As we have seen, it is a widely shared feature of human societies that they define themselves as the only truly *human* people. Everybody else is more or less indiscriminately rendered sub-human by the opposition. In many languages, the term for 'ourselves' also means 'human' or 'people'. The term for others necessarily partakes of non-human features – animal, wild, sub-human, anti-human – by virtue of the opposition. Lévi-Strauss begins the third volume of his *Structural Anthropology*, with the tale of the Amerindian tribe whose generic term for their human neighbours translates as 'louse-eggs'.

We know from Classical sources in general that the Greeks shared with the Romans a virtually complete disdain for the languages of those people whom the Greeks had first called *barbaroi*. From the nearly 1000-year period when the Continental 'Celts' were in contact with literate societies of the Mediterranean, virtually no texts in northern barbarian languages survive. Literate Greeks and Romans were not troubled by the ethics of multicultural education. For them, there was only one, or at most two, languages, worthy of attention. The rest were vulgar noises, animal cries, babble, chatter, jabber; or, indeed, barbarous – an onomatopoeic rendering of the language of those who went 'barbarbar . . . '.

How, then, are we to interpret Greek references to the keltoi? Some of the earliest references are in Herodotus, and date from the middle fifth century BC. Herodotus tells us, in sweeping terms, and within a conception of European geography since proved to be far from accurate, that the keltoi occupy the northern and western areas, all along the Danube to its source in the far west, in the Pyrenees. The geography was to a considerable degree imaginary, and I think we must suppose that the ethnic group was also imaginary in important senses. Greek references to the keltoi are often read as if Herodotus were using the word in the same way that a modern linguist might use the term 'Celts'. This is surely mistaken, however. Herodotus, in putting the keltoi in the northern and western unknown, is extending an empty category into ignorance. The term probably had linguistic significance, but this must be viewed as largely negative – meaning, perhaps, 'non-Greek speakers in the north-west'. There is no justification for supposing that these people, the keltoi, spoke a language proper to them which was Celtic.[5] Greek indifference to other languages was total, and we can suppose no linguistic erudition on their part. It is a mistranslation, therefore, to

think of the keltoi as being Celts in the modern sense, unified racially, linguistically and culturally.

It is probably no exaggeration to say that we had by far better translate *keltoi* with some generalised term of modern vernacular racist abuse, than by a prim and sanitised term from the lexicon of Indo-European linguistics. The Celts, for ancient Greece, were, so to speak, 'the wogs in the north'. It is reasonable to infer that, in common usage, *keltoi* had much of this favour. Given our knowledge of the way social boundaries work, and of the kind of social boundary which the Greeks were expressing in using the term *keltoi*, the balance of probability must surely be strongly against the notion that the Keltoi, over such a great expanse of Europe, were self-defining as such. If we think of *'keltoi'* as like a modern vernacular racist epithet, then it becomes much easier to see how this particular social boundary operated. For, of course, those who use a deliberately offensive term like 'wog' do not bother, in their usage of it, to draw fine distinctions; the term is one of general disparagement, for people of any different colour, culture and origin. If inspected closely, the people so reviled may turn out to speak a great variety of sophisticated languages, and to come from widely disparate cultures. Those who characterise them as 'wogs', however, know nothing about this, and care less. If we were trying to infer the ethnic make-up of the world from information drawn from this particular kind of modern and unselfconsciously vernacular English, we might commonly meet two telling phrases: 'foreigners are all the same', and 'wogs begin at Calais'. It is easy to see what picture of the world we would have to draw. So it must surely have been, for the ancient Greeks, that great swathes of the European unknown were filled with keltoi.

The Greeks used the forms keltoi and galatai more or less indiscriminately. The two are best regarded as orthographic variants of the same word, perhaps reflecting local differences, in time or place, in pronunciation of the term. Writers in Latin adopted the form *celtae*, from the Greek. The Latin term *galli*, however, came to share the same semantic space. Indeed, the two terms *keltoi* and *galli* effectively *meant* the same thing, as subsequent commentators have perceived. The conclusion usually drawn from this is that the keltoi and the galli were the same people, in an objective cultural and linguistic sense (were, that is, Celts[6]). This surely oversteps the evidence, however. What we have, rather, are two terms whose synonymy derives from a nearly identical definitional structure – both are indiscrimi-

nate terms for 'uncivilised barbarians in the north', and on that basis alone they 'mean the same thing'. The terms, and their synonymy, tell us nothing about the presence or absence of ethnic uniformity among the barbarians. The galli were, for the Romans, the northern barbarians of immediate relevance, just as the keltoi were for the Greeks.

Eventually, both galatai and galli came to be historically identifiable, and self-identifying, places and peoples. A group of European barbarian ('Celtic') mercenaries in the Greek armies eventually broke away and settled in central Anatolia (modern central Turkey) in the early third century BC. These continued to be known to Greek speakers as Galatai, and it was to these 'Galatians' that St Paul, writing to the outposts of Christendom, addressed one of his epistles. By this time, no doubt, the 'Galatians' knew of themselves as such. 'Galli', similarly, eventually provided a name for the parts of north-western continental Europe that were incorporated into the Roman Empire, as 'Gallia' (or, as we remember it in English, 'Gaul'). Gaul was a prosperous and stable part of the Empire for over 400 years, and during this period there is no doubt that its inhabitants became Gauls, and would have described themselves as such when visiting other parts of the Empire. These later developments of the terms into *self*-ascriptions are, however, no evidence of the early situation. Assuming that the barbarians of the fifth century BC called themselves, and thought of themselves, as keltoi or galli, is rather like assuming that the pre-Columban peoples of the American continents thought of themselves as 'Indians', or, indeed, 'Americans'. Kruta (author of *Les Celtes*, 1976) says (my translation):

> The current state of our knowledge leaves us uncertain about the time from which it becomes appropriate to give the name Gauls to the western Celts and Galatians to the eastern Celts (the beginning of the 3rd century B.C.?)
>
> (Kruta, 1976: 5).

We must ask, however, 'appropriate for whom?' Galatai and galli are names given to northern barbarians by, respectively, Greece and Rome. They are not indigenous barbarian concepts. The western and eastern Celts are divided at this period because there are now two peoples, the Greeks and the Romans, providing accounts of them. The division is between Greece and Rome, and tells us nothing about the barbarians themselves. No advances in the 'current state of our

knowledge' could provide an answer to the question that Kruta is asking. Powell (author of *The Celts*, 1958) notes the similarity of use of *keltoi, galatae, celtae* and *galli*, citing Greek and Roman authorities (the only authorities available), and concludes:

> It would probably be impossible to unravel the story of this ambi-guity in names, but for the present purposes it is safe to conclude that the Celts long continued to regard themselves by this name however much other names within their nation may have come to the fore from the fifth century.
>
> (Powell, 1958: 21)

There is no safety in this supposition at all; nor is there any evidence for Powell's contention that: 'With regard to the actual name itself, the Greeks wrote it down as *Keltoi*, having received it orally from the native pronunciation' (ibid.: 17). Powell's view here derives not from any historical source, but simply from the faulty assumption that most cases of naming are of the kind represented in examples 1 and 2, above (p. 24–5). The fact that the Greeks called the north-western barbarians keltoi does not tell us anything about what these barbarians called themselves.

It might be argued that, since *keltoi* was not the only term used by the Greeks for barbarian peoples peripheral to their world, then it must express some capacity to differentiate between different kinds of barbarian. The term did not mean, so to speak, 'savages' in the most general sense; rather, it meant 'savages in the north-west'. Powell, again, says:

> It seems safe to deduce that, at the time of Herodotus, the Greeks recognized the Celts to be a major barbarian people living west and north of the Western Mediterranean, and beyond the Alps. Ephorus, writing in the fourth century B.C. counted the Celts amongst the four great barbarian peoples of the known world – the other three were the Scythians, Persians and Libyans.
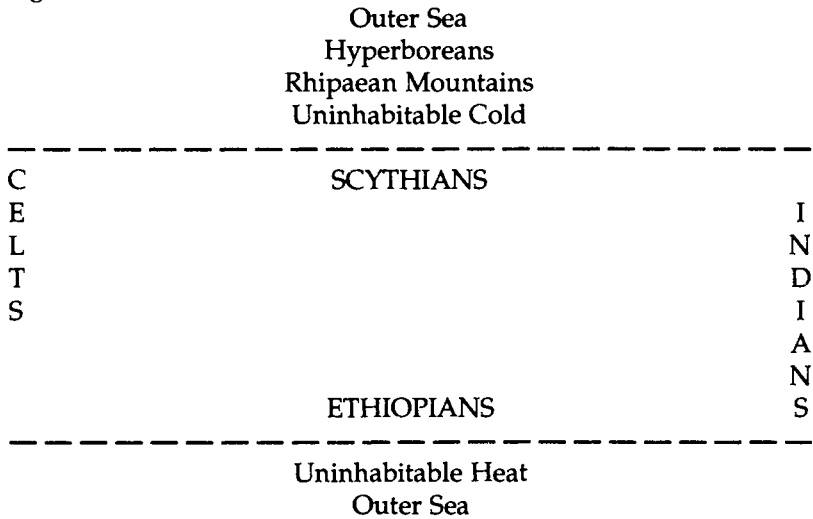>
> (ibid.: 16)

This early Greek capacity for ethnic differentiation needs to be looked at closely, however. The quadripartite ethnic structure of the world beyond Greece owes a great deal to basic features of spatial geom-etry and symbolic orientation within the Greek world-view. It was surely a demand for a spatial symmetry which led to this four-part

ethnic structure, rather than *facts* of ethnic differentiation in the greater world. What, indeed, could be more improbable than that the rest of the world should organise itself so symmetrically for the benefit of the Greeks? J. Thomson, the historian of ancient geography, gives an account of the geographical world-view of the ancients – an interesting blend of myth, symbolism, ignorance, speculation, and slowly increasing knowledge (with the last element far from dominant).[7] He gives a sequence of map-like representations of the world according to the earliest authorities, and we find in each case an ethnic label for the four quadrants – north-west, north-east, south-west and south-east. The north-west is in every case occupied by 'Celts', and the north-east by 'Scythians'. The south-west (Africa, more or less) is filled according to Ephorus with 'Libyans', and according to the Ionian map with 'Ethiopians'. The south-east (the Middle East, more or less) is usually filled with 'Persians', although the Ionian map has 'Indians'. The Ionian map is as shown in Figure 3.1. It is from this order of geography that the Celts derive, as we should remember when considering the ethnological implications of the terminology.

We know from other evidence that it would be quite wrong to take Greek use of 'Persian' as evidence of ethnic, linguistic and cultural homogeneity in the Middle East. As we have seen, however,

Figure 3.1[8]

                          Outer Sea
                       Hyperboreans
                    Rhipaean Mountains
                    Uninhabitable Cold
— —
C   SCYTHIANS
E   I
L   N
T   D
S   I
                                                     A
                                                     N
                        ETHIOPIANS   S
— —
                    Uninhabitable Heat
                        Outer Sea

many modern commentators interpret *keltoi* in this way, thereby
assuming that the north-west was indeed full of a single people
properly called Celts. The existence of some rather similar descrip-
tions of these northern barbarians is taken for evidence that these
barbarians were all Celts, even in the absence of the term 'Celt'.
Thus, Powell, referring to the Gaulish invasions of Italy in the early
fourth century BC (see p. 44), says that 'these invaders were Celts as
is shown by their names and description, but the Romans called
them Galli' (Powell, 1958: 20). I discuss in Chapter 11 the question of
what the classical commentators observed, and why they commented
as they did. Greek and Roman writers, rather like modern European
social anthropologists, were interested in the Celts because of the
differences from Greek or Roman social normality which they ap-
parently provided. As long as there *were* differences, it was not of the
first importance what exactly these were. For example, a striking
difference between the barbarians and themselves, for both Greek
and Roman authors, was that the barbarian men wore lower body
garments that parted at the crotch – trousers, so to speak.[9] Wherever
this difference was noted, classical commentators could suppose
that they were dealing with the same ethnic group. Are we, however,
justified in inferring any kind of ethnological uniformity? It seems
doubtful. We might again profitably look at modern representations
of the savage for an analogy. Nakedness, for example, defined sav-
agery for generations of Europeans: as a criterion of identification, it
was of the first importance for those with clothes; for the great
diversity of those without, however, it was of no relevance at all.
There is no more reason to suppose that breeches operated as a
criterion of unification in Iron-Age Europe, than there is to suppose
the same in the modern world. Tacitus (AD 55–120) provides one of
the last, as well as one of the best, classical commentaries on the
northern barbarians, in his *Germania*. This is ethnologically rich, and
is a strong candidate for the title 'the first ethnography', but even in
this work: 'Tacitus writes as if any province, any provincials, any
army, any enemy might serve equally well' (Mattingly, 1948: 19).
There is an essential truth here, and it is one which we should bear
in mind when considering all Greek and Roman writings on eth-
nological subjects.

I have tried to show that the terms used by the Greeks and
Romans for the northern barbarians do not provide such accurate
ethnological information as is commonly supposed. Terms used for
social description are subject to similar processes. The Greeks used

the term *ethnos* to describe a unit of the barbarian social order. In modern Greek, the term *ethnos* has come to mean 'people' in the sense made familiar by romantic nationalism in the nineteenth century. It is used by modern Greeks for themselves, and by scholars all over the world who are anxious to draw their concepts from the classics, as a term expressive of intimate self-definition.[10]

In the earliest recorded uses of *ethnos*, however, in Homer, the term was not used for familiar groups of people sharing a culture, an origin, or a language. It was used, rather, to describe large undifferentiated groups of either animals or warriors. Frequently, *ethnos* was used for an animal multitude (bees, birds or flies), which was then used as a simile for a like multitude of warriors, where great size, amorphous structure and threatening mobility were the qualities to which attention was being drawn (e.g. *Iliad* 2.87 and 2.91; 4.59–69; 12.330). We might gloss the term as 'throng' or 'swarm', both of which terms have ambiguously animal and human possibilities. Aeschylus used *ethnos* to describe the Furies (*Eumenides* 366), and also the Persians (*Persai* 43, 56; see also *Herodotus* 1.01). Sophocles used it for wild animals (*Philoctetes* 1147; *Antigone* 344). Pindar, again in very early recorded use, employed the term to describe groups of like people, but again people whose location or conduct put them in some way outside the sphere of Greek social normality (the husband-killing women of Lemnos, for example; *Pythian Odes* 4.448). Aristotle used it for foreign or barbarous nations, as opposed to 'Hellenes' (*Politics* 1324.b.10). When Herodotus described the Greeks in his famous passage (8.144), *ethnos* was not a term he employed. Romans, writing in Greek under the Empire, followed the trend of earlier usage, and used the term to describe the provinces – areas that were, that is, *not* Rome (see Appian *Bella Civilia* 2.13; Herodianus 1.2.1; Dion Chrysostom 4.3.11).

We might perhaps compare early Greek use of *ethnos* to modern English 'tribe' – a term still used by many educated people to describe all political units which are not of the familiar nation and nation-state kind. Aspects of naturality, non-legitimate social organisation, disorganisation and animality, are strong in *ethnos* – a term used not for a kind of social structure, but as an expression of the *absence* of structure.[11] The *Keltoi* were, *par excellence*, a people of the ethnos – defined by social disorder and absence of order, living in animal-like hordes and swarms, pulsing and threatening on the social horizon. The collocation *to kelton ethnos*, then, in ancient Greek, is not best translated, as it might well be, by 'the Celtic people'; more proper to

the spirit of the phrase would be an expression like 'a swarm of foreigners'. The Celts and their society, as we know them from the classics, were positively defined in only one limited sense, through the difference perceived by the literate Greek and Roman worlds that have left us our records.

Eventually the Greeks themselves, who had been central to the definitions of ancient Greece and subsequently of Constantinople, became peripheral to the definitions of Ottoman Istanbul. The term *ethnos*, which they had long used to describe alien and peripheral kinds of social organisation, came to be applied, in Greek usage under the Ottoman Empire, to the Greeks themselves. It was as a term for intimate *self*-description that *ethnos* settled into modern Greek,[12] and this sense was incorporated into the analytical pretensions of social scientific vocabulary, in terms like 'ethnic group', 'ethnicity' and so on.

The Greeks made no distinction between Celts and Germans, and this failure has puzzled some later commentators, since the distinction is so important in Europe in a later and much better documented period. It is often said, to account for it, that the Greeks had not yet learnt that the Celts and the Germans were different, or that they sometimes made mistakes of identification. Rankin, for example, says that the Greeks and Romans 'occasionally were mistaken about the ethnic affiliations of more remote tribes with whom they had not yet made contact' (Rankin, 1987: 1). Mistaken, however, in whose terms? It makes much more sense, from an anthropological point of view, to accord to the Greek category its own systematic success: it did not fail to account for the difference between Celts and Germans; rather, it expressed a truth about Greek perception, which was that northern and western Europe were, as far as Greece was concerned, full of the same kind of barbarian – barbarians, that is, who shared the essential characteristics of being uncivilised, and unable to speak Greek.

Posidonius (*c.* 135 – 51 BC), and through him Strabo (*c.* 64 BC – AD 19), regarded the Germans and Gauls as close kin, very similar in physical features, manners and customs.[13] Julius Caesar was the first writer to distinguish clearly between Germans and Gauls, on the basis of differences in language, religion and customs (Caesar vi. 21–4, i. 47), but in Caesar's case the need for a revision of the ethnic categories was a clear one. If the people east of the Rhine were Gauls, then Gaul had not been conquered. Greek historians laboured under no such imperative, and continued to use the category *keltoi* in a way

that modern commentators find indiscriminate; they 'continued for centuries to speak of Germans as Celts, adhering to the antiquated idea that northern Europe was inhabited only by Celts and Scythians' (Anderson, 1938: xxxix). We will return to this point, for it is of enduring interest.

4

'A Wave of Barbarians . . .'

I have suggested that there is no necessary relationship between the
name given to a people, the archaeological or cultural evidence, the
linguistic evidence, and the flesh and blood. It is often argued that
the spread of the archaeologically defined culture styles across Eu-
rope is accompanied by a spread of place-name elements of a Celtic
kind. There is a serious danger of circularity here, however, in that
an archaeological feature found in a place with a Celtic name will be
called Celtic on that account; its presence elsewhere can then be used
as evidence of the 'Celtic' nature of the local place-names, and so on.
Much argument of this kind has gone on, and there is, of course, no
ultimate tribunal. Let it be, however, that a new language – a Celtic
language – and a new culture – a Celtic culture – spread across large
parts of Europe together during the first millennium BC. What can we
then say about the people?

The simplest interpretation would seem to be that a new people
accompanied the new language and the new culture. This interpre-
tation then gives us our new ethnic or racial group – the Celts. The
demographic questions posed by the evidence of barbarian expan-
sions are, however, far from solved. The Celts give every appearance
of having expanded, in the most dramatic and striking way, in the
La Tène period. They settled northern Italy, and sacked Rome in
390 BC.[1] They plundered Delphi in 279 BC, and served as mercenaries
in the armies of ancient Greece. It is reckoned to have been a group
of disaffected Celtic mercenaries that crossed into Asia Minor to
found Galatia, commonly assumed to have been the eastern outpost
of this particular barbarian expansion.

The Celtic sack of Rome in 390 BC did not seriously impede the
growth of Roman power, for it was only a temporary incursion. The
fear of the potential of the barbarian masses remained in Rome,
however, as the 'terror gallicus'.[2] The fear of Gaul was allayed with its
incorporation into the Empire in the first century BC, but the fear of
the barbarian masses remained. We might regard the apparent Celtic
expansion as an early presage of the seemingly endless waves of
barbarian humanity which were to come out of eastern and central

Europe, the Cimbri, Goths, Huns, Vandals, Franks, Angles, Saxons, Langobards, Avars and the like, which overwhelmed and variously dismembered the Western Roman Empire.

What, however, did a wave of barbarians look like? The metaphor is worth taking seriously. In viewing the passage of a wave through water, we have the illusion of sustained forward movement, although in fact only movement in a vertical dimension occurs: the water does not move forward, but simply up and down. Waves at sea only truly give rise to forward movement when they break – at the moment, that is to say, when they collapse, spending such energy as they have. The picture that we get from early archaeological and linguistic evidence of the Celts is, as we have seen, one of expansion. The Celts, like the Indo-Europeans before them, and like their successor barbarians, seem to have expanded, demographically, in a very genuine sense. From a small source, in the salt mines of Hallstatt or the swamps of La Tène, they emerge in ever-increasing numbers, and overwhelm everything around and before them, on a continental scale. There is, it might well be agreed, an inherent demographic improbability about this. Edwin Ardener provides the following insight:

> In the past, certain steppe-peoples seemed, to settled observers, to resemble animal populations in their frightening apparent tendency to multiply in numbers and to burst out of their bounds. They appeared to 'swarm'. They swept like a terrible plague, suddenly dwindling as rapidly as they grew. The ancient cases of the Huns, Goths, and other German tribes, and medieval cases such as the Magyars, Mongols, and the like, are deeply ingrained in the historical consciousness of our civilization. . . . How often have we heard of the dessication of the inner Asian steppes driving out virile hordes? Yet if we take the classic case of the Huns, we know that the swollen masses under Attila included almost every people from the Rhine to the Urals. The swarm effect, as it was experienced, was a combination of mobility plus accretion.
>
> (Ardener, 1974: 28–9).

The 'swarming' of the Huns could have occurred without any significant numerical change in the originating population at all. We have indeed no certain knowledge of the precise definition of the originating population. When the Attilan entity collapses in A.D. 454 we catch glimpses of small remnant groups of successor

'Huns' incorporated in other rolling, swelling ethnicities. A century later the Avars 'swarmed' by incorporating a large Slavonic population. The rapid collapse of their apparent numbers in A.D. 796 was such that a Russian proverb came to say: 'They perished like the Avars, and there survives of them neither progeny nor heir'.

(ibid.: 30)[3]

The process I describe has as much in common with the growth and collapse of a fiduciary phenomenon like the South Sea bubble as it has with any biological one. The sudden shrinking of such barbarian enemies is a function of their presupposed size. . . . It is not (I emphasize strongly) that population changes played no role at all in any of these matters, but that they were overlaid, and totally reshaped by changes in the mode of self-identification of the ethnicities concerned.

(ibid.: 30)

Much of this we can apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the Celts. If we return to our wave, the forward motion can be largely insubstantial, a motion not of people, but of a self-identification. An example from modern fashion might illuminate this. 'Punks' first appeared on the streets of London in the early 1970s. They appeared a few years later in the streets of Stornoway, the main town of the Outer Hebrides. We need not conclude that the original 'punks' had rapidly multiplied by biological reproduction, and owing to population pressure in their homeland had invaded outlying islands in search of living space. Something moved in time and space, certainly, but it was not people as such – it was, rather, a self-definition, a self-identification. Archaeologists, looking back upon the twentieth century, may notice that the Coca-Cola bottle had spread throughout the known world by 1950, and had been completely replaced by the Coca-Cola can in many locations by 1990. We know, however, that they would be wrong to conclude, as well they might, that the Coca-Cola bottle people had emerged from North America, and spread throughout the world, massacring all others as they went; or that they in their turn had been displaced and massacred by the Coca-Cola can people. The assumptions of ancient archaeology do sometimes look rather like this.

I do not mean to say that the processes of Celtic expansion excluded genuine demographic accumulation. The Celts, moreover,

emerge in a period of innovation in agricultural and metal-working techniques, a period therefore disposed to demographic growth. It is surely necessary, however, to take into account the possibility that what were moving across the map were names and fashions, not people at all.

Before leaving the metaphor of the waves, we can look in some detail at Livy's account of the sack of Rome by the Gauls in 390 BC. The account is of the breaking of a barbarian wave, remembered with fascinated horror by the settled urban inhabitants of a self-consciously civilised city. We can remember that when a wave breaks it is most visible, and nearest its end:

> Calamity of unprecedented magnitude was drawing near . . . now that a strange foe, of whose power [Rome] knew nothing either directly or by hearsay, was on the march from the Atlantic Ocean and the furthest shores of the world. . . . The Gauls . . . wasted no time; . . . they flamed into the uncontrollable anger which is characteristic of their race, and set forward, with terrible speed, on the path to Rome. Terrified townships rushed to arms as the avengers went roaring by; men fled from the fields for their lives; and from all the immense host, covering miles of ground with its straggling masses of horse and foot, the cry went up 'To Rome!'

> . . . in spite of warnings the sheer speed of the Gallic advance was a frightful thing. . . . The ground . . . was already swarming with enemy soldiers, and the air was loud with the dreadful din of the fierce war-songs and discordant shouts of a people whose very life is wild-adventure.

The Romans were routed; many fled to a neighbouring town; those left in Rome withdrew to the Citadel, leaving the walls unmanned, and the streets empty:

> The Gauls could hardly believe their eyes, so easy, so miracu-lously swift their victory had been. For a while they stood rooted to the spot, hardly realizing what had happened; . . . when no sign of an enemy was anywhere to be seen, they marched, and shortly before sunset, reached the vicinity of Rome. . . . news came that the Gauls were at the gates; the anguish of personal bereavement was forgotten in a wave of panic, and all too soon cries like the howling of wolves and barbaric songs could be heard, as the Gallic squadrons rode hither and thither close outside the walls.

The Gauls waited outside Rome throughout the next day, apparently fearful of entering the city, then:

> A night having passed without action, the Gauls found their lust for fighting much abated. . . . When therefore they entered on the following day, it was coolly and calmly enough. The Colline Gate was open, and they made their way to the Forum, looking with curiosity at the temples and at the Citadel. They . . . then dispersed in search of plunder; finding the streets empty. . . .
>
> For the Romans beleagured in the Citadel the full horror was almost too great to realize; they could hardly believe their eyes or ears as they looked down on the barbaric foe roaming in hordes through the familiar streets, while every moment, everywhere and anywhere, some new terror was enacted: fear gripped them in a thousand shapes; now here, now there, the yells of triumph, women's screams or the crying of children, the roar of flames or the long rumbling crash of falling masonry forced them to turn unwilling eyes upon some fresh calamity, as if fate had made them spectators of the nightmare stage-scene of their country's ruin.
>
> (Livy, 382–8)

Help was on its way to Rome, however, from Romans organising outside the city; the leader of the Romans exhorted his troops as follows:

> The enemy is near – his disordered columns are close upon us. They are big men – brave men too – at a pinch – but unsteady. Always they bring more smoke than fire – much terror but little strength. See what happened at Rome: the city lay wide open, and they walked in – but now a handful of men in the Citadel are holding them. Already they are sick of the siege, and are off – anywhere, everywhere – roaming the countryside; crammed with food and soused in drink they lie at night like animals on the bank of some stream – unprotected, unguarded, no watches set – and a taste of success has now made them more reckless than ever.
>
> (Livy, 390)

After this exhortation, the Romans, in a series of engagements, routed the Gauls. What, however, if this particular wave had not broken at Rome, but had passed over it? Already, with the Gauls at the gates, and the Roman aristocracy huddled in the Citadel:

Thousands more – mostly plebeians – who could neither have been lodged nor fed on the small and inadequately provisioned hill, streamed in an unbroken line from the city towards the Janiculum, whence some scattered over the countryside while others made for neighbouring towns – a rabble without leader or common aim. For them, Rome was already dead; each was his own counsellor and followed where his hopes led him.

(Livy, 386)

The Etruscans, moreover, fairweather allies of the Romans at this time, seized the opportunity to plunder and attack Roman territory. Ultimately, they were punished for this by the victorious Romans, but it was clearly a close-run thing. It took Juno's sacred geese and their cackled warnings to prevent the success of a night-time Gaulish assault on the Citadel, which might, perhaps, have been the end. Had the wave not broken here, but moved on, we might have no record of the event at all; or perhaps we might have a vague recollection, in a footnote, of the inconsequential slaughter of a few hundred people who, it is thought, called themselves Romans. Instead, of course, we have an episode of crisis that rings down from antiquity, through the history and mythology of Imperial Rome.

The ethnic redefinition failed, then, broken upon the rock of the Roman Citadel. The thousands of streaming plebeians, for whom Rome was dead, woke up to find that it was alive, and that they were still Romans; the Etruscans, happy to assist in an ethnic redefinition which involved the disappearance of Rome, found to their subsequent cost that it had not worked. And the Gauls, the physical embodiment of this wave of humanity, and its breaking, vanished as quickly as they came. The picture is a poignant one. The Romans in the Citadel looked down on the barbarian hordes, described by Livy in images that recur throughout the confrontation of settled urban civilisation with nomadic barbarism – hordes that swarmed, that talked, sang and cried like animals, moved fiercely and fast, drank swinishly, were quick to anger, brave in battle, disorganised, over-numerous, unsteady. The Gauls, for their part, walked in awe and curiosity around Rome's empty streets, as uneasy in the face of Roman urban life as the Anglo-Saxon conquerors of Britain were to be 800 years later, and clearly not quite sure, having won the battle, what to do next. One is reminded of the passage of the Scottish Highlanders through urban Britain on their march south in 1745. The Gauls, like the Highlanders, were doomed, not primarily because

they lost a battle, but because the processes of accretion to their 'ethnicity', or say perhaps their 'side', had failed them. As Livy tells us, the final Roman victory 'was bloody and complete: the Gallic camp was taken, and the army annihilated' (Livy, 395).

We know, of course, that Rome eventually spread itself widely, taking over large parts of the areas that are retrospectively defined as 'Celtic'. The Roman Empire expanded in this way, however, not by massacring the original inhabitants, but by persuading them, with more or less conviction, that they were Roman. What expanded, again, was a self-definition, not a biological population. Just as barbarian waves roll across the map, so empires expand and disappear, with all the appearance of cataclysm, yet leaving most people much as they were, bobbed up and down, perhaps, upon the wave of a moving name. The lightning spread of Islam across the Middle East and northern Africa was not a military conquest, nor a displacement of peoples. It was, rather, a highly successful and painless recruitment drive.[4] The spread of the Roman Empire was often of the same order. It ultimately failed, not only because it started to lose military engagements, but also, and perhaps predominantly, because it lost both the will and the ability to make those that opposed it into Romans. In AD 410 Alaric the Goth entered and sacked Rome, the first enemy to succeed in doing so in the 800 years since the Gauls. Alaric did not want to destroy Rome, but, having conquered it, he wanted to be allowed to become important in its hierarchies. Those in control of the definition of the prestiges of Rome, however, could not stomach the idea. And so the Western Roman Empire defined itself out of existence, to be later recreated by many hopeful would-be emperors, from Odoacer, through Constantine and Charlemagne, to Napoleon and Mussolini.

I dwell upon this question because it raises issues which are modern in an anthropological sense, and which have not yet been taken into account in the great bulk of writing upon the histories of ethnic groups. For most authors, the Celts are a flesh and blood people, with a name that is theirs by right of birth, back to the dawn of history.

The conflict between an interpretation involving ethnic definition and redefinition, and one involving conquest, population movement, displacement and massacre, raises itself at many critical points in the history of Europe. There are many examples involving the Celts: Is France a Celtic country – did the Gauls remain, changing their language to Latin and taking their name from the Franks? Or

did the invading Franks take the language of the Romanised Gauls but kill most of them? Is England a Celtic country – did the Anglo-Saxons come in great numbers, and kill or drive out all the original Roman, British or Romano-British inhabitants, or did they come as aristocratic conquerors, settling as lords in a land otherwise inhab-ited by Celts who rapidly learnt to speak Anglo-Saxon? Did the Britons who moved to Brittany in north-west France in the period of the fall of the Empire go as conquerors, finding a country empty, a country full of Gauls, a country full of Romans? Did they go in great numbers, as helpless refugees, or in small numbers, as invited mercenaries or colonists? And so on, for Ireland, Wales and Scotland. It is important to bring these questions to the fore, if only because of the vast amount of ink that has been spilt over them – more ink, perhaps, than blood.

' . . . WHO CALL THEMSELVES CELTS'

I have argued that the 'Celts', in their classical form, are a group whose definition occurs within somebody else's world-view, and that this has rather important consequences for our interpretation of the evidence. The classics, however, present at least one evidence that the term was used by the Celts of themselves. The first few famous phrases of Caesar's *Conquest of Gaul* run: 'Gaul comprises three areas, inhabited respectively by the Belgae, the Aquitani, and a people who call themselves Celts, though we call them Gauls'. One might reasonably conclude that the people in north-west Gaul, 'who call themselves Celts', are a group of those same people to whom Herodotus drew attention several hundred years before. One might go further, and conclude that just as the people Caesar found in Gaul 'called themselves Celts', so also did the people noticed by Herodotus, and that we are therefore dealing with a self-realising ethnic group (or 'people', or 'tribe'), cleaving to its own ancient and proudly held name. One cannot, strictly speaking, disprove any such idea, al-though we might be surprised, if this were so, by the absence of groups elsewhere which 'call themselves Celts'.

   The construction usually put upon this is that Herodotus' 'keltoi' and Caesar's 'Celtae' were both Celts in an objective sense, with the language, culture and name proper to this people. There are other possibilities, however. We might, for instance, suggest that there was, in Gaul, indeed a people who called themselves something like

'Celtae', and that Caesar, or some of those around him, assimilated this to an ancient and originally Greek word for northern barbarian – a word already in their vocabulary. With its antecedents, the term would seem very appropriate, and there would be no comeback for the people whose name was so traduced. The long confusion of the name of the earliest Germanic intruders into the Roman Empire, the Cimmri (or Cimmerians – see Conan the Barbarian) with the Welsh Cymry, provides a plausible real analogy; so, too, does Bede's pseudo-historical assimilation of the Scots (or Scotti) to the Scythians (Skythai) of Greek classical record. Or, in a slightly different way, perhaps some people in Gaul had become aware, at some stage during their long relationship with the classical world, that they existed in somebody else's vocabulary as 'Keltoi' (for a useful model, we can look to the use of the term 'Welsh', used by the Welsh as a name *for themselves*). We can only guess, but this might have happened through the long-standing Greek trading colonies on the Mediterranean coast of Gaul, centred upon Massilia (the modern Marseilles), and trading far up into France. One unambiguous message from the archaeology of the period is that goods from the Mediterranean civilisations – metalwork, wine, jewellery – were held in very high esteem in barbarian Europe. And just as the imported goods were held in high esteem, so might the imported vocabulary. The history of the colonisation of the world by Europe in the modern period is rich in examples of peoples who have taken, as their own name, a name originally given them by powerful and privileged visitors. It is likely enough that the same thing happened somewhere in Gaul in the few hundred years before Caesar wrote.

My observations on this problem are, of course, entirely speculative. They are, however, based upon processes which are commonly found in cultural meetings in the modern world, and amply recorded. We have a choice. Either we ascribe the consonance between Caesar's Celtae and Herodotus' keltoi to universal features of human classificatory thought, and application of these at a small-scale social and linguistic level. Or we are obliged to consider the possibility of a people occupying most of the European continent, at a period when communications and travel posed the gravest difficulties, who considered themselves to be united, as a people, by their culture and language. Which is the more probable?

Further slender evidence for people who 'called themselves Celts' lies in the existence of a single place-name – 'Celtici' found in south-west Spain during the Roman period. Powell calls this 'the only case

where the name of this widespread people found any geographical
memorial' (Powell, 1958: 16). Again, however, we must invoke ear-
lier arguments. Powell is in a sense perfectly right, but we must ask
'who defined the widespread people?', and 'who gave them a name?'.
If the Greeks and Romans had a widespread term for barbarian
peoples, it is not altogether surprising that it might appear, in their
records, in a place-name (see p. 59).

Edwin Ardener has discussed problems of this order at some
length (see 1972; 1974), and in a recent piece he draws a picture of the
anthropologist and the native chief discussing astronomy. They are
talking about the stars (the Great Bear, Venus, Orion and so on). The
native chief says to the anthropologist, 'what I don't understand, is
how you found out their names' (Ardener, 1991). If names come
from a source of sufficient authority, then they will be accepted –
they will become real. But nothing is identified and nothing has a
name, in and of itself, outside the processes of human social and
linguistic identification; and these processes are proper to specific
social and linguistic situations. The only one of these that we have
access to, in the classical period, is that of the classical authors
themselves. The Celts were like the stars of the Great Bear, coher-
ently patterned from a limited and distant viewpoint, but made up
of elements joined together by nothing other than that viewpoint,
and otherwise disparate and, figuratively or literally, great distances
apart. We can safely suppose that the European barbarians lived
their lives oblivious of the Celt-like picture that observers saw.

Many writers on the Celts have allowed the grandiose implica-
tions of a Europe-wide definition to colour their perceptions:

> In the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., the Celts achieved their
> greatest prosperity, and expansion over the face of Europe.
>
> (Powell, 1958: 65)

> At that time a territory stretching from Ireland to Galatia was in
> Celtic hands. 'For two centuries,' says Grenier, 'they (the Celts)
> were the greatest people in Europe. . . . About 300 BC the power
> of the Celts is at its height and seems inexhaustible in energy and
> in manpower'.
>
> This rapid expansion over an enormous area implies great fe-
> cundity and a great spirit of adventure.
>
> (Dillon and Chadwick, 1972:6; citing Grenier, 1923: 99–100)

The picture that we get is of a people brave and gay, physically powerful, and amazingly successful in the early period. From Galatia in Asia Minor northwest to Scotland, and south again to Andalusia, one could travel in the third century BC without leaving Celtic territory. And although there was no empire, it was one culture.

(ibid.: 17)

At the height of their powers the Celts occupied in Europe an enormous territory bordered in the west by the Atlantic, from the Iberian peninsula to the British Isles, in the north by the inland edge of the great northern plain of Germany and Poland, in the east by the arc of the Carpathians and in the south by the mediterranean coast. . . .

(Kruta, 1976: 28)

It is reasonable to accept that in the fourth and third centuries BC the Celtic peoples dominated northern and central Europe from the Black Sea to Spain (Momigliano 1975: 51). This is the message of the Greek and Roman authors, who, together with the archae-ologists of the present time, are convincing on this point.

(Rankin, 1987: 9–10)

I close with Rankin, in order to draw attention, once again, to the stark degree of disagreement which may lie beneath apparently compatible phrasing. If the Greek and Roman authors convince us that the Celtic peoples dominated northern and central Europe, it is because they were convinced themselves. And it is true that the archaeologists have taken the terminology offered to them by the ancients, and drawn their categories accordingly. But even so, we still know almost nothing about the categories of 'self'-ascription of the Celts. When Powell talks of 'prosperity and expansion', Dillon of 'amazing success', Kruta of 'occupation' at the 'height of power', and Rankin of 'European domination', how are we to take all this? For we must ask: 'power' for what? 'expansion' in relation to what? 'prosperity and success' for whom, in whose terms? In every case, the relevant frame of reference for such terms is provided by two structures which have been made to interlock – (1) the self-centred perceptions of the classical world, and (2) the structure of academic historical inquiry in Europe since the Renaissance. Between these

two, 'Celtic Europe' is a kind of empty space, in which mythical
figures disport themselves. We need not deny, of course, that there
were local experiences of prosperity, expansion, power and success
in barbarian Europe, but we know nothing about the relevant frames
of experience, which would allow us to tie these into their local
context of significance. We can, however, be sure that that context of
significance was not, even incipiently, 'Europe from the Hebrides to
Asia Minor, from the Carpathians to the Pyrenees'.

5
Celts into Welshmen

It is worth noting that Europe has still not seriously begun to aspire
to the degree of ethnic uniformity which the term 'Celt' imposes
upon Iron-Age Europe. When the Western Roman Empire failed, the
definitions of a power with transcontinental structures and aspira-
tions failed at the same time. When the barbarians invaded, much of
the European map was, for a brief moment, almost completely ob-
scured. Emerging again into the light of history, it was transformed.
Where once a single definition prevailed, we have a thousand frag-
ments of boastful and vainglorious self-identification. Christianity
gave writing to the post-Roman world, and with it the power not
only to name things, but to have these names remembered. The
apparent discontinuity in European forms of self-definition at this
stage is, therefore, only a trick of the record. If history had proceeded
differently, and Iron-Age Celtic Europe had been offered the oppor-
tunity to define itself and its discontinuities, and to leave written
record of these, then the supposed great unity of the Celtic people
would never even have suggested itself to subsequent observers.

We can, then, say that with the disappearance of the ancient
world, the Celts disappear too, in a significant sense. It will be clear
by now that this does not mean that they were massacred or dis-
placed by invading barbarians of a different totem. Rather, the
structure of definition which had brought the Celts into existence as
a category – the clear distinction between civilised Greece and Rome,
and the barbarian north – was broken and lost. After the Germanic
invasions of Europe the term 'Celt' almost disappears from view,
and does not re-emerge for many centuries.

The category *keltoi* survived, however, in the Greek of the Eastern
Empire, Byzantium. This is little noticed, however, for Byzantium
holds only a small place in the popular historiography of western
Europe.[1] When we speak of the 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman
Empire', we usually think of Rome and the Western Empire, and
tend not to follow the story, with Gibbon, through to the fall of
Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in AD 1453. Christianity's
early division into the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions

contributed largely to this alienation of Byzantium from western European thought. The Renaissance furthered this, concentrating on the traditions of ancient Greece and Rome. When nationalist Greece fought for its (re-) establishment against Muslim domination in the early nineteenth century, it did so within terms of debate established by the major European powers of the time, particularly Britain. It is no accident that the aspiring nation of modern Greece looked for its lineage to the ancient Greece of English public school education, rather than to the much more recent and locally relevant traditions of Byzantium and Greek Orthodoxy.

It is hardly surprising, in this context, that the continued use of the category *keltoi* in the Eastern Empire is so little regarded. The term was used in much the same sense that I have accorded it in ancient Greek, for northern and western barbarians. From Constantinople, non-Orthodox early mediaeval Europe had all the appearance of barbarity and disorder which ancient Greece had found in the *keltoi*. Within the terms of modern comparative linguistics and ethnology, the peoples of early mediaeval Europe were of various kinds – Latin, Germanic, English, and so on. They were all capable of being dismissed, from Byzantium, as *keltoi*[2] – a rag, tag and bobtail of worthless, uncivilised, unreliable people (see p. 182).

We have seen that the ancient Greeks used the term *keltoi* for peoples that modern linguists and ethnologists might wish to discriminate as 'Celts' and 'Germans', and that most modern commentators regard this as a 'mistake'. The Byzantine use of the term *keltoi* to describe a mixed group of 'Germans' and 'Italians' in twelfth-century Italy is an apparently compounded and absurd extension of this error.[3] This, of course, is the view we must take if we continue to regard 'Celtic' as a term properly applicable to a specific and unitary ethnic, cultural and linguistic group. If we *do* take this view, however, we must argue that the Greeks were, from first to last, making fundamental mistakes in the use of *their own categories*. If, instead, we allow that the term always meant something like 'non-Greek-speaking uncivilised barbarian in the north and west', then both the ancient and Byzantine usages make perfect sense, and are quite consistent.

It is a measure of a fundamental ethnocentricity of interpretation, that the keltoi of Byzantine definition are so completely disregarded in modern Celtic studies, as it has grown up in the last hundred or so years. If my interpretation of the continuity between early and later usage is correct, then the keltoi of Byzantine definition are 'Celts' by

exactly the same statute as the keltoi of the Upper Danube 1500 years previously. The difference between them is not, as is commonly supposed, simply that the latter were *really* Celts and the former were *really* Germans or Italo-Germans. The matter is more subtle. If our only information for the early second millennium AD came from Byzantine sources, we would be bound to conclude that much of Europe was full of Celts. The reason we do not is that we have other information, from sources written by and for the other peoples of Europe. The difference between the keltoi of Iron-Age Europe and the keltoi of early mediaeval Europe is that the former are only available to us through a name given to them by other people; the latter are available to us through records they made for themselves.

Nowadays, of course, it seems merely comic or perverse to insist that the Franks or Goths, for example, were truly 'Celts' in any modern sense. If we do not, however, we need good reasons for taking so seriously the early Greek sources and dismissing so thoroughly the later sources from Byzantium. Such reasons seem to be lacking. We might also wonder what modern 'Celtic studies' would have looked like had the 'European Renaissance' been centred upon a strong and inviolate Byzantium, with northern and western Europe on its fringes.

Any argument about whether the term 'Celt' was given by the Greeks or offered to the Greeks by the 'Celts' themselves must be inconclusive – no proof is possible. The same is true for argument about whether the term is apt to a coherent ethnic, cultural and linguistic group, or was simply an indiscriminate and vulgar term for 'uncivilised barbarian in the north-western quarter'. I offer here what I regard as the most probable interpretation, drawing upon analogies with similar documented situations, and avoiding anachronisms introduced by modern European thought.

It is far from outrageous to regard *keltoi* and its cognates as generalised terms of mild abuse, and not as proper ethnological labels, since many major terms on the ethnological map can be shown to have similar origins. Indeed, everywhere we look in the ethnic nomenclature of Europe we find an intimate association between terms for peoples and a language of moral and political approbation and contempt. The Slavs, for example (conventionally one of the 'great peoples' of Europe), most probably derive their name from the same source that has given rise, in the modern Slavonic languages, to the word for 'word' itself (*słowo* in modern Polish, for example). A verb

meaning 'to speak' is inferred, with the implication that the Slavs called themselves 'those who can speak'. All the Slavonic languages contain a term formed from a negative suffix and the infinitive of the modern verb 'to speak'. The compound means 'non-speaker', or 'dumb'; in modern Polish it occurs as *niemiec*, and in modern Russian as *nimitz*. The term has so commonly been used for the Germans, that it is now regarded as an ethnic term specific to them, properly translating English 'German' and German 'Deutsche'. In origin, however, the term certainly meant 'people who do not speak our language', and would have been used for any of the great variety of such peoples that once surrounded the Slavs. The Germans, however, dominated Slavonic boundary problems in the west, and so came into exclusive possession of the title, as the 'dummies' of most immediate relevance. The ethnic term 'slav' also provided mediaeval Latin and Greek (and thence other languages of Europe) with terms expressing a condition of total social subservience – modern English 'slave' and 'slavery'. The transition from an ethnic self-styling to a term of social contempt is manifest by the tenth century.

The name 'Frank', from the Germanic tribe that gave its name to modern France, is not open to early etymological analysis. Frankish political dominance in early mediaeval France, however, led to the adjective *franc* (Fr.) and 'frank' (E.) being generalised with the meaning 'open, free from constraint': frank, that is, as opposed to enslaved. The term 'Gael' (with learned equivalent Goidel and Goidelic) is now used for the Scottish and Irish (or at least those among them that are 'Celts'). Many etymologies for this have been proposed, often involving vexed questions concerning the movement of population and political domination between Ireland, Britain and the Continent.[4] Whatever the merits of the various explanations, there is no doubt of a close association in modern Welsh of the term *Gwyddel*, 'Irishman', and *gwydd*, meaning 'wild' (or originally 'tree' or 'forest'; cf. the etymology of the English term 'foreigner', p. 29).

Many of the early names for Celtic and Germanic peoples are not open to etymological inspection for want of information. Moreover, as we have seen, terms can begin life as indiscriminate terms for 'self' or 'other', then narrow down to employment in specific terms, and then generalise themselves once again in unexpected social or ethnic directions. There is a constant interplay between self-naming and naming of and by others, and we have little access to the subtleties of this in the early period. One very interesting example, however, is

provided by the many cognate forms of early common Germanic *walχaz, a term which meant, more or less, 'foreigner'.

CELTS INTO WELSHMEN

It was, in many ways, *walχaz and its derivatives which replaced 'keltoi', 'Celtae' and 'Galli' on the map of European ethnicity, after the fall of the Western Empire. When the barbarian Germanic order came to dominate much of Europe after the fall of Rome, it brought a new category of otherness with it: one that meant 'other people, not ourselves, not as good as us, who do not speak our language'. This category included all non-Germanic peoples who had previously lived under the Roman Empire. The careful classical distinction between Celts/ Gauls and Greeks/Roman was entirely collapsed by this new vision, and the Latins of Italy were treated to titles derived from *walχaz, as were the Gallo-Romans and the Celts of Roman Britain.

*Walχaz is a hypothetical early common Germanic form, reconstructed from attested cognates in later Germanic dialects. The *OED* gives their variants and meanings as follows:

> Old English (Anglian, Kentish) *welisc, waelisc*; West Saxon *wilisc, wylisc, *wielisc*, corresponding to Old High German *wal(a)hisc, walesc* (modern German *walsch, welsch*) Roman, Italian, French; Dutch *waalsch* Walloon; Old Norse *valskr* Gaulish, French; from Old English *walh, wealh*, corresponding to Old High German *wal(a)h*, Old Norse *valr*, pl. *valir*: – Germanic *walχaz foreign (Celtic or Roman).

Clearly, *all* these early usages meant 'foreigner' (or, perhaps, 'foreigner in the west'). To specify, in modern terms, the precise nature of these foreigners is spurious and retrospective. The *OED*'s gloss for *walχaz – 'foreign (Celtic or Roman)' – is correct until we get to the parenthesis; informative though this is, it is important to notice the very different qualities of the terms. *Walχaz is a term given by one people to a large indiscriminate group of other people, and not accepted at first by any of this group as a *self*-identification; 'Roman' is a term that would have been proudly claimed by many of those whom the Germans called *walχaz; and 'Celtic' is a term that would probably not have been recognised by anybody involved in the

definitions, on any side. I labour this point because it is so easy to
forget. If we allow ourselves to think of these early terms as being of
equal and unproblematic status, then we impose alien interpreta-
tions upon them, which nevertheless seem vouched for by the fabric
of modern thought.

The Germanic invasions, after the eclipse of total Roman author-
ity, led to the establishment of ostensibly 'Germanic' kingdoms in
large parts of western Europe – Visigothic in Gaul, Italy, Spain and
North Africa, Vandal in Spain and North Africa, Ostrogothic in Italy,
Frankish in Gaul, Lombardic in Italy.[5] The linguistic, cultural and
religious order of the late Roman Empire, however, partially reas-
serted itself, assimilating the Germanic element, and the language of
large areas of Europe came to be Latin-derived – the various 'romance'
languages of France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Romania. As this
happened, the dialects of Germanic took on their own trajectory,
associated with other developing political units of early modern
Europe. The term which once meant 'foreigner', in an expansive and
indiscriminate manner, slowly came to mean, in each dialect, 'for-
eigners of the first local consequence'. Gradually, the usages crys-
tallised into terms for specific peoples and areas, in various parts of
Europe. Terms once carried across the map wherever *Völkerwanderung*
took them, settled into new uses, in a new world of kingships,
nations, and fiercely and jealously guarded geographical boundaries.
Terms derived from *walχaz* in Anglo-Saxon came to mean 'Welsh'
and 'Wales' in the modern English sense; cognate terms in Dutch
and Low German came to mean 'Waloon' and 'Wallonia', the French-
speaking people and area in northern Europe largely outside the
historic kingdom of France (now more or less the French-speaking
part of Belgium). Cognate terms were borrowed into the Slavonic
languages; the Romanians are known to the Slavonic languages by
the term *Vlach*, and their country as *Vallachia* (many variants exist);
early Germanic usage is similarly echoed in the modern Polish names
for 'Italy' and 'Italian', *włochy* and *Włoch*.

A flavour of early usage can be found in the Kassel Glosses, from
a middle ninth-century German manuscript. They include a series of
phrases apparently designed for travellers, translating from German
to Latin – a sort of ninth-century Berlitz. Among others, the phrases
include (Latin first, then Old High German):

> 'stulti sunt romani: tole sint uualha', 'Romans (or 'uualha' –
> Latins, Italians, French etc.) are stupid'
> 'modica est sapienti in romana; luzic ist spahe in uualhum',

'Intelligence is scarce among the Romans (Latins, Italians, French etc.)'

sapienti sunt paioari: spahe sint peigira', 'Bavarians are intelligent'.

(Barber, 1951: 5, 96–7)

The Anglo-Saxons' term for their neighbours found two major locations in the west of Britain. It is the name for modern Wales and the Welsh (further found in many names for places and people: places, mostly in the west of England, like Wallasey, Walworth, Walton, Walsall;[6] surnames like Walton, Walsh, Wallace, and so on[7]). It is also the second element of 'Cornwall' ('the horn of land where the "welsh" live', with its equivalent in south-west Brittany – 'Cornouaille'[8]).

Early forms of the term 'welsh' were used in Anglo-Saxon not only to mean 'other people', but also something like 'slave' or 'serf'. The 'other people' were perhaps predominantly those from whom the 'serf' population was drawn, although in Anglo-Saxon usage the ethnic and social senses of the term were probably not distinguished from one another. The use of forms of 'slav' in mediaeval Latin, comprehending both a social status and an ethnic group, is a useful model. The lowly estate of the 'welsh' in Anglo-Saxon imagery, led to further usages of 'welsh' which expressed this. These were once much more abundant than they are today, although the *OED* lists over a dozen from recent centuries. Not all are still popularly attested, and only two are, to my knowledge, in current popular use: 'welsh rabbit', which is no rabbit at all, but rather cheese on toast (and so expressive of poverty), and the expression 'to welsh' or 'welch' (i.e. to cheat) on a deal.

The hypothetical early Common Germanic *walχaz is often argued to derive from *Volcae*. This is a name used by Caesar for two presumably distinct tribes (if tribes they were), the 'Volcae Tectosages', who occupied the 'Hercynian forest' to the east of the Rhine (Caesar, I. 2), and the 'Volcae Arecomici', whom he places near Narbonne, in the south of Gaul (Caesar, VII. 1, 4). If the etymological connection between *walχaz and *volcae* is a real one, the 'Volcae Tectosages' seem the likeliest candidates. Caesar regards them as Gauls, who in earlier Gaulish belligerence against the Germans, invaded part of German territory and settled there. Possibly the Germans took, as a name for *all* strangers, the name of the strangers with whom they were most immediately in contact, or whom they first met (much as the Romans and Celts of Britain called

all the Germanic invaders 'Saxons'). It is equally possible, however, that the tribal name 'Volcae' was itself a product of terms and ideas related to *walχaz*, with the Volcae appearing in the Hercynian forest through processes similar to those which much later put the Welsh in Wales. Some might feel that the long history of belittling Germanic use of terms like *welisc, walas* and *welsh* was redeemed by finding a 'Celtic' tribal name at its root. The etymology from *volcae* also makes a tacit appeal, of a kind commonly found in such matters, to a time when everything had its 'real' name. The names that come to us out of our earliest records seem to have a showroom gloss on them, unsullied by the confusion of time and events, and the muddled movement and mixing of peoples. This Garden of Eden quality, however, derives only from the absence of prior record: every term, before it was ever written down, had a muddled, ambiguous and complicated etymological history of its own.

What, meanwhile, were the Germans called by the British? Raids on Roman Britain from the coastal areas of what are now Holland, Germany and Denmark, had been serious enough from as early as the third century AD to provoke the construction of the fortifications and garrisons along the south-eastern coasts of England – the 'Saxon Shore'. The 'Roman' forces in Roman Britain in its last years were a cosmopolitan group, including many 'Germanic' soldiers. Many in the garrisons, as elsewhere in the Empire in its decline, were attackers turned defenders, and ultimately dubious allies. From some time in the fifth century, raids turned into attempts at settlement and large-scale immigration.[9] The names given to the invaders tend to be those sanctioned by Bede, in his *History of the English Church and People*, written several hundred years after the events. Bede describes the continental origins of the three groups, the Saxons, Angles and Jutes (*Bede*, I. 15), in a passage of which Collingwood and Myres have said:

> Bede himself makes no attempt elsewhere . . . to conform to his own tripartite division. It looks as if he may have put in this passage as an afterthought, a desperate attempt based on the political geography of his own day to introduce a semblance of order into the confused conditions of two hundred years before.
> (Collingwood and Myres, 1936: 337)

This insight can be generalised to many other historians, in many other periods. The invaders were generally known to the Roman British as 'Saxons', a term used within the Empire for all the north

German peoples beyond the Rhine, and which undoubtedly had abusive overtones. Gildas, a Roman Briton writing during a lull in the storm in about AD 540, usually called the invaders simply *barbari* (Gildas, 23.5). When he refers to them as *ferocissimi Saxones* ('most ferocious Saxons'), he adds 'illi nefandi nominis' ('name them not'; ibid. 23.1).

The problems attached to the nomenclature of the Germanic tribes of the Continent, and their transposition in name and body to England, are similar to other cases of ethnic naming already discussed.[10] It is interesting that the undoubted variety of names which the invaders brought with them was reduced, in the nomenclature of the receiving population, to a single despicable term – some form or other of 'Saxon'. The name survives in the modern Celtic languages, and is now commonly glossed as 'English' (Scottish Gaelic *sassunach*, borrowed into Scots as *sassenach*; Welsh *sais*; Breton *saoz*). Latin was the language of privilege and learning for the inhabitants of late Roman Britain,[11] and it emerged, through the activities of the Christian Church, as the first language of literacy in Anglo-Saxon England. In the Latin of the invasion period, as in the Celtic languages, the Germanic invaders were indiscriminately Saxones – used by Gildas in expression of fear and loathing, but later a respectable Latin gloss for all varieties of Anglo-Saxon. Both 'Angle' and 'Northumbrian' were later translated into Latin, by Angles and Northumbrians themselves, as forms of 'Saxon'.[12]

The early days of the Anglo-Saxon occupation were not a planned invasion of one nation by another, but a slow and fitful process of local events, with the boundary between 'Saxon' and 'Welsh' gradually moving west. Roman Britain had imposed a kind of conceptual uniformity upon the entire island south of the Forth–Clyde line. This polity, however, retreated westward, as the Anglo-Saxon occupation gained in strength, and as the memory of Rome faded. Sometime in the seventh century the geographical unity of the British was broken, as the Anglo-Saxons reached the sea in the west, at the mouths of the Severn and the Dee. Henceforth, the British were isolated from one another, in the peninsulas of Cornwall, Wales, Cumbria and south-western Scotland, where they came to be known by local names. Those that we know best, the Welsh, call themselves 'Cymry' (meaning 'from the same *bro*, or country'[13]).

The Welsh in the modern period trace their origin, under the influence of modern scholarship, to the Celts of continental Europe. Those from whom they might also trace their ancestry, however, the Roman British, would have found this connection entirely repug-

nant. The British aspired to be Roman, and their weakness before the Anglo-Saxon threat can largely be attributed to the reckless pursuit of this aspiration. Several expeditions towards Rome were made from Britain, by Roman Britons anxious to set themselves on the imperial throne. These were commonly considered to have greatly weakened, perhaps fatally, Britain's defence against barbarian invasion.[14] Internecine strife among opposing barbarian tribes had long been one of Rome's greatest military assets. During her decline and fall, the balance of this advantage shifted to the barbarians, as the provinces vied for power in Rome. The *wealisc* whom the Anglo-Saxons encountered were not wild nomadic people living on the fringes of civilisation; they were, on the contrary, self-consciously civilised and urban. During the coming of the Saxons, it was the Saxons themselves who were ferocious and uncivilised barbarians, in the literary and ethnological conventions of the British.

The erstwhile *barbaroi* and *barbari* of Gaul and Britain had been assimilated to the privileges of Rome, and the opposition of Romans to Gauls and Celts had lost much of its significance. The opposition of civilised to uncivilised, however, retained all its force, with the 'Romans' of Britain contrasting themselves to the new barbarian terror, the Saxons. The situation changed quite rapidly. The events of the next five centuries consolidated power in most of lowland Britain in 'Saxon' hands. The Anglo-Saxon polity came to define the fashions and sophistications of Britain, and the wealthy and privileged of Britain gathered, as they have always tended to do, in the fertile lands of England nearest the Continent. The cultural and linguistic traditions of the inhabitants of Roman Britain were either assimilated to the dominant Anglo-Saxon framework, or were rendered geographically and culturally marginal.

The retreat of Roman Britain into the west, before the Anglo-Saxon advance, was a conceptual retreat at every level, as well as a sporadic military disaster. Only the memory of Roman British hegemony remained, passing into the mutable structures of oral tradition. Roman Britain became less and less Roman, and more and more British (or, as we might now say, 'Celtic'). Within Celtic oral tradition, the historical realities of Roman Britain were soon muddled or forgotten. Even our best source for the period, Gildas, 'illustrates the shortness of Celtic folk-memory, and the limitations of geographical vision which a century of political chaos had produced' (Collingwood and Myres, 1936: 329). The previous order became only a cloudy memory of greatness, crystallised for subsequent

centuries around the figures of Arthur and his knights (Collingwood and Myres, 1936: 321–4).

When the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy had established itself, isolating the 'Welsh' in the peninsulas of the west, it constructed its own history, in which the British had no part, except as a failed and conquered people. The 'Welsh', in this dominant historiography, were not seen as the last representatives of Roman order and civilisation; instead, they became barbarians in their turn. Within their own historiographical traditions, of course, the Welsh remained the centre of their own universe, but there was no doubt that a 'passage of dominion' (Leckie, 1981) had occurred, and that a one-time greatness had been lost. This tradition, furthermore, was now largely orally maintained, and might have gone unnoticed by the wider world, had not two channels appeared to feed it into the mainstream of European imagery. One of these was created by Geoffrey of Monmouth, who, drawing upon both oral and literary traditions, finished in 1136 a synthetic account of the *History of the Kings of Britain*, which brought glamour and romance to the British defence of the island in the post-Roman period, and which gave to European literature the figures of Arthur and Merlin. The second channel is more problematic, but from some source Francophone poets derived the materials for the great romances of the Provençal and French Arthurian tradition. They undoubtedly used Geoffrey's work, but it also seems probable that some poets of a Provençal background came into contact with Celtic oral tradition in Brittany and Wales, both on the frontiers of twelfth-century Norman power. The *Lais* of Marie de France, and the Arthurian verse-romances of Chretien de Troyes, established the Europe-wide appeal of these themes. Many other French versions followed, and the theme re-entered mainstream English literature through Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* in 1469.[15] The general European appeal of these works is interesting. Lewis Jones argues that Geoffrey's work 'was just what a romantic age was thirsting for' (Jones, 1911: 70). This begs various questions, however: What *is* a romantic age? Why was the twelfth century one of them? and why did the work of Geoffrey and the Provençal versifiers appeal so strongly to this age? Why Arthur, Merlin, Perceval and Lancelot? Why British themes, from so obscure a period?

Those in Britain whom the Anglo-Saxons called *waelisc*, began the fifth century as the legitimate power and authority in all of England and Wales. By the end of the seventh century they were confined to the far west, and marginalised in every sense – they had become a

'fringe' people. Their history's central place in European literary symbolism is, then, something of a puzzle. One simple solution is to argue that Arthurian symbolism rapidly ceased to have any obvious connection, in its popularly received forms, with the relatively obscure Welsh-speaking people living in the Cambrian mountains. Indeed, Geoffrey of Monmouth's version was far from faithful to Welsh sources, but such became its fame that it replaced, in Welsh tradition, the very traditions from which it was partly derived.[16] The mailed knights of chivalry who rode through the legends were received as the idealisation of European knightly society in general, without any particular ethnological connection. The general popularity of the themes, however, provided a structure through which, in later and more erudite centuries, the fame and glory of Wales could be amplified. The figure of Arthur, to our modern age, has a potent twin appeal: a tale of central power and glory, along with peripheral glamour. These are not, in life, compatible, but they combine triumphantly in Arthurian symbolism.

The Welsh, once constituted as such by the consolidation of Anglo-Saxon power in lowland Britain, had various possible lineages of which to boast. They were the descendants of the British, and so of the wild tribes that had resisted Caesar. They were also, more prestigiously, the survivors of Rome in Britain, with memories of imperial power. Any connection with barbarous keltoi or galli would hardly have seemed privileged, desirable or self-evident, and Wales did try to keep alive some version of the Roman British lineage, although the recollection became increasingly muddled. A version of classical prestige was claimed for Wales by Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth, who sought the origin of the British people in the great-grandson of Aeneas, one Brutus. Brutus was made the eponymous founder of Britain, and, through his kinship with Aeneas, gave Britain descent from the same royal Trojan household that, in Roman mythology, founded Rome itself. Brutus, after the fall of Troy, brought a party of Trojans, via Gaul, to an uninhabited island, which was called 'Britain' after him. The Trojans, on their way through Gaul, slaughtered many of its inhabitants, with no apparent assumption of 'Celtic' kindred spirit. This is the gist of Geoffrey's account of the origin of the Britons and of the Welsh; it was doubtless sanctioned by old Welsh literary tradition, and was to be much repeated over subsequent centuries.

During the *adventus saxonum*, when Roman Britain was still a reality, it might have made sense to assimilate the barbarous Saxons

to the other barbarians of the classical record, keltoi and galli. The Germanic kindred of the Saxons were, indeed, still called keltoi by those in Byzantium who chronicled their disorderly progress. The *walchs*, by contrast, were a group centred upon Rome itself – a group which included, in a sense, everybody who smelt of Rome to Germanic nostrils. The modern appearance of a lineage which would tie the surviving Welsh to the keltoi could hardly have been predicted, and would certainly have made no sense to Gildas.

A major claim to continuity with Rome resided in the maintenance of Christian worship, while the heathen barbarians moved in from the east. It was, indeed, throughout the erstwhile empire, the Church which embodied continuity with the classical world. British Christianity was, however, according to Bede, reluctant to involve itself with the pagan Saxon: 'Among other unspeakable crimes, recorded with sorrow by their own historian Gildas, they added this – that they never preached the faith to the Saxons or Angles who dealt with them in Britain' (Bede I. 22).

Bede, as historian of the English Church, had little admiration for the Britons, and Aldhelm provides independent testimony to the 'gulf of misunderstanding' between English and British clergy:[17]

> Bishops of Dyfed, on the other side of the strait of the Severn, glorying in the private purity of their own way of life, detest our communion to such a great extent that they disdain equally to celebrate the divine offices in church with us and to take courses of food at table . . . , they order the vessels and flagons [i.e. those used in common with Anglo-Saxon clergy] to be purified and purged with grains of sandy gravel. . . . No greeting of peace is offered, no kiss of affectionate brotherhood is bestowed. . . . But indeed, should any of us, I mean Catholics, go to them for the purpose of habitation, they do not deign to admit us to the company of their brotherhood until we have been compelled to spend the space of forty days in penance.
>
> (Aldhelm, letter to Geraint)[18]

We have seen above that the growth and decline of 'ethnic groups' depends on positive recruitment. The evidence of Bede and Aldhelm suggests that the Britons, far from being anxious to recruit the 'Saxons' to possession of central defining features of being 'British', were, on the contrary, anxious to keep these exclusive. We might remember the disastrous reluctance of the Romans to include Alaric among

their number. For the survival of an 'ethnic group', the absence of a successful 'recruitment strategy' is quite as deadly as pestilence or massacre.

Roman Christianity found its way to Britain and to Ireland, and thence back to England and Scotland, through the missionary activities of 'the age of the saints'. Augustine, however, began his mission from Rome when he landed in Kent in 597, and by 627 this mission had extended its work, under Paulinus, as far north as Northumbria. It was not until the 630s that 'Celtic' monks from Iona settled in Lindisfarne, and began to play their own great part in the conversion of the English. The tradition of monasticism which the Iona monks gave to northern England was one inspired by Gildas, a Roman Briton. It had passed, however, between Gildas's writing in about 540, not from the Roman British to the Saxons, but via Ireland and Iona, with nearly a century's delay. Again in the world of might-have-been, it seems possible that if the Roman British Christians had immediately succeeded in converting the Saxons, the ethnic structure of post-Roman Britain might have assumed a very different aspect (whoever was 'really there'). As it was, the British tradition was a late-comer to the evangelisation of the Saxons. During the century in which Roman British Christianity was relatively isolated from the Continent, it developed some peculiarities which distinguished it from Roman practice, and which never gained acceptance outside its own peripheral world (matters relating to the form of the tonsure, baptismal procedure, and the burning question of the dating of Easter).

It was during this period, in a sense, that Roman British Christianity became what is now commonly called 'Celtic Christianity', which was, as this name implies, a fringe phenomenon from the first, directly descended from the earliest continental traditions though it was. When the urban episcopate was first re-established in the British Isles, it was within the structures of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. At the Synod of Whitby in 663, the Celtic and Roman traditions confronted one another before King Oswy of Northumbria, who was to decide between them. In Bede's account, Wilfrid, speaking for the Roman cause, addresses Colman, his Celtic antagonist: 'For, although your fathers were holy men, do you imagine that they, a few men in a corner of a remote island, are to be preferred before the universal Church of Christ throughout the world?' (Bede III. 25).

Wilfrid won the argument, and Oswy decided in favour of Rome. Bede regarded this as a decisive moment for the English Church, and it seems probable that it confirmed the 'Celtic Church' in its peri-

pheral position in perpetuity. It took many centuries before Roman practice was universally followed in the Celtic areas, but the Synod of Whitby is commonly taken as the beginning of the decline of Celtic influence. The relationship between the political institutions of Anglo-Saxon England and the Church was a close one. The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, in power and piety, traced their spiritual connections with Rome, forgetful of the pagan past. The Celtic Church, continuous with the older traditions as it was, had become eccentric; and the fate of the Celtic Church can serve as an image for the entire Romano-British heritage.

The opposition between 'Celtic Christianity', tribal, rural and monastic, and the urban episcopal Christianity of Anglo-Saxon England (and, later, of Scotland and Wales), has provided later interpreters with a wealth of moral oppositions which they affect to find appropriate to the 'Celtic/Anglo-Saxon' opposition more generally – community, brotherhood, nature and belonging ('Celtic') contrasted to hierarchy, urbanity and bureaucracy ('Anglo-Saxon'), for example. I discuss this kind of argument at length below, but it is worth noticing here that the opposition owes its substance partly to developments which occurred well after the Anglo-Saxon invasions, partly to anchoritic influences from the Middle East, and above all to retrospective interpretation. Roman British Christianity, in the imperial period, had many of the features which later came to characterise Anglo-Saxon Christianity – the urban episcopate, the relationship between spiritual and secular authority and structure, and so on. The invading Anglo-Saxons, moreover, had many of the features which later seemed to characterise the 'Celts' – tribal structure, rural society, and so on. It was the consolidation of Anglo-Saxon power, within a structure of geographically defined kingdoms, with secular and spiritual power closely interlocked, that defined, by opposition, the community of those people that we have come to call 'Celts'.

I have concentrated so far on some aspects of the boundary between the Saxons and the British (or Roman British), leading to the creation of Anglo-Saxon England and Welsh Wales. This concentration is, however, something of an anachronism. The period of the decline of the Western Empire saw considerable movement of people and their names everywhere in Europe. The Saxon movement to eastern England was only one of many such movements – Britons to northwest France, 'Irish' Gaels to Wales, the Isle of Man and the west of Scotland, and so on. When Gildas complains of the troubles besetting Britain, it is not only Saxons whom he reviles. Equally bother-

some were 'the foul hordes of Scots and Picts, like dark throngs of worms' (Gildas 19.1) (by 'Scots', Gildas meant inhabitants of Ireland, and by 'Picts', inhabitants of Scotland; the migrations of the Irish Scotti to Scotland were still in their early days). Scots, Picts and Saxons were, as far as Gildas was concerned, the same kind of pestilence. Any idea of 'Celtic' unity, which modern categories might impose, would have been nonsense to him.

Because of the importance which the Anglo-Saxon polity came to assume, and because modern English traces its lineage to Anglo-Saxon, the opposition between Anglo-Saxons, and all the previous occupants of Britain, has come to dominate our historiography. It was Anglo-Saxon England, and later Anglo-Norman England, which set the running in the evolving political and cultural institutions of the British Isles. And it was principally through this polity that the British Isles communicated with the Continent, and acquired Continental fashions and ambitions. The 'Celtic fringe', as historiographically constituted through its opposition to Anglo-Saxon England, remained a repository of older ideas and customs. The only thing 'Celtic' about these, however, was that they were *not* 'Anglo-Saxon'.

We have noted above that the Celts enter history in the writings of others. It was as a people of the fringe that they interested the few classical authors who wrote about them. The fringe in question was geographical, certainly, but it was also conceptual – a fringe territory of the social imagination of those that have left us our records. With the collapse of the classical world, the 'Celts', constituted in opposition to this world, disappeared; the structure of definition which gave them substance was destroyed. Terms related to 'Celt' and to 'Gaul' lapsed. The Germanic world which temporarily succeeded the Roman in large parts of northern Europe was also, however, a powerful defining force, with figures of 'otherness' on its own frontiers. One aspect of this was the appearance of a range of rather disparate cultures on the northern and western fringes of Britain, which all shared the fact that they were not 'Anglo-Saxon'. This range of disparate cultures did not think of itself as unitary, nor as 'Celtic'. Our retrospective definition has made it so, however. The 'Celts', in opposition to the classical world, disappear when that world disappears. They re-emerge, however, in opposition to the Germanic world. The two terms which have most significantly characterised them, *keltoi* and *walχaz*, are both terms given to a people by others, both meaning, in essence, 'people not like us'.

The Celts, therefore, in their two principal manifestations, are defined as the 'other' of the two dominant European traditions – doubly marginalised, so to speak. The appearance of a historio-graphical tradition joining the Welsh to the keltoi is, I think, in many respects a function of this. What the mediaeval Welsh (and Scots and Irish) and the Iron-Age keltoi have in common is not that the former are descended from the latter, but rather that both were fringe ele-ments in the dominant historiographical traditions of Europe. For this reason, the classical inheritance of commentary on the Celts has remained appropriate through to the present day, and has been much copied and elaborated.

The relevance of this for social anthropology is, perhaps, this: social anthropology finds its intellectual dynamic from a meeting of cultures – typically, a meeting of the culture of the ethnographer with the exotic of a 'primitive' culture. In the history of the European intellect, the Celts have represented, since the earliest records, a prominently available 'other culture' upon which the imagination could work. Much of our thinking about 'cultural difference' has its origin in thought and theory about this people of the fringe.[19] Eu-ropean order in the classical period threw into the Celtic fringe an imaginary subversion of social and moral order – a subversion that, by opposition, provided the ancients with a picture of their own rationality and ordered practice (see Chapter 11). Mediaeval English and Anglo-Norman commentary echoed many of these practices and perceptions, when it looked towards the strange wildness of Wales, Ireland and Scotland (see Chapter 12). And because mediaeval England always turned its ambitions for modernity towards European power and authority, the fringe followed the English trajectory, but always a step behind – thus sustaining a continuity of difference, and making the oldest commentaries seem relevant to modern concerns. The continuity between the Celts of the Iron Age, the Celts of early mediaeval Europe, and the Celts of the modern day, is not a simple continuity of genetic lineage, of culture, race or language. It is, rather, a continuity of symbolic opposition between a central defining power and its own fringes; this continuity can be, and has been, sustained, regardless of overwhelming changes in the cultural content involved. This argument runs counter to the common as-sumption of genetic continuity in its three different guises – linguistic, racial and cultural – and it is therefore appropriate to look at these in detail.

6
Celtic Continuity: Language

Comparative historical linguistics is a highly specialised and sophisticated subject. Its practitioners do not always agree among themselves about their results, but they alone are well-placed to take part in the argument. A non-specialist must be cautious, therefore; even so, there are some potentially useful contributions that anthropology can make in this domain.

Celtic linguistic continuity is in some ways the least controversial and most securely established aspect of the overall continuity. It is, indeed, often held to underwrite the others. It should be remembered, however, that the grouping, and the name, are a modern product. Classical terms ancestral to 'Celtic' were not primarily linguistic in their content or application. Nor was 'Celtic' the self-evidently correct term for the linguistic or ethnological grouping, when terms were being sought for these from the late fifteenth century onwards – a different choice of term might have had radically different historiographical consequences. It is not clear, either, how far the 'Celtic' languages of the ancient world were differentiated from other neighbouring language groups. Hybrid terms like 'Celtiberian', 'Celtoligurian' and 'Celtoscythian', which are attested in ancient Greek, suggest a blurring of categories which may conceivably have had linguistic parallels.[1] Modern scholars have fiercely argued the possibility that there was once a unity of the Italic and Celtic languages (and, with less conviction, that there was once a unity of the Celtic and Germanic languages), although these debates typically collapse conceptually before they can be answered empirically.

Historical linguisitics was brought to its zenith towards the end of the nineteenth century by a group of German scholars often called the 'Jung-grammatiker' (usually translated as 'neo-grammarians'[2]). The 'neo-grammarian' historical linguistic model was, in Ardener's words, 'a scythed chariot', carving its own path through reality, and ruthlessly disregarding what it considered irrelevances or unsystematic intrusions. This selection of relevance was justified by its results, but was nevertheless arbitrary in important respects.

Importantly for present purposes, the model maintained a distinction between 'genetic' systematics in the development of language, and intrusive external elements. As such, it well-suited the prevailing evolutionary historicism of nineteenth-century thought. Within the conventions of the model a core vocabulary, and a core system of changes, were involved in the genetic relationship of a language with its predecessors and successors. Borrowings from neighbouring languages were gathered into the model, but only as accretions which did not affect the main lineage – rather like the lineage of a royal house whose prestige and identity is unaffected by the marrying in of commoners and the marrying out of peripheral members, as long as the central line of succession remains unbroken. Ardener sums up the problem, referring to the defining features of the neo-grammarian model:

> [W]hat is it that makes it possible for a historical linguist to say that English 'continues' Old English and not Old French? This question was solved by the Neogrammarians in characteristic manner: a second row of protective conventions lay beyond the protective rules of analogy, loan-effect, and exclusion. These were: (1) 'there are no mixed languages'; (2) 'there are no substratum effects'. . . . In the case of some modern spoken Welsh it can be said to be, at the level of phrase and sentence, a calque upon English: a one-to-one code. In the terms of generative grammar the 'deep structure' is shared in part with English. Here the findings of the modern descendant of 'synchronic linguistics' clash with those of the traditional historical linguistics. For what is more 'historical' about Modern Welsh? Its English connections? Or those with Irish, Breton, and epigraphic Gaulish?
>
> (Ardener, 1971d: 220–1)

This question would probably receive an unequivocal answer from most Celtic scholars and language enthusiasts – it is the 'Celtic' connections which truly characterise the Welsh language; borrowings from English, at whatever level (semantic, syntactic and so on) are adventitious intrusions. This view of the nature of language and language-change has much in common with popular thought on the history of cultural forms, and has long found expression in the attempt of academic anthropology to deal with the same problem.[3] The neo-grammarian model of historical linguistics maintained, by definition, the integrity of linguistic lineage. In the dendritic model

of language development (see p. 15) the branches could only divide over time; they could never grow back into one another. This is another way of saying that 'there are no mixed languages'. Thus, a sentence in modern spoken Welsh which borrows most of its words and syntax from English, remains 'Welsh', and 'Celtic', within the terms of the model. This would be true even for the most 'mixed' examples:[4] 'It has been said that to understand Pembrokeshire Welsh you need only a working knowledge of English' (Charles, 1971: 103).

During my early attempts at conversation in colloquial Breton, I was struck by the phrase 'Anderson zo ur sacré joueur'; the reference was to a Nottingham Forest football player, after the European Cup of 1980. The phrase translates into French as 'Anderson est un sacré joueur', and into English as 'Anderson is a great player'. The question might justifiably be asked, what is more historical about this, its relationship with Latin, or with Insular Celtic (or, indeed, through Anderson, with Common Germanic)? Whatever answer we give to this question, the phrase is nevertheless still protected by the conventions of historical linguistics from being regarded, for example, as a curiously deformed kind of French.

The 'mixed language', defined out of existence by neo-grammarian linguistics, and by many subsequent trends, finds its reality in what have come to be called 'pidgins' and 'creoles'. Ardener noted:

> We have seen that the treatment of languages as if they were well-formed systems has led to great advances. An unsatisfactory treatment of pidgins was part of the price paid for those advances, for most of the efficient models of language have 'snipped out' pidgin phenomena, with the very shears that demarcated their field of operation.
>
> (Ardener, 1971b: lxxviii)

'Pidgins' and 'creoles' have attracted increasing linguistic attention in recent years,[5] but ideas developed from them have scarcely touched the security of the 'genetic' model of historical linguistics. The axiomatic nature, within this model, of 'genetic' relationship, and the equally axiomatic absence of 'mixed languages', provide an insight into the continuity of the Celtic languages. Continuity is *given in the model*, as is definitive difference from other language groups; the model cannot generate anything *other* than genetic linguistic continuity. Ardener, within a discussion of the 'historicity' of historical

linguistics, argues not only that there are strictly speaking no *people* inhabiting the categories of the Indo-European model, but also that the model and its reconstructions are 'timeless' (Ardener, 1971d: 214). The model is a formal summary of historically available evidence, not a means of going beyond this evidence into the unknown past. The 'history' which the model seems to generate is only there because the linguistic material is *already marked* in temporal sequence, on non-linguistic criteria.

It would, therefore, be interesting to watch a Martian philologist examining modern material, without access to the historical materials upon which our reconstructions of linguistic genealogy depend. We could give him access to a sample of the modern spoken languages of north-western Europe (say Scottish Gaelic, English, Welsh, French and Breton), but deny any access to historical or written material. We could then ask for speculation about the family relationships of the languages in question. Depending on the sample, it is perfectly possible that he would group Scottish Gaelic, English and Welsh as belonging to one family, and French and Breton as belonging to another. If he were also given adequate samples of Celtic, Germanic and Latin from 500 BC (supposing that we ourselves had access to these), what conclusions might he draw about the relationship between the modern languages and the ancient? Again, the result would not be self-evident. The 'Celtic' languages since the Iron Age have suffered great changes within themselves, as well as profound changes from contact with other languages. Latin has co-existed with them for as long as we have records, and the history of the surviving Celtic languages is intimately tied up with literary Latin. Germanic languages, too, have always been on the frontier; the Insular Celtic languages have been greatly influenced by Anglo-Saxon, by English, and by the many French influences that English contained (as well as by the inferred 'pre-Indo-European' languages of Britain). This is of course a traditional expression – a core of 'Celtic' features 'influenced' by 'external' factors. Imagine a sentence of modern spoken Breton, in which the word-order was obviously French, in which most of the lexical elements were borrowings (within recorded history) from either a Germanic or a Romance language, and whose early Common Celtic equivalent is in any case completely unknown. Our Martian philologist would not need to invent a family of Celtic languages to explain this phenomenon.

I give this imaginary example in order to draw attention to the very rarefied, even arcane, nature of the intellectual structure which

ties the modern 'Celtic' languages to the scant linguistic evidences of
early Celtic Europe. The model of historical linguistics defines its
own proprieties, and within its own terms it cannot be faulted (how-
ever much scholars may disagree *within* its conventions). The model
is constantly used, however, to serve purposes beyond its design – to
serve, for example, as a lineage of people or culture. The categories
of analysis are apparently the same (Celtic, Germanic and so on),
and the consequent misrepresentations are a constant and unsolved
problem in European historiography. The idea that the historical
linguistic model represents a true lineage of people and culture,
continuous and essentially uninfluenced from the outside, is an
inversion of the priorities of evidence, since it is dating provided by
non-linguistic features which feeds temporality into the linguistic
evidence. If we had only the linguistic evidence, temporally un-
marked, then the 'Celts', as a linguistic group, would look very
different.

These thoughts must be tied into previous comments about the
moral congruence of the Indo-European language model and the age
of European nationalism. The linguistic model responded to the
emerging national political unities of this age, and to the many
selective and self-serving constructions of history which these uni-
ties produced for their own glorification. Lineage was what the
politicians and intellectuals of the age of nationalism wanted, and
lineage was what the model of historical linguistics, *par excellence*,
provided. It is now relatively easy to see that many of the political
and ethnological histories of the period were deeply influenced by
contemporary political and symbolic requirements. Had the political
map of Europe over the last 200 years contained, say, a consolidated
Napoleonic Empire, or a consolidated Nazi Empire, then doubtless
the concerns of historians, their celebrations and suppressions, would
have been quite different.

Given the close relationship of linguistic and historical studies,
and political and moral enthusiasms, it is hard to believe that this
has not influenced historical linguistics in its conclusions. To estab-
lish this, however, would be a truly monumental task, an 'archaeol-
ogy of knowledge' indeed. It would require an intricate examination
of historical linguistics and linguists, and of the relationship be-
tween categories of analysis, selection and availability of data, moral
enthusiasms and political pressures. It would require at every
synchronic moment a knowledge of the hoped-for futures, of inter-
pretations of the immediate past, and an attempt at empathy with all

the histories which did not happen. The task is, in effect, the unpeeling of reality itself, and it is impossible. I invoke its ghost, however, because the nations constructed in Europe over the last 200 years *are* reality for us, and historical linguistics has been involved in their creation. If history could have been otherwise, and it clearly could, then it is no great step to argue that historical linguistics, also, would be changed. I do not simply mean that particular cases would be differently argued according to the political attachments of the linguists involved, for that is relatively easy to observe.[6] I mean, more fundamentally, that the very relevance of the structure of modern ethnic, political and intellectual life to the interpretation of ancient linguistic material is questionable, at the same time as it is inescapable. The field of speculation is an infinity of imaginary histories, and one can do little more than voice a doubt. Given the genetic lineage structure of the model of historical linguistics, and the intersection of linguistic and political categories in historical interpetation, 'continuity' of any named linguistic category is virtually bound to be generated. We might conclude that within its own strictly limited terms, the historical linguistic model defines a continuity from Gaulish to the modern Celtic languages. We can accept this, and move on to the continuity of people which the linguistic model is so often taken to imply.

7
Celtic Continuity: People

It will be clear by now that the notion of a finite, biologically defined and biologically self-reproducing population as the basis of an ethnic group is largely fictional. Before looking further into this, we can recall earlier thought on the subject. The nineteenth century was the great period of the formulation of racial theories in Europe. Theories about the nature of human races were not always coherent or consistent, but there was a general tendency to regard human races as the same kind of entity as biological species. Such a species is definable in one simple respect – it reproduces itself, and does not cross with other species. Today's fox population is descended from that of a thousand years ago. If there are more foxes today than there were then, this is a reproductive success, a population growth. If the foxes of today inhabit places that mediaeval foxes did not inhabit, then migration has occurred.

Popular representation of the histories of people has much in common with this model. Races are treated as if they were species, whose essential and primary mode of recruitment was by biological procreation, from within. If a named race appears to move, this is regarded as the result of mass migration. Those who speak of 'races' in this way would rarely try to defend the notion in such hard-edged terms, but the manner of expression, the racial categories, are often allowed to imply what would, if challenged explicitly, be withdrawn or qualified.

Nineteenth-century racial theory has not survived in modern anthropology. The various methods of racial classification have not proved to be scientifically sound or analytically useful.[1] They have, instead, proved to be based upon what we might call 'folk-perceptions' of difference, where the folk in question were intellectual Europeans. Once we are back in the realm of 'folk-perception' we are, of course, back in the area of human definition and self-definition which creates ethnic groups.

Many of the various linguistic, political, cultural and 'ethnic' changes and movements to which I have referred, imply the movement and reproduction of peoples. The idea of 'folk-perception'

helps us to understand the sustained appeal of explanations of this kind in human historiography. Nineteenth-century racial theories were congruent with very old features of human self-understanding. Theories of kinship, human relationship and reproduction, are among the oldest and most elaborate creations of the human imagination, as is attested both by our most ancient records, and by anthropological evidence of contemporary societies from around the world. The idea that a human group is defined and sustained by its capacity for biological reproduction is equally embedded.[2]

In an idealised clan system, for example, a group of men, women and children who constitute a 'clan', conceive of their clanship as consisting in common genetic origin. Typically, a clan considers all its members to be descended from one famous, fabulous and distant progenitor (we have seen, for example, that the kings of mediaeval Wales were tempted to trace their lineage to Homer's Aeneas). When anthropologists began to study existing clan systems closely, however, they discovered, not surprisingly, that the purported lines of descent of a modern clan were largely fictitious. Evans-Pritchard's study of the Nuer of southern Sudan is the *locus classicus* for this.[3] In every generation, the purported biological and genetic lineage of a clan is subject to potential reconstruction, according to a complex web of contemporary political and moral pressures. If political union with another clan is necessary, the genealogy can be re-jigged. If political schism is sought, then independent lineage can be imagined. If it becomes desirable to exclude certain people, then their alien nature can be given ancient genealogical origins. If it becomes desirable to incorporate strangers, then they can be found familiar genealogical clothes.[4]

In a completely oral context, the evidences of previous reconstructions are lost. We cannot know whether a genealogy is biologically true or not, and from a social point of view the objective truth is unimportant – the genealogy is *believed* to represent biological truth, and as such contains all the truth that social understanding needs.[5] In an oral society, there is not necessarily any competing record. With the appearance of literacy, a society encounters the problem of reconciling the latest creative reconstruction with the surviving written evidence of previous states of affairs. Even here, however, reconstruction need not stop, for the *biological* lineage continues to offer, as we will see below, a vast potential field for the exercise of genealogical creativity.

In the Celtic context, the most familiar (and indeed for many the

definitive) clan system is to be found in Scotland, particularly in the Highlands. Today, the clans have fallen prey to their nineteenth-century literary idealisation, and consider that the only proper recruitment to themselves can come from biological reproduction, particularly through the male line. Their theory is one of exclusion, a conceit of belonging for urban Gaels all over the world. When the clans were living social entities in the Highlands, however, up until (say) the mid-eighteenth century, they were essentially *inclusive*. Recruitment of any kind was necessary and desirable. The best clan was the biggest clan; the most powerful chief the one that could lead most men into the field. The theory of clan membership was biological, founded upon genealogy, but the genealogies were stretched to incorporate any willing body. Walter Scott had no illusions about this, and in *Waverley* (his first novel, published in 1814) he gives a fictionalised account of the nature of a Highland clan, the 'MacIvors', whose ambitious chief exerts all his powers to recruit to his name the maximum number of men – anyone 'willing to call himself a son of Ivor'. We might express the change thus: in the seventeenth century, if you were a member of the clan, you were biologically produced by it down the male line; in the twentieth century, if you are biologically produced by the clan down the male line, you are a member of it.[6]

Genealogical fictions of origin of the original Scottish Gaelic or Nuer kind are inherently expansionary. If the original founder of a clan (say ten generations ago) has given rise to a clan of several hundred members today, then the implication is that the population has increased several hundred-fold. Typically it has done no such thing, but the suppression of all but the most significant lines of genealogy promotes this illusion. This aspect of demography takes its ultimate form in myths of the Garden of Eden kind, where *all* mankind owes its origin to one man and one woman.

Races and languages are often conceived of as growing through time in an expansive, dendritic manner. Within a model of this kind, the 'Celts' of antiquity have reproduced themselves, moved and expanded, to give rise, by direct lineage, to the Celts of modern Europe. The very genuine periods of demographic growth over the intervening period lend verisimilitude to what is fundamentally an idealised, selective and fictional genealogy.

The best way to demonstrate this is to look at the genealogical process through the other end of the telescope. Let us imagine a family of two parents and an only child, in 1990. Then let us imagine

their ancestry, according to an idealised structure, wherein the intergenerational gap is always twenty-five years, and no ancestor is related to another by ties of consanguinity other than those directly generated by the model. The only child in 1990 thus has two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, sixteen great-great-grandparents, and so on. As we climb back through the generations, at this rate of multiplication, the number of ancestors of one individual meets the growing population of Europe sometime in the fourteenth century AD, and the growing population of the world sometime about a century prior to this. If we go back, for the sake of symmetry, to 510 BC, when our La Tène Celts were assiduously burying future archaeological finds, we have gone through 2500 years and 100 generations. The number of non-related direct ancestors that we have generated by this time is of the order of 10^{30} (1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000). We have no accurate population statistics for this early period, but it has been estimated that the population of Europe in the middle of the first millennium BC was approaching 20 million (2×10^7), and that of the world at the same time was approaching 100 million (10^8)[7]. Our hypothetical only child has, therefore, a hypothetical number of ancestors at this period which is 10^{22} times bigger than the world population of the time. Or we might put this another way: in order to keep the number of ancestors down to our estimated figure for world population in 510 BC, our only child must be descended from every individual through 10^{22} different routes. That is if we talk about world population. If we guess a figure for the Celtic population of Europe (3 million, say?) at this period, then the hypothetical figures are even more absurdly disproportionate.

Now, the social world of reproducing humans is not like this. Many aspects of this model are unreal. There is, of course, commonly and necessarily a considerable degree of consanguinity in any breeding population of human beings. Furthermore, a society commonly has rules and conventions which pose barriers to random mating; a degree of endogamy is produced, both by accident and design, by geographical features, and by linguistic, cultural and political affiliations. If, however, we try to imagine a distinct population unit, in 500 BC, trying to retain its biological integrity through sustained endogamy over 2500 years, we need only look at the figures given above to get some idea of the scale of the odds that such a unit is struggling against.

There is great uncertainty about the size of the demographic entities with which ancient history is implicitly dealing. One of the earliest documents of British history is the poem known as 'The Gododdin', attributed to the northern British poet Aneirin (or Neirin). It tells of 'three hundred men' who set out from the northern British kingdom of Gododdin in about AD 600, to destroy the emergent Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira.[8] The Gododdin were all killed in this unsuccessful attempt, with the exception of the poet who lived to tell the tale. Setting out for international strife with only 300 men seems foolhardy, and Jackson has argued that this figure must be understood as the nobility, each of whom would have had a large number of followers. He suggests a total figure of 3000.[9] Many others, however, have taken the figure of 300 as a proper count of the army in question.[10] If we do not know, to within a factor of ten, the scale of the entities involved, any suggestion of the nature and shape of biological lineage must be perilous. Nora Chadwick, writing of 'the colonization of Brittany from Celtic Britain', speaks of 'considerable displacements of population' (Chadwick, 1967: 268); Bowen, however, points out that:

> the distribution of population in Wales and Brittany in those days was very sparse indeed and the total number of people (Irish or British) who were 'on the move' must be reckoned in hundreds rather than thousands.
>
> (Bowen, 1968)

Consideration of the very small size of the 'nations' of this early period must make it all the more probable that we, in the modern period, share a cosy intimacy of genetic relationship with all of them.

A genealogy is often presented as a branching structure, showing the large number of modern-day descendants of some famous ancestor (Figure 7.1a). This structure is conceptually identical to that commonly used to express the growth and development of languages. It is in conceptual collusions of this kind that the unitary development of 'race, language and culture' can be imagined. The same figure, however, can also be drawn upside down, to represent the large number of erstwhile ancestors of a single individual in the modern day (Figure 7.1b). The inverted figure (b) is as real a genealogy as the more conventional (a). We might, indeed, profitably imagine the same inverted figure applied to the genealogies of cultures and languages, recalling the other aspects of 'Celtic continuity'.

Figure 7.1

(a)   (b)
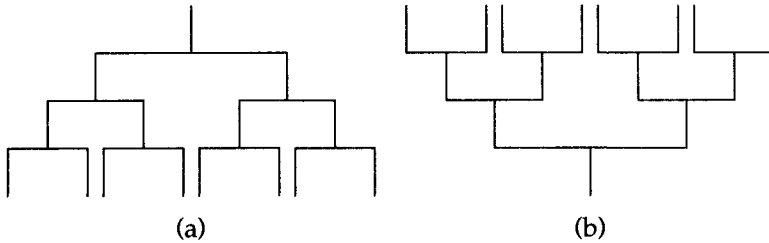
In demographic terms, we might sum the matter up thus: when it is said that Queen Elizabeth II is a direct descendant of King Alfred the Great, this does not mean that everybody else is *not* a direct descendant of this justly famous monarch. It means, rather, that the Queen is descended from King Alfred by a line which rules of inheritance and succession, and political fortunes, have combined to label the most privileged route through the genealogical web (a line which, incidentally, wanders around through the 'ethnicities' of Europe, 'Celtic' included, in a remarkably promiscuous manner). In fact, the chances are very good that almost everybody in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland is directly descended from King Alfred, by numerous intersecting routes.

Illustrating the problem through the genealogy of a royal house might seem unfair, since inter-dynastic politically inspired marriages induce a high degree of long-range exogamy, not typical of the peasantry. The principle of the argument stands, however. In all areas of Britain and Ireland in the last two millennia there has been continual movement of peoples. It is true that the most spectacular entries into the islands – the Belgic, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Norman – were in the south and east. These all, however, provoked movements to and from the north and west. In the light of the genealogical model offered above, 2000 years of coming and going must make nonsense of the notion that the nameable 'ethnic' groups of pre-Roman northern and central Europe have any privileged biological connection with nameable 'ethnic' groups of the modern day. Any individual today in the British Isles, wherever he or she lives, and whatever language he or she speaks, is as likely to be descended from a Roman soldier, a German mercenary, or a Viking raider, as from any prototypical Celt.

The survival of apparently biologically definable 'ethnic' groups is, therefore, a conceptual matter – a question of social, not of bio-

logical, reproduction. The naive view from many works on the mod-
ern Celtic peoples that they are 'descended' from the Celts of the
Iron Age can be summarily dismissed. Viewed at that distance,
everybody is descended from everybody.

    This genealogical nihilism absolves us of many fruitless pursuits.
Previous generations of scholars have puzzled over the question: If
the Celts were a race, what were their ideal physical characteristics?
Were they short, dark and swarthy (Welsh miners), or short and
dark with curly hair (Irish peasants), or tall and red-haired (Scottish
Highland warriors), or tall and fair (Greek *keltoi*, Latin *galli*)? There is
clearly no consistency about these observations; nor need such ap-
parent local uniformities as we might observe today have anything
to do with being 'Celtic'. We can take Ireland as an example, for it is
a place of which a scholar can say 'Ireland has remained the last
great stronghold of the early Celtic people' (Chadwick, 1970: 84).
The earliest indigenous Irish records, however, speak of a succession
of peoples: apparently indigenous Fir-Bolgs and Fomorians are dis-
placed by the Tuatha De Danann, themselves displaced by the Goidels
(who live alongside the remaining Irish Cruthin, better known in
Scotland as the Picts).[11] At this stage it seems to be entirely
unproblematic to call the Irish 'Celts' – say AD 500. All subsequent
invasions and admixtures are then alienated by the Celtic categorisa-
tion – Danes, Norwegians, Welsh, Normans, English, and so on. The
only uniform feature of the previous invasions (whatever their real
historical status, which is much disputed), is that they occur before
written historical records; all the early categories can be squashed
together as an ethnic uniformity, because there is no contrary voice.

    Another important aspect of this is the overwhelming practical
and historiographical importance which the successive Anglo-Saxon,
Anglo-Norman and English polities came to have in Britain and
Ireland. Within a definitional opposition as clear and stark as that
provoked by centralising England, little finesse of categorisation was
permitted among those who found themselves opposed to it. The
'taxonomic space'[12] required gross categories – Gaidheal, Cymry,
Irish, Scottish, Welsh. It is in this sense that we witness the apparent
disappearance (not historical, but historiographical) of entire races
from the islands of Britain and Ireland – the Picts being the examples
perhaps most conspicuously on the cusp between oral forgetfulness
and the written record (hence the 'problem' that they pose.[13]). The
same processes of taxonomic reorganisation went on within Ireland,
Scotland and Wales themselves, of course, even before the appear-

ance of centralising England, as the appearance of larger units led to the 'disappearance' of previous 'ethnicities'. The English intervention only accelerated and confirmed this process.

Any observation of physical discontinuity between two populations depends on the context, with boundaries and significance already pre-empted by the locally relevant structures of perception. We might imagine three objectively specifiable shades of hair colour, on an axis from black to white – say 'black', 'brown' and 'fair'. Then we can construct four populations, with the following percentages of different hair-colours:

1. 100% black
2. 50% black, 50% brown
3. 50% brown, 50% fair
4. 100% fair

It is probable that population 1 will speak of population 2 as 'having light-coloured hair'; that population 2 will speak of population 3 as 'having light-coloured hair'; and population 3 speak of population 4 as 'having light-coloured hair'. If we have a historical record, in which we are looking for evidences of the 'people with light-coloured hair', then populations 2, 3 and 4 will all seem to fall into this category, and will be grouped together in our historiography, on apparently objective physical grounds; this is without any consideration of the inevitable complications due to variable bounding of colour categories in different languages. I choose the example of hair colour, because very early evidences for the physical appearance of the 'Celts' seem to exhibit some features of this otherwise hypothetical example.[14] The boundaries of the category 'black' or 'coloured', as used in popular racial representations in western Europe, might serve as a modern analogy.

The pursuit of specifiable physical characteristics was particularly avid in the nineteenth century, when it was fashionable to regard head-shape as a typical and enduring aspect of racial identity. Much time and energy went into the measurement and definition of the brachycephalic (short-headed) and dolicocephalic (long-headed) peoples. Attempts were made to tie ethnic groups to these physical measurements, and to correlate them with cultural features (for example, long-heads with long-barrows; short-heads with round-barrows) – attempts which, in view of the essentially semantic, non-physical nature of any ethnic group, were essentially futile. More

recent ethno-biological research has centred upon the distribution of blood-groups;[15] this work is of great interest, but it does not provide us with any secure linkage between the 'ethnic' groups constructed in our historiography, and those that biology might provide.[16]

Given the historiographical importance of the Anglo-Saxon/Anglo-Norman/English polity, it is not surprising that the question of racial or biological continuity has been most fiercely debated in relation to the coming of the 'Anglo-Saxons' to 'Celtic Britain'. There are intriguing linguistic and social features here, in contrast to the ostensibly Germanic invasions of other parts of the Roman Empire. The Frankish occupation of Gaul, for example, led to the apparent linguistic assimilation of the conquerors by the conquered, with Frankish disappearing as a language, and the vulgar Latin of Roman Gaul reappearing as early French. This is a strikingly different course of linguistic events to that which occurred in lowland Britain. In the English context, the central evidences are Gildas's visions of disaster in Roman Britain, and the striking absence of 'Celtic' words borrowed into Anglo-Saxon. Together, these gave rise to the long-popular theory that the Anglo-Saxons did not, like the Franks, come as a conquering minority aristocracy, content to rule the previously existing population; they came, rather, *en masse*, and killed or drove out all the previous inhabitants, establishing themselves in their place.

This interpretation suited nineteenth century discourse, in which the ancient war of the races was held to prefigure modern national rivalries. It was popularised in England by the historians J. R. Green (1877) and E. A. Freeman (1888). In a discourse in which language, culture and race were regarded as consubstantial, then the evidence admitted of no other interpretation: if the Celtic language had disappeared, then so had the Celts. Green argued that the Teutonic conquest of England after Roman withdrawal:

> had been complete. Not a Briton remained as subject or slave on English ground. Sullenly, inch by inch, the beaten men drew back from the land which the conquerors had won; and eastward of the line which the English sword had drawn all was now purely English.
>
> (Green, 1877:28[17])

This conclusion has since been much contested. Some argued that the Anglo-Saxons, like the Franks, only came in small numbers, and that the bulk of the English population remained physically 'Celtic',

adopting the language of their conquerors.[18] This interpretation is supported by a more considered view of the linguistic evidence. As Windisch noted some time ago, when two languages are in contact, and one is more socially prestiguous than the other, the speakers of the unfashionable language commonly borrow words from the prestige language, while the speakers of the prestige language have no incentive to borrow words from the unfashionable language.[19] For bilinguals, the prestige language remains little affected by the unfashionable language; the unfashionable language, on the other hand, is deeply and self-consciously influenced by the prestige language, becoming more and more like it, and dying out as monolingualism in the prestige language succeeds bilingualism. As Jespersen quite correctly says, 'in the Brittany of today, people will interlard their Breton talk with French words, while their French is pure, without any Breton words' (Jespersen, 1945: 36); and 'we need look for no other explanation of the fewness of Keltic words in English' (ibid.: 37 [20]).

This argument provides no proof, of course, but is at least compatible with large-scale survival of the British, incorporated into an Anglo-Saxon definition. Interpetation still remains a matter of taste, however. Fleure and Geipel take a fashionable view:

> There can be little doubt that a large part of the physical inheritance of a great proportion of the present population of the country is derived from its pre-Roman inhabitants.
>
> (Fleure, 1922: 19)

> Like all the Europeans, we are mongrels and our ancestry is perhaps more tangled than most. It seems likely, however, that the later arrivals – Romans, Saxons, Vikings and Normans – although they came as conquerors and their coming was recorded – contributed appreciably less to the ethnic make-up of the islanders than did the older-established peoples.
>
> (Geipel, 1969: 164)

Loyn, however, says:

> There is need, however, to guard against a modern tendency to look for Celts under every stone. The most scientific and aloof of philologists and historians is not immune from currents of opinion, and it must be admitted that at present continuity is fashion-

able, abrupt break is not; survival of Celtic peoples, even if cultur-
ally negative, is fashionable, emphasis on pure Germanic is not.
                                                        (Loyn, 1962: 12)

Rehearsing all the linguistic, archaelogical and anthropological evi-
dence for and against 'Celtic survival' would provide no final answer.
Common sense suggests some kind of compromise between the two
extreme positions, and some degree of reproductive contact between
the two 'populations'. There might, indeed, have been periods when
British female survival and reproduction was easier than British
male survival, given male predominance in armed affray. Archaeo-
logical evidence has been adduced to support this idea.[21] This glimpse
of a possible real masculine/feminine imbalance, on an Anglo-Saxon/
Celtic axis, could be seen as an early confirmation of what has come
to be an enduring structural relationship in the history and
historiography of these two categories. The 'masculinity' of the Anglo-
Saxon, and the 'femininity' of the Celt, were popular ideas in nine-
teenth-century racial theory (see p. 216).[22]

    The fact that the evidence will not allow us to answer the question
'did the British survive?', is perhaps our best clue to the nature of the
question itself. The categories which history gives us to make sense
of its events, are categories created by, and specific to, given social
worlds. Society defines its own purity and mixture, continuity and
discontinuity. Statements about the existence and survival of human
populations, from within the populations themselves, have a very
different status from statements about animal populations. Within
the terms of discussion and understanding in Anglo-Saxon England,
the British did not survive. Of that there is no doubt. This statement,
however, tells us nothing at all about the relative *genetic* or *physical*
survival of the pre-invasion inhabitants of Britain in lowland areas.
Like a Nuer clan, or a Scottish Highland clan, the Anglo-Saxons
defined the terms of their own contemporary existence and geneal-
ogy; British origin or not, there were no Britons among them.

    Considerations of this kind lead us not to any solution of the
problem, but to a renunciation of the terms in which it is commonly
posed. When it became obvious that the idea of discrete races was
untenable, many writers backed away slowly, arguing (as we have
seen Geipel doing above) that most peoples were a 'mixture of
races', or grudgingly conceding that there was 'no such thing as a
pure race'; as if there once had been 'pure races', which history had
muddled up. The analogy with my presentation of the history and

definition of languages is a close one. Geipel uses the term 'mongrel' to describe a 'racial mixture', and the peculiarly offensive nature of the term is entirely social in origin. Of course we are all 'mongrels', always, everywhere and everybody. But purity is the property of those who accord it to themselves. It would be a brave or foolish physical anthropologist who went up to Niall of the Nine Hostages, Hywel Dda, Malcolm Canmore, Urien of Rheged, Nechtan the Pict, Penda of Mercia, Offa of the Dyke, Alfred the Great, William of Normandy, Henry Tudor or George the Fifth, and told him that he was a mongrel.

The deeply socialised nature of our categories for people is pleasantly exemplified by Geipel's *The Europeans – An Ethno historical Survey* (1969). This work, in common with many similar volumes,[23] has a selection of photographs of 'living European types' (which earlier works would have called 'European racial types'). Many points of interest and entertainment can be had from these, but keeping to Celtic and Teutonic examples, Geipel shows pictures of:

A Scots girl from Aberdeen
An English schoolgirl
Ivor Emmanuel, a Welsh singer
An English gipsy
An Irish turf-cutter from Connemara
A Breton fisherman

(Geipel, 1969: 148ff)

The presentation makes it plain that these examples are chosen for their physical typicality; indeed, to the British eye they look like what they are supposed to look like: but the clues are all social, and include the captions themselves. From forty photographs, and leaving aside the sexual difference, there are few interchanges of caption and photograph which would not be equally credible to the reader. The Scots girl carries evidence of the white bread, the chips and the hairstyles of Aberdeen in the 1960s. The English schoolgirl, with ribboned plaits, drinks her free post-war welfare-state school milk through a straw. Ivor Emmanuel is a dark handsome singer, like all Welsh men. The English gipsy looks like General Montgomery in need of a shave, sunburnt and suspicious. The Irish turf-cutter, whose head does not speak his typical peasant status as clearly as his caption, has a pudding basin haircut and a truculent expression. The Breton is a fisherman, unshaven, with a large beret, a thick mous-

tache, and the look of somebody who probably drinks and smokes a good deal. The categorisations and perceptions involved are all, in a sense, real enough: they are not, however, physical, but social, like genealogy itself; they belong not in any objective record, but in the cultural inventory of folk-ethnography in north-western Europe.

Physical anthropologists, even today, often accept as units of analysis *socially* defined units, part of whose social definition is supposed biological singularity; the *social* definition is primary, but it is the putative biological singularity which attracts attention. This last is, however, often elusive, when inspected closely. The recent study, by Oxford-based physical anthropologists, of the region near Oxford known as 'Otmoor', is an interesting example. The people of Otmoor had long had a reputation among their neighbours as somewhat backward, inbred and peculiar, and there was no doubt that this reputation had spread as far as Oxford University intellectual life. When Oxford physical anthropologists wanted a 'population' with limited in- or out-migration for scientific study, they chose this population; limited migration echoes the popular notion of incest, and limited contact the popular notion of backwardness, and it seems at least plausible that the scientific selection of the area of study here was partly influenced by folk-perceptions of this kind. Professor Geoffrey Harrison, who led the study, has said that the choice of Otmoor was solely determined by the existence of long and full parish records for the area, although Macbeth provides a slightly different account.[24] It is at least no surprise, given the supposed singularity of the 'Celtic' peoples, that they continue to attract the attention of physical anthropologists.

Harvey et al. (1986) have looked at the question 'How Celtic are the Cornish?' from a physical anthropological point of view. Their answer might be crudely summarised as 'no more Celtic than anybody else', although they clearly expected (and hoped for) biological data which would tie the Cornish to the Welsh, Irish, Breton and the rest, and structured their argument to this end. Their results are compatible with my argument that the category 'Celtic' is entirely social in construction – as, indeed, are all the other purportedly 'biological' categories that they use for comparative analysis. They use, for example, the case of the 'Pays Bigouden' in Brittany. This has a reputation in Brittany rather like that of Otmoor in Oxfordshire, and has attracted the attention of physical anthropologists in France; Harvey et al. refer to this work:

> The most recent blood group survey to have been published for
> Brittany concerns the Bigoudens who live in the extreme south-
> west of Finistere (Youinou *et al*, 1983). According to Cornou and
> Giot (1973) The Pays Bigouden is the most characteristic Breton
> district, for the region was settled almost exclusively from
> Brythonic and Goidelic language-speaking areas of the British
> Isles, including Cornwall, Wales and Ireland, in the sixth century.
> The inhabitants do, however, exhibit certain curious pathological
> features, for example a high incidence of congenital dislocation of
> the hip and a substantial occurrence of a monoclonal gammapathy.
> Thus there is a suggestion that cultural isolation and inbreeding
> may have influenced the genetic structure of this population.
> (Harvey et al., 1986: 195[25])

These reflections particularly interest me, since the 'Pays Bigouden'
was the immediate neighbour of the area in which I carried out
fieldwork in Brittany. The 'Pays Bigouden' is indeed, as Harvey
believes, 'the most characteristic Breton district', for the striking
headwear of its women, the 'bigouden coiffe', has become a national
and international image for Brittany entire (though it is now worn
only by a few elderly women, and in folkloric festivals). It is mere
naivety, however, of a kind encouraged by the otherwise excellent
work of Cornou and Giot, to suppose that this 'characteristic' nature
is ancient, and based upon demographic and biological distinctive-
ness dating back 1500 years. The 'Pays Bigouden', as a conceptual
entity, is no more than a century old; the term 'bigouden', of obscure
etymology, was first used of a coiffe (quite different in form and
distribution from the modern version) in the 1830s, and the idea of a
'pays' attached to this coiffe is an urban sentiment about rural life,
closely associated with the growth of food industries in the region,
and the appearance of railways and tourism.[26] The 'Pays Bigouden',
like Otmoor, has a reputation for biological peculiarity and inbreed-
ing, although the most popular local folk-theory for the singular
demographic origin of the Bigoudens has nothing to do with Celts,
deriving them instead from Mongolia.[27] The reputation for inbreed-
ing, apparently supported by the locally notorious congenital hip-
dislocation, may be partly justified, but this, again, is recent and
social in origin; the *Code Napoléon* required that inheritance pass
equally to all siblings: inbreeding in areas like the 'Pays Bigouden'
resulted from a desire among wealthier farmers to keep property

within a small family circle. It had nothing to do with 'cultural isolation', and much to do with peasant economic prudence, another locally well-recognised phenomenon.

Social definition of singularity, for a population, is compelling, and often carries with it a notion of ancient genealogy. At the same time, however, categories defined by *social* definition are malleable and temporary: today's modernity may be rewritten tomorrow as ancient lineage; today's ancient lineage may be forgotten next week. Physical anthropologists who are unaware of this kind of problem run the risk of gravely misinterpreting the nature of their evidence.[28]

A major problem in the construction of ethnic lineages is that many ethnic and national unities of the early period were sea-based, not land-based. Anglo-Saxon power, for much of the invasion period, centred not in England, but somewhere in the North Sea; British power focused not in Wales, but in the waters surrounding western Britain and north-western France; Gaelic unity was based upon the ease of sea-communications betweeen northern Ireland, Man, and the islands and peninsulas of south-western Scotland.[29] This is in stark contrast to the later land-based political unities. The conceptual and taxonomic space occupied by the earlier ethnic entities differed greatly from that later constructed, although the same ethnic labels occur in both. The attempt to drive the lineage of land-based political entities through the earlier structure has led to much misinterpretation.

As already noted, the retrospective importance of the Anglo-Saxon/Celtic confrontation in Britain has led to a concentration of interest upon the Anglo-Saxon invasions of eastern England, and the Romano-British response to this. For this reason the survival of the British represents 'a desperately contentious problem' (Loyn, 1962: 5). Many other ethnically similar events were occurring in Europe and the British Isles at the same time, however: the colonisation of south-west Wales from Ireland; the colonisation of west Scotland from Ireland; the colonisation of Brittany from south-west Britain, and so on. Each of these implies a displacement of indigenous peoples – Welsh Britons, Picts, Gallo-Romans and so forth. In different historical circumstances, with different national and historiographical concerns, any one of these might have become 'desperately contentious', and grown upon itself a rich bloom of ethno-nationalist argument. It is interesting that, of the three examples cited, the only one that has become 'desperately contentious', concerns the invasion of Brittany, which has crucial features in common with the Anglo-Saxon example – the modern historiographical confrontation of a

centralising state (England or France), and a 'Celtic' minority (the Welsh or Bretons). Argument has eddied, throughout this century, around questions like: are the Bretons Celts by virtue of being the descendants of the Gauls, or by virtue of being the descendants of the British colonists? Did the British colonists kill all the Gauls, or intermingle with them, or simply rule them as a minority aristocracy? And so on. The issue has developed elaborate linguistic, political, moral and orthographic convolutions.[30]

The contemporary Scottish examples are interesting. It is at least a possibility that the Gaels (under whatever title), who invaded and colonised western Scotland in the fifth and sixth centuries AD and gave a language and an origin to the dominant lineages of early mediaeval Scotland, might be seen as having disrupted the genuine and original Pictishness of Scotland. One might imagine deep discussion about the essential antipathy of Gael and Pict, and fierce argument about whether the brutal Gaels killed and enslaved the Picts, or intermarried with them, or simply ruled as a minority over a majority Pictish population (in which case Scotland could still be regarded as racially true to its essential Pictish identity). The absence of such a debate has nothing to do with any real difference between the British/Anglo-Saxon meeting and the Pictish/Gaelic meeting. It is, rather, the product of a long-standing historiographical requirement – the need to make Scotland different from England. Gaelic/Pictish confrontation is of no use in this (anymore than Gaelic/British confrontation over the British kingdoms of southern Scotland and northern England – Strathclyde, Manau Gododdin, Rheged, etc.). Whatever *really* happened, in popular historiography the Picts merge into the Gaels with scarcely a murmur of dissent.

One might, indeed, within a different modern geo-politics, regard the Anglo-Saxon occupation of south-eastern Scotland (which was, after all, contemporary with the Gaelic occupation of western Scotland) as the essential element in the founding of modern Scotland. Given that a Germanic language descended from Anglo-Saxon has been the language of power, wealth and authority in Scotland for most of the last millennium, and the native language of the great majority of those who have ever called themselves 'Scots', this might seem the obvious and objective line of descent to choose for modern Scotland. That would be to share a lineage with England, however. Scotland in general has not taken the very real opportunity provided by historical and linguistic fact to define itself as Anglo-Saxon. Nor has it tried to define itself as Pictish, in opposition both to Gael and

Anglo-Saxon. It has, on the whole, settled for a Celtic and Gaelic
definition, in pursuit of difference from England. This accounts for
the extraordinary efflorescence of Highland and Gaelic imagery in
the self-presentation and assumed genealogy of modern Scotland.
There are many interesting aspects to this,[31] but one small and re-
vealing example is provided by the linguistic categories themselves.
In Scotland, the label 'Old Scottish' is used for the literature of the
thirteenth to sixteenth centuries (Barbour, Dunbar and so on). In
England, the label 'Old English' is used for the literature of the pre-
Norman Conquest period, from the sixth to the eleventh century.
The 'Anglo-Saxon' origin of Scottish literature is thus tacitly ob-
scured, although all of 'Old Scots', in these terms, is descended from
Anglo-Saxon. Moreover, in many bookshops, 'Old Scots' literature,
in a language derived from the same influences as modern English,
is shelved under 'Celtic'. So it was that a border Scot, born within a
few miles of England, and brought up speaking and writing a lan-
guage of Germanic origin, should change his name in order to speak
for Scotland. Christopher Grieve, whose surname derives from Old
Northumbrian *groefa* (meaning 'governor of a province', or later
'overseer'), changed his name for literary and political purposes to
Hugh Macdiarmid, thus providing himself at a stroke with a Gaelic
lineage going back to the mythological heroes of the Irish heroic age.
The fantasy and reality-denial thus exemplified is only an extreme
example of a tendency running right through modern Scottish iden-
tity.

I have so far cited 'invasions' and 'ethnic mixtures' that are roughly
contemporary with the Germanic invasions of eastern and southern
England in the post-Roman period. Similar points can be made
about other examples in different eras. In Ireland, for instance, the
importantly formative Norse urban settlements of the ninth and
tenth centuries have been rendered virtually invisible by
historiographical concentration upon the 'Gaelic' and 'Celtic' defini-
tion of Irish identity. The various Anglo-Norman, Norman-Welsh
and English interventions in Ireland, which must be regarded as
having created modern Ireland as it is experienced by most of its
inhabitants today, are all alienated by a concentration upon the
Gaelic genealogy – the aspect most apt, within modern Irish nation-
alist endeavour, to express difference from England. Again, the ge-
nealogy is socially and politically conditioned, and it induces a near-
pathological partiality in the telling of history, understandably per-

ceived as 'schizophrenia' by many who have puzzled over its manifestations.[33]

A similar blindness exists in relation to the long-term Norwegian domination of the islands and seaboard of Scotland.[34] The Outer Hebrides, now the last stronghold of Scottish Gaelic, were for much of the Middle Ages an area primarily or exclusively Norse in speech (like Iceland, Orkney, Shetland and the Faroes). Evidences of this are retained in place-names and personal names in the Scottish Islands, and the Outer Hebrides are collectively known in Gaelic as 'Innse-Ghall', 'the foreigners' islands'. Apart from toponymic evidence, however, there is an 'almost total loss of awareness in modern Gaelic oral tradition that there was at any time a powerfully established Norse-speaking . . . population in the Hebrides' (MacDonald, 1984). The genealogy has been re-jigged, in both oral and literary discourse, and the Hebrides are now the most 'Gaelic' and 'Celtic' parts of Scotland.

8

Celtic Continuity: Culture

The people whom scholars call 'Celts' emerge in archaeological and literary record in the first millennium BC, and are associated with a series of retrospectively defined archaeological culture-types even before their incorporation in the Roman Empire – Urnfield, Hallstatt and La Tène. This last is often seen as the culmination of Celtic cultural achievement, and modern 'Celtic' artists and craftsmen often imitate its styles. The curvaceous asymmetries of La Tène decorative work are justly admired, and an entire comparative morality is often poured into their interpretation, as we shall see.[1] Even within the archetypical Iron-Age Celts, however, there are styles rolling over the people whose ethnic integrity we assume.

If we look at Iron-Age Europe, as we know it from classical records and archaeological evidence, and then at the Celtic fringe today, the cultural context is clearly changed out of all recognition. The same is true, of course, for modern and ancient Tuscany and modern and ancient Kent. Everywhere, there have been great changes in social organisation, economy, settlement patterns, religion, clothing, symbolism – everything. It is an entirely artificial exercise to pretend otherwise. Trying to draw Celtic cultural continuities out of this might, therefore, seem pointless. Virtually every general book on 'The Celts', however, argues in some sense for cultural continuity between the Iron-Age Celts and the Celts of the modern day. The works of Anne Ross typify this habit, but it is very widespread.[2] The model of genetic continuity, which we have already encountered in several guises, predisposes us to imagine cultural continuities. The Celts of Iron-Age Europe are often presented as a people with a culture specific to them, a culture gradually eroded over the succeeding millennia. True Celtic culture has been replaced, in this model, by alien and intrusive cultural forms, yet a trace of authenticity always survives, to show that we are dealing with the real thing. Powell observes that, through the work of Anne Ross:

> We can edge nearer to Celtic pagan modes of thought; in fact the wielding of magic through spell-binding and through shape-

shifting, has left a very deep impression: one that is not yet quite dead even today.

(Powell, 1968: 151).

This model of the replacement of Celtic culture by external forms is much like the previously discussed model of the progressive change of the Celtic languages – a thread of continuity is preserved by definition, and changes intrude as external and definitionally 'non-Celtic' influences. Yet innumerable waves of change, fashion and innovation have, in the last 2000 years, swept over the areas and peoples that we might call 'Celtic'. They have shared these changes indiscriminately with the other 'peoples' of Europe – or at least, the dividing line between 'Celtic' and 'non-Celtic' (however we might draw this) has formed no systematic barrier.

What *has* been systematically true, however, throughout recorded history, is that the Celts (in their Greek, Roman and English guises) have been on the edge of a more dominant world; indeed, this formulation is close to being a tautology: the Celts have not found themselves by chance on the edges of someone else's world, but have been historiographically constituted as peripheral, and this condition is a fundamental feature of their definition.

A central defining power establishes and controls fashion, and is a centre of innovation. As it elaborates new fashions, it consciously differentiates itself from the periphery, which it finds old-fashioned or unfashionable. The periphery notices new fashions emanating from the centre and seeks to emulate them. By the time it has successfully done so, however, the centre has moved on, and the fashions which the periphery has laboriously acquired are unfashionable once again. This process has gone on for as long as we have records, and it is of the first consequence for understanding 'the Celts'. Because 'the Celts' have consistently been peripheral, they have always seemed backward and strange to the centre, from which our theories of the social world were typically constructed.

The process which I have described does not move directly between two points, a centre and an edge, but is a continuous ripple outwards from a centre towards a periphery. Any part nearer the centre can function as the centre for any part further away; any part nearer the periphery can function as the periphery for any part nearer the centre. If you stand at the centre and look out, everything is periphery. If you stand at the edge and look in, everything is centre. These are extreme conditions, however. For most people, the

centre is in one direction and the periphery in the other. The process is not, of course, simply spatial and geographical; it occurs also through *social* structures; the town can be a centre to the village; the middle-class suburb to the working-class suburb; the drawing room to the stable and kitchen; the big house to the croft. . . .

These are very general statements, and it is not always clear where the centre and periphery are. Political, economic and cultural centres are not always in the same place. Different centres compete. Local centres might draw fashion in different directions from national centres. Centrality changes over time. Nevertheless, in recorded European history, it is often easy to see the general patterns of centrality. For the Roman imperial world, centrality lay on the northern Mediterranean shore, particularly in Rome, with a subdominant cultural centre in Greece, and a growing alternative power in Constantinople. The 'Germanic' invasions bring confusion, although we might think of these as a continuation of a tendency, already present in the Empire, for European centrality to move to the north. In the British Isles, for several centuries after the *adventus saxonum*, it was not clear where the centre was, nor where it would be. The primacy of the south-east, however, ultimately re-asserted itself, and London has a fair claim to continuous centrality throughout the post-Roman period.

Centrality is not only a political, economic, social, cultural and demographic fact, but also a focus for written history. The production and consumption of written histories, and of the various kinds of comparative cultural commentary, have always been closely tied to centrality in other respects. What history gives to us most readily is a view from the centre.

The cultural processes involved in the relationship of centre and periphery have much to do with the phenomena of 'ethnicity' and 'identity' – ways of being like and unlike other people. The periphery, in its most common guise, is best regarded as systematically aspiring to be 'like' the centre. To achieve this, it adopts what it perceives as sophisticated and modern habits emanating from the centre. The periphery can be regarded as a rolling frontier, which might find temporary realisation anywhere between a centre and an edge. An intermediate periphery of this kind aspires to be 'like' a centre distant from itself, and 'unlike' a position still more peripheral than its own. In the case of the extreme geographically periphery, however, while the centre is still externally realised, *the society which the periphery is trying to be unlike is itself*. Such a situation, brought to

collective self-consciousness, would readily breed a sense of cultural insecurity. Few writers from the Celtic fringe would deny this sense (although their explanations of it might differ widely); indeed, this very sense of insecurity is frequently the dominant subject of fringe literature.

This insight helps to account for the often life-and-death aspect of politico-cultural debate in the fringe. A cultural feature which began as an innovation at the centre and has passed across the entire social map, adopted as fashionable and abandoned as outmoded, finds its last objective location on the fringe. The decision to abandon it, when it is on the fringe, consigns it to oblivion. This same decision has perhaps been made many times before, by many other people, before it is made for the last time in the fringe. The same importance is not attached to it elsewhere, however, for its consequences are not so obviously irrevocable. On the fringe, the decision is final. It is easy to see, then, how the fringe dwellers come to be seen as occupants of history, guardians of tradition, and so forth, with moral responsibility for the preservation of heritage.

In recent decades, this role has been systematically thrust upon the Celtic fringe. It is not, however, necessarily a role which we should expect fringe-dwellers to be happy to fill. Indeed, it is manifestly unfair to do so, and many people in the Celtic fringe are either indifferent to, or justifiably impatient of, this role. Why should they not modernise, as everybody else has? The decision to do so, in their immediate personal circumstances, is no different in its causes than a similar decision taken anywhere else, which might pass entirely without comment.

The historical baseline for the construction of the original Celtic cultural order varies greatly. For some commentators, it is in the pre-Roman Iron Age, and the general sense of antiquity evoked by this colours all other possible constructions. Many commentators, however, have laid the baseline of inviolate Celtitude close to their own experience – in the youth of the existing senior generation, in the recollections of this generation, or simply in the youthful experience of the commentators themselves. These are typical features of the construction of 'tradition' in all contexts, of course. The disappearance of ancient tradition, in this sense, is continuous; its last vestiges are *always* on the point of dying out, but in practice never actually do so, for the content of 'ancient tradition' is redefined in every generation. Nothing, indeed, more characterises the lament for dying Celtic traditions, than its evergreen poignancy: Tacitus, in AD 98, wrote

of the Britons abandoning their native language and dress for Ro-
man fashions; Giraldus Cambrensis, in the late twelfth century, wrote
of the Welsh and Irish being converted to Anglo-Norman habits;
Donald Munro, Dean of the Isles, wrote in 1549 of the impending
disappearance of ancient practices in the Scottish Highlands and
Islands, as did John Leslie, Bishop of Rosse, in 1596; George Buchanan,
in 1582, found Munro's comments appropriate to his own time;
Hugh Blair, two centuries later, publicised Macpherson's Ossian
with a warning of the imminent disappearance of this ancient tradi-
tion; J. F. Campbell, in 1860, called the Highland stories that he
collected 'curious rubbish about to perish'; Alexander Carmichael,
in 1900, said of his informants 'they are almost all dead now, leaving
no successors'; J. L. Campbell, in 1950, said 'the time is short. In
another ten years most of this material will have perished forever':
so the story will doubtless continue.[3]

Not all cultural features become marked or noticeable in this
process, of course: nobody will necessarily notice or lament the
passing of the last valve wireless, the last asbestos roof. Yet every-
thing is *potentially* apt to the discourse of survival and difference,
tradition and loss. This is pleasingly demonstrated by two deservedly
popular films, *The Maggie* and *Local Hero*. Both concern the meeting
of traditional Scottish Highland life with intrusive and thrusting
modernity, but they are from different periods. *The Maggie* was made
in 1953: traditional Highland life is represented by a broken-down
coastal steamer and its endearingly warm-hearted, feckless and
quarrelsome crew. Steam power, the modernity of all modernities
for the nineteenth-century industrial world, has been assimilated to
Highland tradition; opposed to it is a heartless acquisitive American
entrepreneur, who is eventually won over to the peace and charm of
the Highland way of life. *Local Hero* tells a similar tale, but in 1981:
here, the story is of another intrusive materialistic American, who
wishes to develop a petrochemicals installation on the beautiful
Scottish Highland coastline. He, like his predecessor in *The Maggie*, is
won over to higher things through the philosophy and idealism of
an old local inhabitant, and abandons his industrial plans. In *The
Maggie*, the lovable old-fashionedness of the Highlands is recur-
rently marked by the capricious breaking-down of the leaky old
steam engine of 'the Maggie' herself. In *Local Hero*, the same sym-
bolic part is played by the capricious behaviour of the village public
telephone (in a red telephone box, with buttons A and B, familiar
enough to any Briton over 30), through which American industrialists
try, and usually fail, to make urgent international phonecalls. Here

telecommunications, the one-time prime modernity of the twentieth century, is used, like steam power before it, to characterise the 'traditional Highlands'.[4]

As already noted, the discourse of tradition, innovation and cultural abandonment imposes a tacit moral burden upon the last holders of any cultural feature: language and place of residence provide perhaps the most keenly felt examples. The change from Celtic languages to English (or French, in the case of Brittany) has throughout been led by demand. Speakers of Celtic languages have voluntarily and enthusiastically learnt English, and tried to ensure that their children spoke English fluently. They have abandoned bilingualism as soon as this was practical, in favour of English monolingualism. This process has gone on, over an ever-moving frontier, for centuries. In recent decades, however, it has become apparent that the logical outcome of this – the complete disappearance of the Celtic languages – is not far away. Moral responsibility to preserve these languages seems, therefore, to fall upon the shoulders of those few who still speak them. Concern for the preservation of languages is typically an intellectual concern, for intellectuals are language specialists *par excellence*. Many intellectuals in recent years have tried to impose this responsibility upon the remaining speakers of Celtic languages. This is, effectively, asking them to abandon the traditional and long-standing practice of their culture, which is to seek replacement of the Celtic language by English, and to implement instead a radical novelty – attachment to their language for its own sake. Most speakers of Celtic languages have responded to this with the usual splendid indifference of the ordinary man for intellectual concerns, so that the real decline of the Celtic languages has continued unabated. A considerable smokescreen of argument and literary endeavour has been thrown up around this continuing process, however, and a naive outside observer might easily conclude that the processes of decline had been reversed.[5]

One interesting feature of this smokescreen is the attempt to absolve those who have abandoned, and are abandoning, the Celtic languages, of responsibility for their own actions. Many writers have persuaded themselves, and attempted to persuade others, that the decline of the Celtic languages has been due to the systematic persecution and oppression of those who spoke them. We can look briefly at the Scottish Gaelic example here (although the same points can be made for all the other examples); a typical statement occurs in a pamphlet put out by An Comunn Gaidhealach ('The Highland Society'):

Children who knew no other language than Gaelic were thrashed
for speaking it in the school or playground. It was not unnatural
in these circumstances and under such pressures, that many people
eventually accepted that their teachers were right and that Gaelic
was not only worthless but the cause of their poverty.

   Painfully and cruelly the Highlanders learned English and with
it often learned to despise their first language. Many parents who
were victims of this system decided to spare their children the
same cruelties by denying them Gaelic in their infancy.

<div align="right">(I. Mackay, 1969: 4)</div>

Versions of this argument have become a kind of intellectual consen-
sus in Scotland (and, *mutatis mutandis*, in Wales, Ireland and Brit-
tany). Contradiction of the 'oppressive' version of socio-linguistic
history is much less readily found,[6] and it would need extensive
demonstration for it to be convincing to those who are already
convinced in the other direction. An example, however, might serve
to show how the 'oppressive' version is constructed by its expo-
nents.

   In 1978, Angus MacNicoll (under his Gaelic transliteration,
Aonghas MacNeacail) wrote a series of articles for the West High-
land Free Press. In the third of these, entitled 'Co as a thainig thu?'
('Where do you come from?'), he traces his own bilingualism through
childhood – speaking Gaelic in the home and playground, but Eng-
lish in the classroom throughout his primary education, and then
being allowed at secondary level to choose either Gaelic or French as
a second foreign language after Latin. He complains bitterly that
Gaelic was taught through the medium of English, 'as if it were a
totally foreign, or even dead, language', and goes on:

   Such information we received on our own culture and traditions
   was incidental, even accidental, and usually biased against it.
   [. . .]
      At school, we did not learn the true significance of the Statutes
   of Iona, which, in 1609, provided for the extirpation (extermina-
   tion) of our language . . . We learned nothing about the 1616
   Education Act, ratifying the Statutes, which decreed that 'the
   English tongue may be universally planted and the Irish language
   . . . may be abolished and removed'.
      We learned nothing about the Clearances, which turned a great
   mass of the people out of their homes, and their homeland, often

with brutality, to make room for sheep and game. Entire commu-
nities were wiped out, and the scars still show . . .

I don't remember being told that the 1872 Education Act made
no provision whatsoever for Gaelic. This absence of recognition,
in fact, gave further impetus to the persecution of our language.

One device still remembered by older Gaels was the maide-
crochaidh (or "hanging-stick"). This was attached to a piece of
rope and hung round the neck of any child heard speaking Gaelic,
in playground or classroom. Once burdened with the implement
a child was obliged to wear it till he (or she) heard someone else
speak the forbidden language. Thus were children encouraged to
betray one another, and to expect a thrashing at the end of the
day, for every person subjected to the indignity of the hanging-
stick was also belted.

Little wonder that many Gaelic parents, to this day, give an
impression of being ashamed of their own language, and seek to
ensure that their children do not learn it.

. . . Gaels have been denied the vision, ambience and nourish-
ment of their culture for too long. That denial was, and continues
to be, the political act.

(MacNicoll, 1978)

I cite this at length, as a distillation of the historical bias, the half-
truths and moral deceits, and the general air of gullible self-
righteousness, which characterise a whole genre of writing on this
subject. MacNeacail is one whose most 'bitter' cultural memory is
having to choose between Gaelic and French at secondary school. He
has no moral qualms, however, about putting his experience into a
comparative context of massacres. Reformation politics in Scotland
is reduced to a quotation torn out of context. The agricultural, demo-
graphic and industrial upheavals of the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries, the sufferings and achievements of tens of millions of
British people, are reduced to one phrase, 'the Clearances' (popular-
ised by Prebble, 1969), and made into an oppression of the Gael by
all the rest. The great and humane ambition of the Education Acts
becomes a persecution. The hanging-stick looms large in the history,
and leads to multiple beatings. We are offered this as an explanation
of why 'many Gaelic parents . . . give an impression of being ashamed
of their own language, and seek to ensure that their children do not
learn it'. We are told of a 'welter of oppressive laws', without which
the 'great majority . . . would still be Gaelic speakers' (no list of this

'welter' is drawn up; no justification is offered for the highly conten-
tious, even highly unlikely, socio-linguistic conclusion). We are told
that Gaelic is 'the rightful first language of all the Highland coun-
ties', without any hint that this might pose a moral difficulty, in a
world where the majority of the inhabitants of these counties does
not speak Gaelic.

It must be stressed that this piece by MacNeacail is *not* a one-off
burst of malevolent eccentricity, as it might well appear to a casual
reader. It is, rather, typical of an extreme position to which a great
deal of Celtic language militantism tends. There are very similar
expositions relating to Welsh and Breton,[7] which contain the local
equivalents of the 'hanging-stick', the 'Welsh not' (*sic*) and the *symbole*;
there are routine comparisons with Israel, the Faroes, North Ameri-
can Indians and the Third World. Serious and unbiased study of the
way the socio-linguistic world truly *works* for a bilingual is typically
lacking. The authors take their views from the vocal minority who
share their opinions, enthusiasms and resentments, and then present
these as the views of 'the people'.

A correspondent from Barra, in the Outer Hebrides, responded to
MacNeacail's piece (see Boyd, 1978):

> Mgr Aonghas MacNeacail's valuable contribution to Gaelic his-
> tory and culture now appearing in your paper is something we
> have been looking forward to for some time.
>
> He enumerates three villains in the 'conspiracy' for the sup-
> pression of the Gaelic language: viz. the clan chiefs, the clergy,
> and the dominies. I have no doubt of the culpability of some or all
> of them. But one thing I had never heard of until a year or two ago
> is the 'maide-crochaidh'. When and where was it used?
>
> Though I attended school in two Hebridean islands from 1909
> to 1921, I had never heard of the practice, so it could not have been
> all that widespread. I should like some enlightenment on this
> 'savagery'.

To this, MacNeacail responded in turn:

> John Lorne Campbell, in his book *Gaelic in Scottish education and
> life*, refers to an account given by 19th century author William
> MacKay of the use of the 'maide-crochaidh':
>
>> 'Mr MacKay tells how the master of the parish school at
>> Glenurquhart made it his first duty after the opening prayer to

hand to one of the boys a roughly-carved piece of wood which was called the 'tessera'. The boy transferred it to the first pupil who was heard speaking Gaelic. That offender got rid of it by delivering it to the next, who in his turn placed it in the hands of the next again. And so the tessera went round without ceasing. At the close of the day it was called for by Mr Kerr. The child who happened to possess it was severely flogged, and then told to hand it back to the one from [whom] he had received it. The latter was dealt with in the same manner; and so the dreaded tessera retraced its course with dire consequences to all who had dared to express themselves in the only language which they knew'.

According to Kenneth MacKinnon in his book *The Lion's Tongue*, the use of the maide-crochaidh was reported as late as the 1930s in Lewis.[8]

This exchange is a telling one. MacNeacail's evidence is literary, not living. He cites Kenneth Mackinnon's popularisation (1974) and J. L. Campbell's influential work (1950); Mackinnon's work relies heavily upon Campbell, and there is a significant continuity of citation. Campbell's work, the proximate origin of information for both Mackinnon and MacNeacail, has many merits, but it is far from being a primary source, and Campbell is quite explicit about his polemic, even propaganda purpose.[9] It is Campbell, then, that is primarily responsible for the modern propagation of the idea that children in schools all over the Highlands were systematically flogged for speaking Gaelic.[10] Others have eagerly and uncritically seized upon the idea, for it answered a question for them – 'Why did the Highlanders stop speaking Gaelic?' – in a way that they found palatable.[11] Campbell in his turn, however, bases his argument upon a single anecdote, quoted out of context, from a work written nearly 100 years before by William MacKay, who provides the canonical version of this much-relished tale of corporal abuse. MacKay, in *Urquhart and Glenmoriston* (1893), tells (with good humour, in a few paragraphs from a long book) of the *tessera* in use in a school in his own Highland childhood. We do not learn from Campbell's citation, however, or subsequent retellings, that MacKay presents the behaviour of the schoolmaster in question (a Perth man) as a highly eccentric local curiosity, and as a relic of pedagogical attitudes that otherwise died out in the middle of the eighteenth century.[12] MacKay, indeed, earlier published a short and completely unambiguous ver-

sion of the socio-linguistic history of Gaelic; not, however, a version
which language militants have been at pains to propagate, unlike his
tale of the *tessera*: speaking as the secretary of the Gaelic Society of
Inverness, he says:

> The Gaelic language has in its time encountered many a foe; but
> of all those, the Gaelic people has been its most deadly. This
> seems strange, but it is no less the truth. *We cannot blame any but
> ourselves for the decay of our national tongue. The blame is often placed
> upon the shoulders of our Saxon neighbours, but it is as well to lay it at
> the door of the Hottentot or of the Red Indian – the fault is ours and no
> other's.* In what respect, then, have we Highlanders erred? Simply
> in this – that we have neglected the language which Providence
> gave us to foster and preserve.
>   (MacKay, 1872–73: 43; my emphasis)

This, remember, is from the same author that provided the anecdote
of the *tessera* – an anecdote that MacNeacail (citing at third hand)
unconsciously uses as the basis for an unambiguous picture of a
whole nation of children having their Gaelic systematically thrashed
out of them, by the same authorities that perpetrated the Clearances
and the Statutes of Iona.

When D. Boyd offers 12 years of Outer Hebridean school experi-
ence in contradiction of MacNeacail's account, MacNeacail's response
is to reassert his third-hand story, with reference. This ought to feel
instantly ridiculous, to any reader, and to MacNeacail himself. It
does not, however. MacNeacail, and those like him, have established
their historiographical rules; they are locked into a historical dis-
course within which only certain kinds of event happen, and which
is blind to others. From within MacNeacail's history, you genuinely
cannot *see* Boyd. MacNeacail's history is selective and self-serving,
and largely divorced from the experience and realities of those whose
history it purports to be.

Victor Durkacz has provided an excellent factual and moral reap-
praisal of militant historiography in the area of the Celtic languages:

> Several educationalists have claimed that it was the educational
> system, and especially that introduced by the Education Acts of
> 1870 and 1872, which was responsible for the decline of the Celtic
> languages.[13] But a little research reveals that the truth is infinitely
> more complicated. If the educational system was responsible for

the anglicisation of the Celtic periphery, its influence was much
more subtle than is generally appreciated. It must be said, firstly,
that the process of decline has been a consistent historical trend
since at least medieval times. This fact alone contradicts a recent
theory that it was the 'colonisation' of the Celtic periphery in the
modern period which caused the eclipse of the Celtic languages.[14]
                                                    (Durkacz, 1983: 158)

Discussing the strengths of various factors contributing to Gaelic's
decline (seasonal migration, depopulation, education, and 'attitudes')
Durkacz says:

Perhaps more important [than the schools] were the attitudes of
the people themselves, attitudes which were undoubtedly condi-
tioned by the respective histories of their languages. English was
seen as the language of commerce, the path to prosperity: Gaelic
a lovely but useless museum piece.
                                                    (ibid.: 217)

The evidence suggests that such Gaelic education as there was in
the nineteenth century actually reinforced the trend to English
speaking in the Highlands.
                                                    (ibid.: 219)

[I]t was the Gaelic schools which had awakened the desire of the
people for an English education.
                                                    (ibid.: 221)

The controversy is not whether or not Highlanders favoured Gaelic
in their schools, but why they were so strongly and persistently
against it. Was this a calculated, rational decision on their part or
had the anti-Gaelic views of landlords, teachers and clergy been
successfully implanted? The latter interpretation is easier to accept
at first sight since it clears the Gaelic speakers of much of the
responsibility for the decline of the Gaelic language. But it attributes
to them too great a degree of deference and docility: as the land
Leaguers proved, the crofters were quite capable of defying the
local establishment when they felt their interests were at stake. It
is safest to assume that they knew their own interests better than
the professors of Celtic, the emigre Gaelic speakers in the various
highland societies, and the Lowlanders who learned everything

they knew about the Highlands from the novels of Sir Walter Scott.

(ibid.: 224)

Two valuable documents in this area are the *The Statistical Account* and *The New Statistical Account*, containing reports for all the Highland parishes received from informants, mostly parish ministers, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These often refer to the linguistic situation in the Highlands, and repeatedly tell of an urgent popular enthusiasm for learning English, and of pride in English well-learnt.[15] This pride and urgency are sometimes applauded by their observer, and sometimes deplored, but there is no testimony at all to any sense that English was being forced upon an unwilling people. This is well-established and recorded fact, but MacNeacail, and those with a similar axe to grind, have ignored it.

M. MacDonald (1982) has dealt with the same problem in the Breton context, where instead of the *maide-crochaidh* or *tessera*, we have the *symbole*. This was purportedly passed around from pupil to pupil, as one caught another using Breton instead of French. As such, it is a key feature in the Breton militant historiography of oppression.[16] McDonald, however, tells of one middle-aged man from rural Brittany who remembered his experience of the *symbole* not as a shameful oppression, but as a gleeful game. In Plouhinec, the Breton rural parish where I carried out three years' fieldwork, the older generation of today were mostly monolingual speakers of Breton when they went to school, and many told me of their learning French at primary school. None mentioned anything like the *symbole*, and virtually every one spontaneously stressed the ambition of their parents that they should speak good French, and their own pride in the speed with which they picked French up. None ever questioned the wisdom and virtue of learning French, or complained of the process (except occasionally as part of a more general complaint about the disciplinary rigours of old-style primary school pedagogy). The only people that have complained to me about the *symbole* and the linguistic 'oppression' of the Breton people have been university-educated language militants, most of whom have learnt their Breton as a decoration for their politics. There is great scope for misrepresentation, therefore, in such matters; it seems that tales of the *tessera* and the *symbole* will continue to be handed down, as long as they serve the moral and historiographical convenience of a certain kind of intellectual, anxious to lodge responsibility for the dis-

appearance of the Celtic languages with anyone but the Celts them-
selves.

The same structures of discussion apply to the Highland Clear-
ances, and to emigration from the Highlands and Islands. No cul-
ture, language or society can survive without people; the actual
physical disappearance of people from the islands and glens is,
therefore, an acute problem for those interested in the survival of
Scottish Gaelic culture. The decision to emigrate to the United States
(say) has often represented a rejection of the past, with a complex of
cultural and linguistic forms rendered obsolete by the simple act of
human movement. Not surprisingly, the depopulation of the High-
lands and Islands has attracted an interpretation which absolves the
local people of responsibility for their own movement, and for its
cultural and linguistic consequences. At its simplest, this interpre-
tation begins with the bloody brutalities of the aftermath of Culloden,
and goes on to malevolent forced evictions and emigrations, brought
about by absentee landlords and hired thugs. The most influential
work in this style was Alexander Mackenzie's *History of the Highland
Clearances* (1883)[17], which effectively became instituted in social policy
through the work of the Napier Commission, leading to the estab-
lishment of crofting in the Highlands, and to the Crofting Commis-
sion.[18] John Prebble has latterly been responsible for popularisation
of this interpretation (1969)[19]. The 'Visitor Centre' at Culloden offers
an apparently officially sanctioned historical collage of recent High-
land history in this style, for the instruction of the tourist.

The popular paperback dissemination of this interpretation has
been thorough; so much so that events from the best-documented
and most legally controversial clearances have been incorporated, in
popular local telling, into the history of areas where clearances never
happened.[20] The 'clearances' have become a myth, apt to the self-
explanation of a society puzzled by its own desertion of itself. The
cottages in Strathnaver, on the Duke of Sutherland's estates, which
Patrick Sellar allegedly fired in 1814 in order to drive out their
ageing inhabitants, still burn in many different locations, in the self-
understanding of many Highlanders round the world. As Richards
puts it: 'The common people created a mythology which enabled
them to ascribe their fate to forces of evil' (Richards, 1985: 407).

In contrast to the historical and moral crudity of the 'external
oppression' model, Richards provides a sensitive discussion,[21] in
which the motivations and ambitions of all participants in the clear-
ances are allowed their complexity and diversity, without facile

explanation or blame. He clearly shows that the depopulation of the Highlands and Islands had, and has, an important internal dimension: people *decided* to leave, *wished* to emigrate, *disliked* the poverty and life-style of the old Highlands. The many areas which are depopulated today, yet were never cleared, are evidence enough that something more subtle than simple external oppression was going on.[22]

The depopulation can also be portrayed as the final extension of the capitalist ethic into the most remote part of Britain. In some senses this is true, and as such brings the clearances into my more general model of centre/periphery relations: the clearances of previous centuries elsewhere in Britain have made no comparable historiographical impact, and it is the Scottish Highlanders who occupy the past in relation to this cultural feature, as in relation to so many others. For those satisfied with the rhetoric, the invocation of capitalism also makes the Highlanders the victims of an impersonal system intruding upon their own originally inviolate social order. It is no accident that the argument which externalises the decision to quit the land should be commonly supported by Marxist rhetoric.[23] Romanticism and Marxism have come together in a potent combination in relation to this question: romanticism has glamorised pre-clearance life; Marxism has provided a theory for blaming its loss upon external agencies; and moral obligation for the loss can thereby be both acutely and poignantly realised, as well as thoroughly dodged.

As with my discussion of the language question, my aim is not to take sides, but primarily to show that the periphery is where responsibility for cultural loss seems to lodge. It is, therefore, an area which attracts arguments of exculpation: arguments blaming the loss upon external factors proliferate, and come to be popularly accepted. Arguments relating language change and emigration to the Highlanders' own wish for betterment and modernisation remain virtually invisible. The inadequacy of the 'external oppression' model is perhaps best demonstrated by the continued popular commitment to emigration and language change, after the perceived 'external oppression' has been removed. Proponents of this model are driven, at this stage, to arguing that the people have been so deceived and demoralised that they are eventually reduced to oppressing themselves. The patent absurdity of such arguments, and their implicit contempt for the wit and intelligence of ordinary people, should be their own condemnation. It is no longer possible to argue that people are oppressed for speaking Gaelic, yet still they abandon it; it is no longer

possible to evict Highland smallholders, and still they emigrate: they continue to do what they have always done – pursue self-interest without sentimentality.

Once self-interest has been rewarded, however, it can begin to look for moral justification. Emigration from the Highlands and abandonment of Gaelic have imposed upon the remaining population the burden of maintaining a Highland and Gaelic-speaking population. Those that have already got away, learnt English, succeeded financially and socially in faraway lands, can look back to the Highlands, and imagine their own condition as the result not of ancient and fulfilled ambition, but of distant oppression bravely overcome. If the emigrés left because of oppression, then those lucky enough to have escaped this, and to have stayed in the Highlands and Islands as Gaelic speakers, should be grateful for their privilege. Those remaining are obliged, then, to act out a love of Highland and Gaelic life which is not at all indigenous, but which is demanded by external pressures. There is, therefore, a duplicity in external valuation of the Highlands by those who have escaped from them but return to visit those who still remain.[24] Susan Parman, in a thesis based upon long experience of the Hebrides, well describes this phenomenon.[25]

As we have seen, it is often argued that the Highlanders abandoned their own culture because they were forced to do so, or were brainwashed by the contempt of others. Against this I would put a very simple mechanism, to which everybody accedes – desire to emulate things perceived as socially superior, coming from places perceived as centres of sophistication. There is nothing peculiar about the Gaelic experience here, for the relevant structures overarch any crude Gaelic/non-Gaelic dichotomy; the people of West Yorkshire or West Lothian are quite as subject to them as the people of the Western Isles. And they are, it must be remembered, *indigenous* structures of estimation, which deserve respect as such. Eulogy of traditional aspects of Highland life (small village social structure, Gaelic, crofting, turf-roofed houses, and so on) is, therefore, itself an external imposition. It runs counter to the long-standing ambitions and practices of the majority of Scottish Gaels, who have been anxious to move to towns, learn English, find jobs, and live in modern comfort. And why not? Why should difference be enjoined upon them?

I do not believe, therefore, that the commonly accepted historiography and morality surrounding the disappearance of Gaelic and

the depopulation of the Highlands, for all its invocation of popular thought and the common man, properly represents the experience and practice of the Gaelic-speaking Highlanders and Islanders. A political reflection is unavoidable here. The commonly accepted historiography is shot through with Marxist elements and rhetoric. It has become increasingly clear, throughout the 1980s, that such rhetoric, while it purports to speak for the common man, is indifferent, often brutally so, to the real aspirations of the common man when these are expressed. Left-wing history, as it has read itself into the Highland experience, has remained as much a property of the privileged and intellectual as any history which it attempted to replace. A history which expresses genuine sympathy with the morality and practice of that most typical of common men of the Highlands – the language-shifting ambitious upwardly-mobile emigrant to the Lowland industrial towns – is still unobtainable: it is a history of countless unwritten biographies, not of the self-indulgent moralities of intellectual debate.[26]

I have tried to approach these issues without sentiment. I know from experience that those whose sentiments are thoroughly engaged will interpret my attitude as one of hostility. To generalise the argument beyond prejudice, therefore, we can look again at the centre/periphery contrast. All points between centre and periphery have objective location, outside themselves, both for what they are trying to be, and for what they are trying not to be: for intermediate points, both centre and periphery *exist* -they are real, tangible, open to visits. Intermediate points do not, therefore, experience cultural crisis at either end of the innovation and abandonment process. They may, for this reason, notice the process much less, perhaps not at all, and no body of intellectuals and tourists exists to point it out. I have said that what distinguishes the ultimate periphery is that it is trying to be *unlike itself*. It shares this characteristic, however, with the centre: the centre is also trying to be unlike itself, in the sense of *trying to be like a society which has not yet come into being*. Both centre and periphery are locations of terminal innovation, and familiar with the sense of crisis that this can provoke: but in the centre the crisis surrounds the first innovators, and in the periphery it surrounds the last. The craft museums of the Celtic fringe are thus the genuine experiential homologue of the fashion houses of London: in both, *singularity* of experience is forced upon the attention. In discussions of the rights and wrongs of the fringe experience, comparison is often drawn with the very centre, as if the parts in between were

irrelevant. The theorist of language innovation looks straight from the Hebrides to the headquarters of the BBC; the theorist of folklore straight from the croft to Chelsea or Morningside. This is easy – easy contrast, easy binary opposition, simple moral dichotomies; and this very facility is a kind of intellectual absurdity. Nevertheless, we need not deny the soundness of the intuition that these two, the very centre and the ultimate periphery, are somehow comparable: both are 'crucibles of identity',[27] and this is not necessarily a comfortable state for either.

For some further examples of the progress of continual cultural innovation towards and across the Celtic fringe, we can look at three broad areas – politics, religion and folklore – more generally.

POLITICS

'Tribal' political structures are often seen as essentially Celtic, in contrast to the formalised hierarchies of Rome, and the Kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon and Norman England. From the first, however, the rulers of Celtic Britain have tended to copy the political models offered by the centre, as they perceived it. The earliest sources for Irish history, the 'Ulster Cycle' of mythological tales, tell of dynastic struggle and aggrandisement, with the northern people, the 'Ulaid', prevailing against the people of Connacht. The central story of the cycle as we know it is 'The Cattle Raid of Cooley', *Tain Bo Chuailgne*, whose hero and central figure is Cu Chulainn. When mythology becomes history, we encounter Niall Noigiallach ('Neil of the Nine Hostages') of the Tara dynasty, who, 'influenced, no doubt, by the example of Roman political organization with its centralized authority . . . , gradually fostered a new concept of overall hegemony, or High-Kingship, in the island' (De Burca, 1966: 136). The direct descendants of Niall (the 'Ui Niall'), established and ruled the structure of Irish kingships from the second quarter of the fifth century.

The early 'Anglo-Saxons' were, of course, quite as tribal as the Celts, and early commentators perceived little difference between the social organisation of the two 'peoples'. The history of Anglo-Saxon England is, certainly, a history of the growth of petty kingdoms, and of their gradual tendency to coalesce into one power. There was nothing peculiarly 'Anglo-Saxon' about this, however, for the appearance of small kingdoms was a Europe-wide phenomenon. England's Continental neighbours made the running, and from Eng-

land the fashion spread to Wales, Ireland and Scotland. From the first, records show a tendency in these areas for concentration of power in single dynasties, and for political power to aspire to determinate geographical shape.[28] In Wales, the small kingdoms of the immediately post-Roman period were united under Rhodri Mawr in the ninth century, and on his death in 877 his three sons split the kingdom into three. Dillon has said of these three kingdoms:

> The king had an elaborate court, according to the law-books, and numerous officials. He appointed the judges and justice was administered in his name. But all of this seems to have been borrowed from Anglo-Saxon England.
>
> (Dillon and Chadwick, 1972: 100)

He then looks underneath these borrowings for what he calls: 'traces of the old Celtic system. For example, the word *alltud* 'foreigner' (lit. 'from another tribe') shows that the *tud* (Ir. *tuath*) was the original unit of population, as in Ireland' (ibid.). He forgets the tribal structure of the Continental Angles and Saxons: tribalism is 'the old Celtic system'; kingship and its trappings are 'borrowed from Anglo-Saxon England'.

The early Welsh dynasties unified in the context of Mercian, Northumbrian and West Saxon aggression (see Dillon and Chadwick, 1972: 112ff), and the early Welsh kingdoms were players in the same game as their Anglo-Saxon counterparts; Anglo-Saxon and Welsh kingdoms entered into alliance with one another: Penda of Mercia and Cadwallon of North Wales formed a successful offensive alliance against Edwin of Northumbria in 633; the Welsh king Hywel Dda, grandson of Rhodri Mawr, united Wales under his own power in the first half of the tenth century, with the help of, and submission to, the dynasty of Wessex. The Wales of Hywel Dda, himself a keen student and exponent of Anglo-Saxon habits, was an analogue of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of the time.

Norah Chadwick regards the activities of Rhodri Mawr and Hywel Dda as 'the battle between opposing policies of the North and South Welsh princes – between Celtic political separatism and hopes of freedom from the Saxons on the one hand, and on the other union with England in face of the common danger from the Danes' (Dillon and Chadwick, 1972: 115). Rhodri, representing Celtic separatism and freedom, was 'aiming at the united British nation and an ultimate conquest of the Saxons' (ibid.: 114). It is important to note, however, that Rhodri's ambitions were much the same as those of

other kings of the time – dynastic annexation, territorial aggrandise-
ment, conquest, and the limitation of the freedoms of other people.
Wales, under Rhodri, was trying to do what Northumbria, Mercia
and Wessex more or less succeeded in doing. It is merely sentimental
interpretation to regard Rhodri's failure as a loss of freedom and of
the 'older Celtic system'. Once the world of kingdoms existed, then
freedom had to be sought within this world, whoever you were.
Norah Chadwick says, of the unification of Wales under Hywel Dda:

> In traditions of North and South Wales at this period we have
> passed from the heroic ideals of the north to the realistic political
> vision of the south. But we have also stepped out of the Old
> World into a new era.
>
> (Dillon and Chadwick, 1972: 115)

The interpretation of the history of the Celts is strewn with judge-
ments of this kind, in every period: note the move from the 'heroic
ideas' of the 'Old World' to the 'realistic political vision' of the 'new
era'. The contrast between failed heroic high-mindedness, and the
grubby squalor of compromising real-politik, is often drawn in con-
texts like this. 'Heroic ideals' almost always turn out, however, in
examples of this kind, to be simply *failed attempts* at real-politik.

The move from tribalism to kingdoms is readily characterised by
the originally tribal term 'Votadini', associated with a people living
around the Forth estuary, which gave a name to one of the northern
British kingdoms – Gododdin (or Manau Guotodin). It was under
this name that some of the northern Britons banded together in an
attempt to destroy the fledgling Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Bernicia,
at the very end of the sixth century. Aneirin's poem, *The Gododdin*,
laments the subsequent British defeat at Catraeth (probably the
modern Catterick).[29] *The Gododdin* is a prime source for the sentiment
that the Celts were a people 'who always went forth to war, and
always fell'.[30] Had the Gododdin not fallen (and they never intended
to do so), the northern British might have successfully halted the
expansion of Anglo-Saxon power, and have established a British
political power that endured to the present. As such, we would
remember this late sixth-century military venture not as a whisper of
lost 'high ideas', but as the prosaic history of 'realistic political vi-
sion', leading to modern banalities of government and administration.

There was, therefore, nothing 'Celtic' about tribal resistance to the
encroaching power of kingships. The Celtic fringe threw itself into
this new political order as eagerly as Anglo-Saxon England. It did so

later, however, and ultimately with less success – not because it was Celtic, but because it was further away than Anglo-Saxon England from the pace-setting polities of Frankish Gaul.

Other political systems and fashions succeeded the styles of early Anglo-Saxon kingship, and were in turn adopted into the 'Celtic' areas. The discrediting of an old system, the adoption of another, and the confrontation of old and new, carry the potential, upon an ever-moving frontier, for temporary social disruption. Dillon and Chadwick twice refer to 'the fallacy of regarding the Celtic peoples as inherently warlike' (Dillon and Chadwick, 1972: 112; also 77). Disruption would be perceived from both sides of any structural political change, but would be most *remembered* within the terms of the structure which prevailed. The Celtic fringe has always begun outside the new structure, and been incorporated. As such, it has always seemed 'inherently warlike', within the dominant traditions of historical interpretation, since it has posed problems of incorpora- tion within every new order. From the 'Celtic' point of view, watching the 'new order' come over the horizon armed in the latest fashions in chain mail, it was no doubt the rest of the world which seemed 'inherently warlike'. It was not to record the 'Celtic' point of view, however, that historians typically wrote.

The political moralities commonly built into the Anglo-Saxon/ Celtic opposition are of an individualist/community kind, with all the modern sentimentality that this invokes. The idea that Celtic society was, or is, clan-, tribe- or community-based, as opposed to Anglo-Saxon hierarchy and centralisation, is widely held.[31] I hope it will be clear by now that these oppositions have much to do with our modern political and historiographical sentiments, and little to do with Anglo-Saxons and Celts.

RELIGION

Before Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in 393, the Celts of Britain, like the Germanic tribes of Europe, were 'pagan'. Many Roman Britons, however, became Christian. It was, in fifth-century Britain, the Anglo-Saxons who were conspicuously pagan. Roman British Christianity retreated westwards, becoming what is now commonly remembered as 'Celtic Christianity'. This Christianity was influenced by the general international thinking and practice of the early Church, whose world-renouncing spirit

was manifest in the monasticism that came to characterise 'Celtic' Christianity. The Roman Christianity that came to England with Augustine, however, was prepared to consort with secular powers and interests, and it was in this guise that Christianity grew up in the Anglo-Saxon world. A major feature of subsequent British history, between conversion and Reformation, was the progressive advance of Roman authority against the perceived 'aberrations' of the Celtic Church.

The Reformation, a major discontinuity in the Christian life of Europe, took its British form from changes at the very centre of power in the British Isles – centred, one might say, in Henry VIII himself. The by now *Roman* Catholicism of the British fringe began, in turn, to look peculiarly 'Celtic'. David Mathew treats it as such in his book *The Celtic Peoples and Renaissance Europe*, which tells of the meeting of English protestantism and monarchy with the older fashions in Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Speaking of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he says 'The old Celtic tide drew out; it was the victory of a changed England' (Mathew, 1933: viii). For Mathew, Wales and Scotland at this time were as peculiarly 'Celtic' and 'Catholic' as Ireland. The wheel turned again, however. The intemperate anti-Roman creeds of the European Reformation were domesticated into British politics over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, through the turmoil of civil and religious war. They consorted with power, learning compromise and moderation. The process is complex, with many competing political and religious forces and aspirations; eventually, however, the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) evangelised the eighteenth-century Scottish Highlands in the name of the Presbyterian Church. Methodism spread, through the preachings of the Oxford-educated Wesley, to the urban areas of industrialising Britain, and found an enduring home in the Welsh valleys. The Church of Scotland suffered, in the nineteenth century, a number of schisms, which led to the Western Highlands and Islands becoming the modern stronghold of fundamentalist Calvinism, with various fiercely independent non-conformist Churches. Fissiparous and extreme dissent came to seem characteristic of Scotland and Wales. The compromise and moderation of the Church of England combined with the forces of the Enlightenment, to produce a general decline of religion in the daily lives of most of the people of England, leading to the modern generalised agnosticism and indifference. Modern commentators can now argue that the Calvinist religious fervour of the Outer Hebrides,

or the Methodist fervour of the Welsh valleys, are the modern mani-
festation of the typically Celtic aspiration towards   religion and the
other world. Such modern religious features are also apt to invoke
reflections upon Celtic timelessness. A *Sunday Telegraph* reporter,
David Wastell, writing on the Western Isles of Scotland, called Lewis:

> a barren land with a hard faith and tough people – a place where
> isolation combines with a strict religious code to ensure that *time
> stands still and the modern world barely intrudes.*
>
> (Wastell, 1989: 6; my emphasis)

It is worth stressing how improbable and anachronistic such inter-
pretations of Celtic religious timelessness are, when viewed from an
earlier period. The SSPCK saw the eighteenth-century Highlands as
a dreadful muddle of pagan and Roman superstition, religious in-
difference and social indiscipline. The idea that the austere self-
disciplines of Calvinism, from their sixteenth-century Genevan source,
should by the mid-nineteenth century have come to seem peculiarly
Highland, would have seemed to them altogether fantastic.

The process I have described does not occur with predictable
symmetry. The waves of fashion do not travel with consistent speed,
and do not always wash over the entire Celtic fringe. So general an
argument requires endless nuance and reservation, although the
fundamental outlines are, I hope, clearly enough established. The
fringe religiosity of the 'Celts', their peculiarity and fervour, can be
reconstituted with every new change of fashion. Pan-European pre-
Christian religion, crystallised around anachronistic collocations of
druids and stone circles, is widely considered to be a kind of Celtic
prerogative. The Christianity of the Roman Empire becomes, after
the fall of Rome, 'Celtic Christianity'. Early Christian Mediterranean
styles in monumental religious stonework come to Ireland, and are
called 'Celtic crosses'.[32] Roman Catholicism, in turn, finds an appro-
priate home in the Celtic fringe. And Swiss theological fashions of
four centuries ago have assumed a 'timeless' Celtic guise. . . .

FOLKLORE, FOLK-MUSIC AND THE FOLK

The category 'folklore' dates from the nineteenth century.[33] It might
be said to contain those things in which the centre perceives the
periphery to differ from itself. Like the Celts themselves, it is a
category created by central perception, for employment in the fringe.

Because the category is a nineteenth-century phenomenon, it is also heavily romanticised, as are the Celts. No surprise, then, that the 'Celts' and the 'folk' should often seem virtually co-terminous categories. There is, in the enterprise of folklore collection, a sustained bias towards the Celtic areas. This is not because there is intrinsically anything more 'folkloric' about a Highland crofter or a Breton fisherman, than there is about the Master of Balliol College or the Chairman of ICI. It is, rather, that the *categorical* requirements of folklore are set up by people like the latter, for use on the former. The Celtic bias can be seen by inspection of virtually any collection of British folklore. It is manifest in the strong predominance of Gaelic and Highland material in the journal nevertheless called *Scottish Studies*. The folk-music magazine *Folk Roots* recently observed that, for most people, 'French folk-music equals Breton folk-music'.[34]

The congruence of 'Celts' and the 'folk' in the popular imagination even produces, through a kind of back-formation, a 'Celticising' of British folk-art in general, wherever it comes from. It is some influence of this kind which leads English folk-singers to sing English folk-songs in an Irish accent ('West Country' accents are also available for the purpose). It also leads to a predominance of Irish and Scottish songs in those English venues which call themselves 'folk-clubs'. As a child, at a Yorkshire primary school, I suffered compulsory learning and singing of songs like 'Over the Sea to Skye' and 'Scots Wha Hae'. As a neophyte 'folk-club' attender, in my middle teens, I went regularly to a Bradford 'folk-club' where, along with the rest, I learnt to sing Irish rebel songs, innocently mouthing bloodshed – brave boys that we were. What of cultural imperialism in the context?

Many aspects of putatively 'Celtic' music exemplify the movement of fashions, as I have described them. The bagpipe, for example, in various guises, was at one time a popular instrument all over Europe[35] and beyond. In classical Rome it was the main instrument of professional entertainment, much like the violin in nineteenth-century Vienna. Gradually, however, the bagpipe assumed a rustic appearance, as it went out of fashion in the main musical and cultural centres. By the early eighteenth century, when J. S. Bach wrote a piece called 'dudelsack' ('the bagpipe'), he did so to evoke simple rural themes in a piece of sophisticated mainstream music – a mainstream from which the bagpipe had disappeared.

As a loud portable instrument suitable for outdoor entertainment, and for dance accompaniment, various forms of bagpipe survived in rural areas long after their disappearance from the most fashionable

circles. In western France, a single-drone bagpipe (the Breton *biniou*, French *cornemuse*) remained a popular instrument for these pur- poses until well into this century. The instrument can still be found, although it has moved from barn and village to occasions of self- consciously folkloric tradition, and its social and moral status have changed greatly on the way. Its role as the chief instrument of popular public music-making has been taken over in turn (as in Scotland) by the piano accordion, and then by the electric organ and electric guitar. In Britain, with its earlier domination of urban life over rural fashions, the pipes disappeared earlier than in France. By the end of the eighteenth century, even where they survived, they were moribund.

This was even true for Highland Scotland. In the normal course of events, they would have died out there, as the harp had before them, and their course from Roman centrality to peripheral disappearance would have been duly run. Something very different happened, however; the Scottish pipes became part of the romanticisation of Highland Scotland, and thereby survived into the modern day as the unique and traditional instruments of the Scottish Highlanders. Their use by the Highland regiments of the British army, themselves mostly formed in the eighteenth century, has been a formidable institutional force for their popularisation and maintenance.[36] Subsequently, the Scottish Highland pipes have been adopted to a greater or lesser degree in all the Celtic areas. In Brittany, pipe bands (formed upon a folkloric model, and in urban centres) often use not the indigenous single-drone *biniou*, but the recently borrowed three-drone High- land bagpipe, in display of their Celtic identity.

The Irish case, where it has become accepted that 'Irish traditional music' can be played upon a combination of violin, guitar, banjo, flute and pennywhistle, also fits closely into the model, whereby slightly outmoded fashions gather together in the periphery, and disguise themselves there as native authenticity.

'Traditional dress' is another area which demonstrates the same point. European peasant 'traditional dress', as recorded in the mod- ern period, is invariably a belated copy (albeit rich and imaginative) of aristocratic fashions of a generation or so previous to the recording. The same is true for 'traditional dance': in Scotland, 'Scottish country dancing' continues the dances of polite society throughout Europe 200 years before.

The model, indeed, works for a great variety of cultural features – what comes to be seen as timelessly and typically 'Celtic', is always

the latest 'old-fashion' within the more general British context.[37] What is 'old-fashioned', in this sense, changes as rapidly as fashion itself. The opposition between centre and periphery remains secure: it offers a constant sense of difference; but changing cultural content is forever washing through. Dillon and Chadwick said, of pre-Roman Britain: 'Of the kingdoms of southern Britain the most advanced culturally were the Cantii [cf. Kent], owing to their favourable position for trade with the Continent. Ptolemy refers to their oppida of Londinium (London)' – (Dillon and Chadwick, 1972: 22). *plus ça change. . . .*

9
Romanticism

I have treated the cultural relationship between periphery and centre as one in which culture changes ripple continuously out, beginning as sophisticated innovations in the centre, and ending up as old-fashioned on the fringe. The process as I have so far described it is essentially one-way – a simple wave pattern, as from a single stone thrown into a quiet pool. Romanticism, however, introduced a serious complication – an apparent counter-current.

Before the early eighteenth century, centres of literate civilisation (Athens, Rome, Florence, Paris, London, wherever) were untroubled in their confidence that their own arts and manners were the best. The fashions of rural, low-status, distant and illiterate people, if they attracted any interest at all, were objects of humour and contempt. Occasional flourishes of imagery in poetry can be set against this, but it was the consistent and overwhelming trend. In the eighteenth century, however, a great change in intellectual dealings with the rural and unfashionable fringes of Britain began to take place. Among the earliest signs of this were the collections of popular Scottish songs published by Allan Ramsay (1724, 1730). At the time, the preeminent sources of literary imagery were classical, and as such were the preserve of the educated and privileged, and unintelligible to the masses. Ramsay, however, introducing his songs, argued for the value of native and domestic imagery, and scorned the 'Gentlemen' of Scotland:

> who can vaunt of acquiring a tolerable perfection in the French or Italian tongues, if they have been a fortnight in Paris or a month in Rome: but shew them the most elegant thought in a Scots Dress, they as disdainfully as stupidly condemn it as barbarous.
>
> (Ramsay, 1724: xi)

The rehabilitation of native resources, in contrast to the erudite formalities of the 'classical' school, went from strength to strength during the next century. A major event was the publication in 1760, by James Macpherson, of *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, collected in the*

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Highlands of Scotland, and translated from the Gaelic or Erse language. He followed these *Fragments* with two full-length poetical epics, *Fingal* (1761) and *Temora* (1763). There followed a long argument, the 'Ossianic controversy', about the merits and provenance of these works.[1] Briefly, Macpherson claimed to have manuscripts 1200 or 1300 years old, containing the works of the Gaelic bard Ossian son of Fingal, and to have produced his own translations from these originals. By putting the origin so far back, Macpherson had reached the pagan heroic age, on the threshold of the Christian era; he had, thereby, given Scottish Gaelic its *Iliad*, its *Beowulf*. It is clear, however, that no such ancient manuscripts existed. Macpherson probably did have access to Gaelic manuscripts of some antiquity (perhaps early sixteenth century), although his use and disposal of these is still argued, and it is probable that his Gaelic was not, in any case, up to the task of translating these. He had travelled in the Highlands, and certainly had been exposed, in both English and Gaelic, to an oral tradition containing the characters which 'Ossian' made famous on a wider stage. The broad consensus of opinion, in a debate which still continues, is that Macpherson wrote the Ossianic poems himself, using a general background knowledge of Gaelic oral tradition to add authenticity.

Macpherson's creative achievement was itself remarkable: in a loosely structured blank verse style, emotionally laden, atmospheric and apparently casually organised images succeeded one another effortlessly. This was in complete contrast to the formal, tightly structured intellectual verse of his contemporaries, and this was a major feature in his success. He broke all the rules, and this was perceived, as at rare moments it is, not as mere confusion, perversity and violence, but as a bid for a larger freedom – a freedom in this case that was not only poetical, but moral. It is as such that Macpherson was, for the reading public, an early romantic.[2] 'Macpherson's Ossian' became internationally read, loved, imitated and translated. It became, for several generations, archetypical of what primitive and heroic verse should look like. This was indeed a major cause of the enduring and irresolvable nature of the controversy – 'Macpherson's Ossian' invited judgement by the canons appropriate to ancient heroic verse, but had itself largely created these canons.

The earliest critics of 'Ossian' attached much importance to the antiquity of the poems: if they were from the fifth century AD, then they were of the first importance; if, however, they were based upon

contemporary oral verse collected in the Highlands, then they lost their distinction. The mid-eighteenth century was still reluctant to find anything of literary or cultural value coming out of the mouths of dirty and bare-legged mountain savages. Macpherson's Ossian, however, by opening the literary canon to works ostensibly outside the cultivated English and classical tradition, did much to change this. And the general reading public did not necessarily care about provenance; they had found a treasure, which had its own authenticity in the literary and moral context of the period, irrespective of its origin.

Smollet and Fielding had made scenes of low-life comically and dramatically acceptable in the English novel.[3] The major advances in this area, however, were made by Walter Scott. Scott had elaborated the romance of Scotland in the post-Ossianic period, with his scholarly *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802), and his popular narrative poems on Scottish themes (particularly the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, 1805; *Marmion*, 1808; *The Lady of the Lake*, 1810; *The Lord of the Isles*, 1815). Of these poems, the most influential in affecting our view of the Highlands was *The Lady of the Lake*, which made 'The Trossachs' the epitome of Highland beauty, where the tourist coaches still gather. It was in his prose, however, that Scott found a true home for vernacular speech, turning it into a triumphant art form, and an object of admiration in its own right. Two of his most famous novels, *Waverley* (1814) and *Rob Roy* (1818), are explicitly concerned with the meeting of the Scottish Lowlands and the Gaelic Highlands (the first around the events of 1745–6 which led to Culloden).

Had Scott spoken fluent Gaelic, he might have offered us early access to the vernacular of the Highlands. But then, had he spoken Gaelic, it is unlikely that he would have been so well-placed to understand and exploit popular taste throughout Britain. There was no contemporary Gaelic prose tradition, and the Gaelic poetic tradition, as it found published form, was the work of specialists. It was not until a century after Macpherson's Ossian that a more or less authentic version of a Gaelic vernacular tradition was published. J. F. Campbell, a pioneering figure in the collection of Highland verse, stories and folklore, began his researches into these in an attempt to authenticate Macpherson. He found a rich, but very different, tradition, which he published, for its own intrinsic interest, as *Leabhar na Feinne* ('The Book of the Fianna'), in 1872. He later published important selections of bilingual Gaelic/English folktales, taken down from oral delivery. His work leads on to that of Alexander

Carmichael (see 1900–71), and to the modern academic enterprise of the Edinburgh School of Scottish Studies, wherein commitment to the representation and dignity of 'popular' traditions has become fundamental, in studies of literature, poetry, folktale, language, custom and so on.[4]

The growth of interest in popular tradition was one important outcome of romanticism. It is no accident, however, that the larger public interest in the Scottish Highlands and in Scottish Gaelic was provoked through what was essentially a forgery – Macpherson's Ossian. The British reading public was ready, by the mid-eighteenth century, to depart from the literary conventions to which it had grown accustomed, and to begin to take an interest in its own ethnic and political margins (with the Scottish Highlands the most striking example). It thirsted after difference, we might say, but *difference in its own terms*. If a work were to appeal, it had to be intelligible to the greater public – the greater public which effectively dictated the terms in which representation of Celtic areas could be sold, read, understood and reproduced. Inevitably, then, successful representation of the Gaelic Highlands was dictated in its symbolic structure by majority demands, rather than by native authenticity. There was, throughout the long Ossianic polemic, a remarkable indifference to genuine Scottish Gaelic verse and culture. This was not total, but by the time the first timid attempts were being made to publicise genuine Gaelic tradition, Ossian had been translated into most European languages, and gone through dozens of editions.

Parallels from many other ethnic contexts might even suggest a necessary *priority* of 'forgery' in such a context, although forgery is an inadequate term: what is meant, is a text whose authenticity is suspect, but which nevertheless defines for the reading public the qualities of the 'minority' literature. Many examples could be cited,[5] but that of Brittany is particularly relevant here. For many reasons (see p. 133), France came later than Britain to a romantic and folk-loric interest in its own fringe traditions. In Brittany as in Scotland, however, the interest seriously began with the publication of a pur-ported translation of ancient poetry – the *Barzaz Breiz*, first published in 1839, again in 1846, and in its most popular (and substantially amended) form in 1867. Its 'author' was a young Breton aristocrat, Theodore Hersart de la Villemarqué (1815–95).

Villemarqué was quite explicit, in his production of the *Barzaz Breiz*, that this work would rank alongside Ossian, and give to Brittany the same claim to ancient heroic dignity that Ossian had given to Scot-

land. The *Barzaz Breiz*, indeed, had much in common with Ossian: it purported to be a translation of ancient Breton epics, which survived in modern oral tradition, with Villemarqué as discoverer and translator of these. As such, it became greatly popular throughout the French intellectual world, and even beyond.[6] It never, however, achieved the astonishing pan-European vogue of Ossian, for although it was a novel event in French literature, in larger European terms it was only one of several such 'discoveries', already becoming a genre in themselves. Suspicion about its provenance and antiquity soon arose, just as for Ossian, around a remarkably similar series of questions: 'Where were Villemarqué's original texts?'; 'Were they truly ancient?'; 'Had Villemarqué made them up?'; 'Was this modern folklore in ancient dress?'; 'Was Villemarqué's Breton good enough for the task he claimed to have performed?'. As in the Ossianic case, satisfactory answers were never provided, for similar reasons: the *Barzaz Breiz* came to occupy a central place in the definition of canons of ancient regional authenticity; how, then, could it be judged inadequate by these?

A near contemporary and colleague of Villemarqué, François Luzel, made his own collection of oral literature, standing to Villemarqué much as J. F. Campbell to James Macpherson; like Campbell, he began expecting authenticity to be vindicated, and found something quite different – an oral tradition worthy of interest in its own right, but no coherent and ancient epics. Luzel published his texts, along with a polite indictment of Villemarqué, in 1868 and 1874, as *Gwerziou Breiz-Izel, Chants Populaires de la Basse-Bretagne*. The argument over authenticity still continues.[7]

The story of the production and reception of Ossian and the *Barzaz Breiz* provides a useful clue to the more general romantic movement. The 'nations' of Europe, and their intellectuals, had been preoccupied with establishing their own order and centrality, in political, linguistic, religious and intellectual terms. They were largely self-absorbed, like the classical civilisations whose mantle they had been anxious to inherit. Unarguably the most successful of these, by the late eighteenth century, was England, and English romanticism can be regarded as a sign of her success, in that it appeared as a celebration of *disorder*, and of *anti-classicism*: only when order is sufficiently secure, can a celebration of disorder come to seem appropriate.

Since the fifteenth century the European naval powers had become increasingly aware of non-European societies, and the stark

social differences revealed were an enduring challenge to the Euro-
pean intellect and imagination. There were many responses to this,
but in general the rest of the social world appeared, to the European
mind, like a wilderness to be exploited, tamed and civilised. Attitudes
to 'primitive' societies in the eighteenth century have been treated
under the general title 'primitivism',[8] a patchwork of moral attitudes
in which primitives were variously regarded as living in an untrou-
bled state of primaeval bliss, and living in bestial and sub-human
squalor. Whichever, it was the fate of the primitive, happy or un-
happy as it might be, to succumb to European rule and civilisation.

Before the eighteenth century, it had seemed that the social land-
scape would always contain threatening barbarians. Civilisation had
succumbed to them before, as Gibbon made clear, and there had
been little room for complacency. The struggle to impose centralised
order upon the fringes of the social world had been ever-present,
intermittently flaring into open conflict. The mid-eighteenth cen-
tury, however, saw a major change in this. In 1745, some of the
Highland clans supported Prince Charles Edward Stuart in the last
of the Jacobite risings. This was in a long tradition of animosity,
nurtured in seventeenth-century civil war, the campaigns of Montrose
and Claverhouse, and the rising of 1715. After 1745, the central
British authorities sought a permanent solution. Prince Charles had
raised his standard at Glenfinnan, and marched south. After one or
two glamorous military triumphs, and holding court at Holyrood,
he and his army marched south through England as far as Derby;
there, the non-appearance of the expected English Jacobites finally
told upon the spirit, and retreat was called. The army returned
northwards, shedding the disaffected along the way. The remaining
loyal force was brought to battle on Culloden moor, near Inverness,
in February 1746. Victory for the government troops under the Duke
of Cumberland was complete. After this, a campaign of 'pacification'
of the Highlands was undertaken, beginning with fire and the sword,
and leading on into social engineering of various kinds. The English
or Anglo-Scottish establishment had probably had the capacity for
the military reduction of the Highlands for over a century previous
to this, but there had always been other, more pressing, demands.
When the military reduction of the Highlands did come, after
Culloden, it was thorough.

Once the last mainland threat to the security of the establishment
had been removed, however, it became possible to glamorise the Old
Highlands, rather than revile them. While wolves range round the

human winter homestead, carrying off babies and dragging down
the weary, it is unlikely that the human society involved will rejoice
in the wild splendour of the wolf pack. When the human society has
moved into cities inhabited by millions, and the last wolves are
living a threatened existence on the margins of geography, subject to
the bullet, the situation is altogether changed. Then one might expect
a movement for the conservation of wolves. The analogy with wild
animals is apt, because the Highlanders were often viewed in this
light by the self-consciously civilised lowlands.

It was probably no accident, then, that an intellectual celebration
of social variety and disorder occurred soon after the final subjuga-
tion of the conspicuous remaining source of variety and disorder. It
is through this change of heart, dated sometime between Culloden
in 1746 and George IV's spectacular tartan visit to Edinburgh in
1822, that we can understand the surviving reputations of the parties
involved in Culloden and its aftermath. Before this, some brutal
blood-letting after a victory would only have been considered nor-
mal. We might deplore it in retrospect, if it were called to our
attention, but historiography does not require this of us. Both High-
landers and Lowlanders had been involved in bloody and merciless
battles and repressions. The structure for interpretation before
Culloden, from the centre, had always looked something like: Justified
political activity (government troops) *versus* Wild and cruel oppo-
nents who understand only violence (everybody else). This is familiar
enough, from all the margins of European expansion. Wherever the
burden of gruesome cruelty lay, on whichever side, the centre would
nevertheless have accorded virtue to itself. In the mid-eighteenth
century, however, something rather like a parameter collapse oc-
curred,[9] within the interpretation of British events. The Highlanders
entered the eighteenth century as dangerous marginal savages, and
charged at Culloden under this banner. The Duke of Cumberland
fought them as the hero of the government and the constitution, and
carried out the subsequent repression in this guise.

Once the job was complete, however, then the hero became vil-
lain, and the villain hero. The hunter who killed the last wolf was
not, as he expected, applauded as his forefathers had been; or at
least, he was only applauded until people noticed that wolves were
extinct: then he was reviled. The Highlanders leave the eighteenth
century well on the way to idealisation as a peaceful cultured peo-
ple, cruelly harried by oppressive villains. The Duke of Cumberland
becomes 'Butcher Cumberland'. It is not surprising that those who
suffered at the hands of his troops should call him 'Butcher'; Alexan-

der Macdonald, the unofficial laureate of Prince Charles, called him
'am Feoladair, Mac Dheorsa ris an striopaich' ('the butcher, king
George's son by the harlot').[10] What *is* noteworthy, is that he should
have become more generally known by this title, even to the society
on whose behalf he fought. Alexander Macdonald helps to give us
an idea of how arbitrary this re-evaluation was, in the last verse of
his 'Song of the Clans':[11]

> Bidh fuil us gaorr dam fùidreadh ann
>   Le lùth-chleasan ur làmh,
> Meangar cinn us dùirn diubh,
> Gearrar uilt le smùisreadh,
> Cìosnaichear ur biùthaidh,
>   Dan dubh-losgadh,   's dan cnàmh;
> Crùnar le poimp Teàrlach Stiùbhart,
> Us Frederic Prionns' fo shàil.

> Blood and gore will mingled be
> By your dexterous hands,
> Heads and fists will be lopped off,
> Bones broken, and joints hacked apart,
> Your foemen will be overwhelmed,
> Fire-blackened and eaten;
> Charles Stewart crowned in glory,
> And Prince Frederick Trampled down.

This is exhortatory and political verse, written at a critical moment;
it is, nevertheless, worth wondering what our view would have been
of the gallant and noble Highlander, had Macdonald's vision been
put thoroughly into effect. The great change in sentiment began,
however, and the idealisation of fringe peoples became easy and
fashionable. I earlier argued that:

It is proper to regard it as fortuitous that the intellectual world of
the larger society became interested in the primitive at a time
when the Highlander was peculiarly suited for the role, in a way
that neither, say, the Lothian peasantry, who were too close, nor
the South Sea Islander, who was too far away, could approach.
The conceptual boundaries of civilization were expanding fast,
following on the great exploratory periods of the 16th and 17th
centuries, and the strange and exotic were becoming elusive
enough to merit lament for their absence. The Scottish Gael stood

ambiguously in this world, at once a fit object for the location of primitive traits, and a fit object for taming, schooling and 'improving'.

                                                          (Chapman, 1978a: 20)

I would only qualify this formulation by saying that I no longer consider the matter fortuitous. There is, I believe, a close relationship between the final incorporation of the entire island into subdued civility, and the appearance of an idealisation of difference: romanticism of internal ethnic variety is a British invention. The site at Culloden moor, in its modern tourist guise, is one of its finest monuments – the shelves of the visitor centre groan with books about the Scottish Highlands and their people, and the glory that once was. The fabled violence of the Highlands, with their inter-clan savageries, have become admirable – a fierce pride of unruly passion.[12] A papier-mâché Duke of Cumberland lowers at visitors, piggy-eyed and blubber-lipped. Stones mark the spot where each clan, idealised in the nineteenth-century manner, fought and fell.

Romanticism was marked by a change in attitude to 'nature' (I put the term in quotes since it is not an objective category meaningful to all cultures; 'nature' is commonly constituted by its opposition to 'culture', and both these concepts are thus mutually defining and mutually variable). Crudely put, before the romantic reappraisal, nature was opposed to, and inimical to, culture and society. A previous age of urban civilisation had shown signs of moral attitudes similar to romanticism, in the Idylls and Eclogues of Theocritus and Virgil; these attitudes were imitated in some aspects of seventeenth and eighteenth-century art. Marie-Antoinette's 'shepherdess' act belongs in this context, but only a person at the centre of the social order, could take the risk of playing the 'peasant'. The seventeenth- or eighteenth-century pastoral also required the presence of people to domesticate the wild. Such precursors of romanticism were, in general, acted out within a moral structure in which the 'wild' needed taming if it were to be of any use or relevance to humanity. Wild animals were to be hunted, and wild places shunned or planted with crops: natural beauty was a fat buck in the larder, a field of grain, a pedigree heifer, prosperous peasants at harvest.

Romanticism, however, invested wildness with beauty and merit of its own. Human intervention, previously necessary to natural beauty, now became inimical to it. Landscape no longer needed people or dwellings; rural scenes were vaunted over urban; solitude was sought, in which natural virtue could be absorbed; nature was

good and kind. Notions of this kind, prevalent in the late eighteenth century among intellectuals, have reached most of British society by the twentieth. They are not uniformly interpreted or acted upon, but the imagery is accessible to all.[13] The reappraisal is well-exemplified by attitudes to the mountains themselves. Dr Johnson, visiting the Highlands with Boswell, reflected amid the mountains that 'The phantoms which haunt a desert are want, and misery, and danger; the evils of dereliction rush upon the thoughts' (Johnson, 1775: 87). Only a few decades later, Byron wrote 'I become/Portion of that around me; and to me/High mountains are a feeling, but the hum/ Of human cities torture: I can see/Nothing to loathe in nature' . . . 'Are not the mountains, waves and skies, a part/Of me and of my soul, as I of them?' ('Childe Harold', canto III, v. 72 and v. 75[14]).

The reappraisal of wild places goes along with a reappraisal of the wild people who lived in them, with a similar dynamic. By the late eighteenth century in urban Britain, nature, no longer an obvious threat, was palpably under threat itself. This period saw the beginnings of the sense that the natural world is not limitlessly resourceful and indestructible, but rather something that man might destroy, accidentally or wilfully. England and Scotland were the first to experience the growth of towns and industries on a modern scale, and this is closely associated with romanticism. Indeed, romanticism, in the British context, is the spiritual and intellectual *alter ego* of urban industrialism – a glorification of things rural, non-industrial and pre-industrial. There was, then, an inversion of the values placed on oppositions like:

> rural/urban
> unpopulated/densely populated
> wild/civilised
> solitude/company

For most of the eighteenth century and before, the weight of virtue lay in the second of each pair. Romanticism reversed this, beginning a familiar metaphorical indictment of industrial towns:

> natural/artificial
> clean/dirty
> peaceful/noisy (clamorous, whatever)

Idealisation of nature allowed idealisation of the peoples who inhabited it, as in Wordsworth's 'To a Highland Girl' (*Poetical Works*, 228):

> Sweet Highland Girl, a very shower
> Of beauty is thy earthly dower.
> Thou wear'st upon thy forehead clear
> The freedom of a mountaineer:
> For I methinks, till I grow old,
> As fair before me shall behold,
> As I do now, the cabin small,
> The lake, the bay, the waterfall;
> And Thee, the Spirit of them all!

The metaphorical structure did not, however, require the presence of people for the fulfilment of natural beauty. Indeed, it often forbade their presence. Nature was *corrupted* by people. We see these ideas realised today in the attempts of people to seek solitude in the natural world, all of them lamenting the presence of the others as a regrettable feature (among the crowds on top of Helvellyn on a summer day, perhaps). The solitary idealisation tends to be paramount in the imaginations of most visitors to mountains places like Cumbria, Snowdonia and the Scottish Highlands, and accounts for the common indifference of tourists to the absence of native inhabitants. In the Scottish Highlands, the absent clansmen can be imagined, which seems to be sufficient. The presence of large numbers of their descendants, living in modern towns, would not necessarily be welcomed. That most characteristic of visitors to the Scottish Highlands, the mountaineer, has made a symbolic world largely independent of any native inhabitants – a world of peaks and paths, standard Anglicisations of Gaelic names, Munro tables, crags and climbs.[15]

Romanticism revolted against urban and industrial society, and against neo-classicism. It also revolted against the rationality of the Enlightenment, but again, only in the clear and comfortable evidence of the power of that rationality. Science was advancing rapidly, and the power of religion was waning. A celebration of irrationality, of intellectual disorder, was, therefore, congruent with the various other aspects of romanticism. The revolt against neo-classicism, and the idealisation of barbarian and primitive peoples, made the European barbarians of the ancient world an ideal location of romantic sentiment. They too had revolted against classicism in the most tangible way, and had lived beyond the bounds of self-defining civilisation. They were also suitable locations of irrationality and disorder, for they had been perceived as such by their more settled

neighbours for as long as we have records (see Chapter 11). The long-documented excess, disorder and passion of the barbarian was ripe for the artistry of romanticism.

The classical world had left records of two apparently different kinds of barbarian in northern Europe – the Celts, who had resisted the Roman Empire in its growth, and the Goths (or Germans) who had brought about its fall. Both became, in early romanticism, vogue figures, serving rather similar symbolic functions. The Goths were embodied in the Gothic novel, with its ghosts, irrational passions, supernatural creatures, and wide circulations from the subscription libraries (Matthew 'Monk' Lewis, in *Ambrosio, or the Monk*, 1796, provided the exemplar, and had many imitators[16]). The Celts found a variety of expressions, of which Macpherson's Ossian has already been mentioned; important also was the rehabilitation of the Arthurian theme, out of popularity during the Renaissance, but back with all its old vigour under romanticism: it has been with us ever since, growing ever-more elaborate and fantastic accretions.[17]

The Germans in the late eighteenth century were regarded by intellectual Britons much as were the contemporary Celts – as latter-day barbarians. Thomas Carlyle, attempting to draw British attention to the virtues of German literature and philosophy in 1827, wrote:

> It is objected that the Germans have a radically bad taste. . . . the spirit of the accusation seems to be somewhat as follows: that the Germans, with much natural susceptibility, are still in a rather coarse and uncultivated state of mind; displaying , with the energy and other virtues of a rude people, many of their vices also; in particular, a certain wild and headlong temper, which seizes on all things too hastily and impetuously; weeps, storms, loves, hates, too fiercely and vociferously, delighting in coarse excitements, such as flaring contrasts, vulgar horrors, and all sorts of showy exaggeration. . . . In short, the German Muse comports herself, it is said, like a passionate and rather fascinating, but tumultuous uninstructed and but half-civilised Muse. A *belle sauvage* at best, we can only love her with a sort of supercilious tolerance.
>
> (Carlyle, 1888: 28–9)

This is very much like a contemporary description of Celtic literature, or indeed of any other 'primitive' literature. John Buchan gives a brief but telling expression of the congruence of Gothic and Celtic

images, when he says of Scott's *The Lady of the Lake*, that 'there are perhaps too many Gothick echoes, to which a Celtic subject always made Scott prone' (Buchan, 1932: 86). Thomas Love Peacock wrote several excellent parodies of the Gothic genre, including a spoof 'Celtic' Gothic novel: the unity of the barbarian categories at this time was such that a 'Celtic' Gothic novel, which now sounds like a self-contradiction, could readily exist.

The German or Goth was not, however, apt to British romanticism, which took the form of a revolt against the established forms of *England*: the Anglo-Saxon, at the centre of England's conception of itself, was first cousin to the Goth and German; moreover, a German dynasty was on the throne of England. These were reasons enough to discourage a romanticism of the barbarian Anglo-Saxon. There *was* such a romanticism, but it was poor and feeble compared to that of the Celt. *Beowulf*, for all its pagan passion, and despite keen literary and historical interest, has remained largely a text for scholars. King Arthur and the romantic Highland clans are known to all.

Indeed, the Anglo-Saxon came to represent, in standard ethnological imagery, the opposite of the Celt. Carlyle's metaphors were sifted out to provide further polarities, for good and ill. The Anglo-Saxon shared the German's 'bad taste, coarse state of mind, and energy', while the Celt shared his 'natural susceptibility, wild and headlong temper, impetuosity, passion and tumult'. Ernest Renan (1854) and Matthew Arnold (1891) provided near-definitive versions of these characterisations,[18] with great influence on subsequent works. The picture any writer drew depended upon what he wished to prove – whom he was trying to put down, and whom to vaunt.

Germany's place in all this is interesting. The picture of romanticism that I have drawn is Britain-centred, with France drawn in for its Gaulish and Breton connections. Germany I have largely left out. Romanticism, however, in many of its guises, is strongly associated with Germany and German intellectuals – Kant, Schiller, Lessing, Novalis, Herder, and so on. On the face of it, however, my analysis does not work for Germany. I have argued that British romanticism looked beyond itself, to the outer edges of its own rationality and geography, for inspiration and embodiment, and that it was a reaction against the mundane securities of British administration, science, civility, art and urban life. German romanticism, however, looked to Germany itself. The German people was one of its prime objects. The answer must be that Germany, if it could be said to exist at that time, lacked England's securities. It was not a secure polity; unification

was in the distant future, and Germany was a political patchwork, tied together only by a language. It was not intellectually or morally secure, for it had the political power and intellectual prestige of France as its neighbour, patronising and threatening by turns. Germany found, therefore, in itself a suitable object for the romantic imagination. As the 'second industrial nation', after Britain, Germany eventually provided similar grounds for the development of romanticism – dirty industry, urban growth, mechanical manufactures and the triumph of science. Its political and intellectual status, however, were quite different from those of Britain. Germany realised itself romantically before, under Bismark, it realised itself in statehood and power. One is tempted to say that this was what made Germany peculiar and dangerous; it became a most powerful industrial nation, which had a romantic interpretation of itself nesting at the centre of its being. Britain was not like this: romanticism in Britain lived in Macpherson's Ossian, Mary Queen of Scots, the Highland clans, Arthur and his knights; in Germany, romanticism lived in the German people.[19]

France is a more obvious comparative example, since it too had a fringe 'Celtic' minority. The comparison with Britain is instructive. I have already introduced the *Barzaz Breiz*, the text by which Brittany became known in its modern guise to educated France, and noted that this was published and popularised almost a century after Macpherson's Ossian. I have argued that a romantic idealisation and celebration of the ethnic fringe of Britain occurred when the distinctiveness of the fringe was manifestly under threat, while the centre felt itself to be secure. Over the formative period for British romanticism, these conditions did not apply in France; quite the contrary.

Quite the contrary, indeed. From 1789, France was busy with survival and self-definition, a long and bitterly contested process, which left no space for fond elaboration of fringe identity. British romanticism took the French Revolution as an inspiration to romantic thought.[20] It also perceived it as a romantic event; this is arguable, but it is at least possible that aspects of thought which found primarily literary embodiment in Britain, were realised in action during the French revolutionary period, without any primarily literary monument: the romantic monument was the Revolution itself. The appeal to mass consciousness and culture, and disdain for the existing establishment, were clearly features that romanticism and revolution shared. The monarchy was restored in France, however, in 1814, and the Revolution temporarily discredited. The relative tranquility

of the restoration period, however, allowed France to elaborate the latest foreign fashions, among which was literary romanticism. French romanticism is often considered to have hit its best in a belated hurry, between 1818 and 1822, and to have disappeared by 1845; however naive formulations of this kind are, they nevertheless emphasise the lateness and fragility of French romanticism.[21] Self-conscious classicism continued to dominate French culture. Napoleon campaigned with an Italian translation of Macpherson's Ossian at his side, but he had himself crowned as a Caesar, not as Vercingetorix; his regiments marched as Roman legions, not as Gaulish war bands. Neo-classicism was not an environment in which fringe minorities flourished.

French uncertainty about self-identification during the revolutionary period and the first empire, continued long after this. France has made its way, since 1789, from *ancien régime*, through five republics, two empires, a consulate, the Vichy regime, the Hundred Days, the Paris Commune and May '68. It has been occupied by foreign forces, enemies and allies, four times in the last two centuries. Faced by this succession of external and internal upheaval, Paris has rarely been sure enough of France's integrity to wish into existence other identities within it, which would have rendered the nature of France itself even more problematic. On the contrary, the French Jacobin state has given the world a model of directive centralisation. In the concern of the centre with its own survival, there was no comfortable political space that a minority could occupy.

Between 1790 and 1815, when polite British society was discussing Ossian, forming Highland societies, applauding the achievements of the Highland regiments, and reading *The Lady of the Lake*, French society was engaged in a desperate internal war. North-west France, and with it Brittany, was a source of persistent opposition, royalist, religious and regionalist, to the new republic. It was also a convenient location for British interference in French affairs: there were insurrections in Brittany and the Vendée, royalist forces landed at Quiberon, and the British navy constantly on the horizon. So, when Scottish Highland 'difference' was attracting polite and scholarly attention, Breton 'difference' posed only a threat, and provoked only violence.

The sense of threat that Brittany (and other internal French minorities) posed to France continued. As has often been argued,[22] internal minorities in a modern nation-state construct themselves in 'opposition' to the central identity and power. The term 'opposition' here derives from structuralism, and need not involve hostility; hos-

tility, however, is one possible political realisation. In Britain, the construction of minority identities in 'opposition' to the central identity was benignly tolerated; the centre colluded in the construction, even initiated it. In France, however, the process was continually interrupted by real hostilities. The story is complex, but it can be illustrated by the effect of France's wars with Germany upon interest in, and realisation of, Breton identity. In the periods before 1870, before 1914, and before 1939, there was a growing interest, among intellectuals both French and Breton, in Breton customs, political aspirations, language and literature. This was structured within a benign sense of difference, of structural opposition, between France and Paris on the one hand, and Brittany on the other. Fledgling organisations began activity in Breton language-teaching and learning, Breton literature, Breton folklore, and aspirations towards Breton political autonomy. In each case, the outbreak of war with Germany halted this: 'opposition' to France looked too much like friendship with Germany to be tolerable. The safe moral conditions for the growth of minority identity were destroyed. Other practical considerations also intruded: many people involved in peace-time 'Breton' activities became involved, in war-time, in fighting for France; the major structure triumphed over the minor. After hostilities, the realisation of Breton identity was set back many years, and the work had to begin again.

The saddest example of this was the fate of the 1930s organisation Breiz Atao ('Brittany Forever'), and associated cultural and linguistic activity (especially the Breton-language journal *Gwalarn*[23]). Breton cultural and regional activity after 1870 had been clearly associated with Catholicism and right-wing politics, in opposition to the secular socialism of the Third Republic. The compulsory schools of the Third Republic had introduced French into Brittany as an explicit means of freeing people from their bondage to priest, landowner and aristocrat. Breton was seen, not without reason, as a language of Catholic faith, and traditional social and economic relations; or, as the educationalists of the Third Republic saw it, as a language of reaction. The 1930s Breton movement, in turn, opposed itself to the secular socialism of Blum's *Front Populaire*, and had a tendency to tune in to contemporary German racial ideology, with a putative 'Celtic supremacy' on the agenda. Some leaders of this Breton movement (and it was a movement with, so to speak, many generals and no private soldiers) saw collaboration with Germany as the best way to realise Breton independence from France, thus realising the worst fears of the French central authorities. The overt collaboration of a

few of this small 'Breton' movement was not ultimately of any great
account. In the post-liberation orgy of accusation and self-exculpa-
tion, however, the taint of collaboration touched not only the or-
ganised Breton movement, but even the Breton language and Breton
customs themselves. There were executions, exiles, imprisonments
and humiliations, and a general destruction of the pre-war struc-
tures of Breton identity. Movements towards Breton autonomy and
towards the teaching and use of Breton in the schools were subse-
quently regarded, by the mass of ordinary Breton-speakers them-
selves, as tainted by fascism and collaboration. In the immediate
post-war period, self-consciously 'Breton' cultural activity all but
disappeared. It began again in harmless forms, as an interest in
dance and costume. Only when a generation born after the War had
reached maturity, in the 1960s, could overt Breton political activity
begin again; even then, for many old people, this was a rebirth of
Breiz Atao. The young activists of the 1960s, however, were left-
wing, opposed now to the *right-wing* Fifth Republic of De Gaulle and
Pompidou, and saw themselves as being of an entirely different
stamp to the discredited pre-war movement.

   Organised Breton cultural, linguistic and political activity has,
then, suffered along with France itself. Aggrieved minority activists
often argue that French minorities are oppressed because France is
such a strong and intolerant centralising power. It is, however, the
weakness of France, in the long-term, which has made it intolerant of
its large linguistic minorities and fearful of the threat of fragmenta-
tion they seemed to represent. A romanticism of minority ethnicity
was not, therefore, of such ready growth in France as it was in
England. The stakes remained too high for the romantic risk to be
taken.

   There are also demographic and economic aspects to this. I have
argued that a romantic interest in nature and rural society occurred
when both nature and rural society seemed to be finally tamed, even
vulnerable. Britain in the nineteenth century, with its growing eco-
nomic strength, massive industries, and growing preponderance of
urban industrial population, provided such conditions. From 1800 to
1900, the population of England, Scotland and Wales grew from
under 11 million to almost 38 million; this growth was urban and
industrially based. The self-sufficient peasant, in most of Britain,
was a thing of the past by the end of the eighteenth century,[24] and over
the next century Britain became a thoroughly urban society. France
was very different; its population grew from 29 million in 1800, to
about 41 million in 1900; much of this growth was rural rather than

urban, and in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century, over 65 per cent of France's population was still rural.[25] France industrialised later and more slowly than Britain. The peasant smallholder was not dispossessed of his land, and there was no comparable pull to urban industrial centres. By the late nineteenth century movement of people from rural Brittany to towns (especially of young women) was high enough to cause concern both to moralists and economists.[26] The rural position continued to be the majority, however. The definitive and majority move to the towns did not happen until after 1945. Only in this relatively recent period did France entire become generally conscious of the dwindling of its peasantry – a category no longer rendered banal by its omnipresence.[27]

Since most French people continued to live either on the land, or in small towns in close contact with rural areas (with most people having access to relatives in a nearby rural village), there was little room, either, for a romanticisation of empty nature. This is an essentially urban dream, and was unnecessary in France. When such ideas did occur in France, they tended to do so as borrowings from England.

There are many small pointers to these differences. *Access* to the land has been a much more burning issue in Britain, since there was less land in the first place, and dense urban populations. In rural France today, footpaths typically go far enough for farmers to get to their fields, and no further. This is true of parts of rural England that have no tourists. Areas of rural England that attract urban interest, however, have a network of footpaths giving a visitor access to rural beauty. There is nothing comparable in France. Many places of great natural beauty in France, which would be criss-crossed by paths in England, have no easy access. The Goyen estuary in south-west Brittany, leading to Pont-Croix, is deservedly marked on the maps as a place of scenic value (as indeed it is), but until recently there were no footpaths along it; in England, such a river would have had wide footpaths down both sides. In Brittany, since the car made walking unnecessary for the local population, the footpaths that did exist have fallen into disuse. There has been no large nature-loving urban population to keep them open. This is changing, however, and within the last few years a footpath has been made along one bank of the Goyen. Only since the last war has urban France triumphed, demographically and morally, over rural and peasant France, and in this period movements for access to rural France have gained momentum; the Goyen path is one evidence of a much wider change. Nature reserves, national parks, long-distance walking routes (*sentiers*

de grande-randonées), youth hostels, and so on, have come in strength
in the post-war period. In every respect, however, they are later and
less well-developed than their British counterparts.

So, a romantic idealisation of nature, rural life and minority eth-
nicity was, in England, both safe and necessary. In France it was
neither, and concern for the rural fringes and the people that inhabit
them was later and less enthusiastic.

THE ROMANTIC COUNTER-CURRENT

I have suggested that romanticism represents an apparent counter-
current to the normal run of centre–periphery relations in cultural
matters, and that the impulse to romanticism is differently timed
and structured in Britain and France. Within the romantic ethic,
fringe fashions become fashionable at the centre. The centre looks at
its own ordered civility, propriety and modishness, and finds them
wanting; it looks, for desirable fashions, to the edge of its social
world, to wild, natural, folk and ethnic habits and virtues. This new
fashionable possibility only arises when rural naturality is tamed
and threatened. For romanticism is primarily *a new fashion at the
centre*. The centre looks to the rural fringe, finds there archaic cul-
tural features, and turns them into fashionable items; but this re-
evaluation occurs *in the centre*, for the benefit of the centre, with a
logic determined by the centre. For this reason I have called roman-
ticism not simply a counter-current, but an *apparent* counter-current.

It was to draw attention to this *apparent* status of the counter-
current that I began my account of romanticism with two famous
forgeries – Ossian and the *Barzaz Breiz*: for not all of fringe life
becomes fashionable, but only selected aspects, as these are under-
stood and appreciated at the centre. Romanticism plays a vital part
in creating a 'public persona' for fringe minorities, but this public
persona is created by the centre. Macpherson produced his Ossian to
appeal to Edinburgh intellectuals. The young Villemarqué left Brit-
tany for Paris with no evident interest in Breton verse, and learned
there, in salon life, that Parisian fame might be achieved through the
publication of ancient and rustic Celtic epics.

The near-disappearance of features apt for romanticisation is im-
portant. At the centre, there is no fashionable appeal in adopting
habits which are outmoded at the centre, but otherwise widespread:
that way you simply make yourself unfashionable again. If you have
just had a chimney built, there is no prestige and romance in going

back a year later to a hole in the roof; that way you simply become like your poorer neighbours. If your parents were peasants struggling to earn enough to raise a family, and you have managed, through the efforts of yourself and your family, to get an education and a job as a teacher, putting your clogs back on and becoming a peasant would be irrational self-destruction. It is different, however, if you adopt a feature of obvious minority status, on the verge of extinction; then you put yourself in a rare minority status, achieving distinction thereby. Before the periphery can produce fashions which the very centre will want to adopt, the distance between the centre and the periphery must, therefore, be considerable.

The first romantic appropriations of fringe habits were necessarily of features that were nearing disappearance. They occurred at a time when little thought had been paid to documenting fringe cultural habits; this is a romantic ambition not prevalent in the eighteenth century. They also occurred at a time when the distance in communication, of people and ideas, between fringe and centre, was still great in modern terms. The fringe habits which were appropriated were subjected to the demands of the central structure, and found themselves part of a cultural semiotic system quite different from that in which they had originally existed. It is not surprising, then, that there is a permanent question mark over the authenticity of features attributed to the Celts by early romanticism.

There *are* cases of unambiguous forgery (or, at least, imaginative creation – the druidical rites of the Welsh Eisteddfod, and the druidism attached to Stonehenge, for example – these have, of course, since established themselves as traditions over a century old). The more interesting and typical cases, however, are those where there is a real but suspect continuity from fringe practice to romantic centrality. The Scottish Gaelic case provides a wealth of these, in those features thought most typical of it – bagpipes, tartans and kilts, and the clans themselves.

Before we examine these, we should remember the model of the passage of fashions from the centre to the periphery – a continuous wave of innovation and outmodishment. Within this model, no 'traditions' are sacrosanct and exempt from history: everything is merely a passing fashion – fashions in musical instruments, in clothing, in social order. The periphery may seem, if intermittently inspected, to be a repository of timeless custom, but this is only an artefact of a mode of observation; a discourse of the past surrounds the periphery, making it easy to suppose that the periphery is outside of time, and changeless. The periphery can change as fast as the centre, and

still give rise to this perception. We need not suppose, therefore, that before their romantic discovery the Celtic fringes were locked in tradition. We have seen the example of the bagpipes, whose position in Highland Scotland was the end-result of a process of abandonment on a European scale. Had it not been for the influences of romanticism, the pipes would have disappeared from Scotland, as unlamented in Skye as they had been in Yorkshire, Normandy or Rome.

The Highland pipes, the kilt and the clan system, were all seized upon by polite Scottish society at a time when they were disappearing and little recorded. Not surprisingly, there is controversy about their exact pre-romantic status: modern moral imperatives altogether outweigh the available facts, and beguiling idealisations resist factual criticism. Campsie's destruction of the idea of the Skye MacCrimmon piping-school co-exists with piping-schools purporting to continue the grand old traditions; Trevor-Roper's defrocking of the Highlander co-exists with the international image of kilted Scotland; my own general suggestion of the inherent inauthenticity of the British and Scottish appropriation of Highland tradition co-exists with Black's indignant assertion of authenticity.[28]

The kilt is a typical romantic appropriation: it moved rapidly from the extreme periphery to the very centre, accompanied by all the processes of forgetting and imaginative re-creation. In 1745, the plaid was the dress, as Trevor-Roper puts it, 'of roguish, idle, predatory, blackmailing Highlanders' (1983: 15). It was proscribed, along with other Highland attire, by the Disclothing Act of 1747, and fell out of use as an item of ordinary dress. The Disclothing Act was repealed in 1782, and although this did not affect popular disuse of the plaid, it did mark a stage in the romantic rehabilitation of Highland dress; this reached its high-point in a visit to Edinburgh in 1822 by George IV, stage-managed by Sir Walter Scott,[29] in which Scott and the King firmly tied the Highlanders into the centre of Scottish historical self-understanding, and the King himself wore a kilt, thus beginning a tradition of royal tartan-wearing which the House of Windsor continues.

Trevor-Roper has called the emergence of the modern kilt an example of 'the invention of tradition'.[30] He makes much of the move from the plaid (a garment covering the whole body, skirted round the knees), to the modern kilt (covering waist to knees). The former was truly worn by the common man of the Highlands; the latter was not. Trevor-Roper's argument is sound, if not entirely novel, but I am at one with Robert Paine in finding 'the invention of tradition' to

be a crude formulation of the problem.[31] Recent social anthropological approaches to the 'infinite sequence of rememorisations' by which the present appropriates the past, are at once more subtle, and more general, than any 'invention of tradition' directed at obvious and easy targets.[32]

For Trevor-Roper has not, I feel, touched the heart of the problem. The move from plaid (upper and lower body garment leaving the knees bare) to kilt (lower body garment leaving the knees bare) could easily be argued to preserve the fundamental continuity – bare knees; rather as a move from trousers with turn-ups to trousers without turn-ups might be said to preserve the tradition of trousers. It was, after all, the bare-knees feature, and the ready possibility of large-scale exposure of the lower body, which most impressed observers of the Highlanders. It was also the feature which Gaelic writers stressed, when writing about Highland dress. Duncan Ban Macintyre, protesting against the Disclothing Act, in 'Oran do' n Bhriogais' ('Song to the Breeches'), wrote:[33]

> 'S o'n a chuir sinn suas a' bhriogais
> Gur neo-mhiosail leinn a' chulaidh ud,
> 'Gan teannadh mu no h-iosgannan,
> Bur trioblaideach leinn umainn iad
>
> 'S neo-sheannsar a' chulaidh ì,
> Gur grànda leinn umainn ì,
> Cho teann air a cumadh dhuinn
> 'S nach b'fheairrde leinn tuilleadh ì
>
> And since we put the trousers on
> That clothing does not please us well
> Pinching us around our houghs
> Uncomfortable to wear
>
> Unlucky this new dress of ours,
> Uglily does it sit on us,
> So tightly does it cling to us,
> We'd sooner see no more of it

Alexander Macdonald also wrote in immediate and angry response to the Disclothing Act, in 'Am Breacan Uallach' ('The Proud Plaid'); he too made the freedom of movement permitted by the plaid into a metaphor for the liberty of the Gael, and the restriction of trousers

into a metaphor for their legal subjugation – 'Ged chuir sibh oirnne buarach, Thiugh-luaidhte, gu 'r falbh a bhacadh' ('Though on us you've put fetters, Tightly fixed to stop us moving').[34] Macintyre rejoiced accordingly at the repeal of the act, in 'Oran do 'n Eideadh Ghaidhealach' ('Song to the Highland Garb'):[35]

> Chuir sinn a suas an deise
> Bhios uallach freagarrach dhùinn;
> Breacan an fhéile preasach
> . . .
> Togaidh na Gàidheil an ceann,
> Cha bhi iad am fang na 's mù;
> Dh'fhalbh na speirichean teann
> Thug orra bhith mall gun lùth;
>
> We have assumed the suit
> That is lightsome and fitting for us
> The belted kilt in its pleats
> . . .
> The Gaels will hold up their heads
> And they will be hemmed in no more
> Those tight fetters have vanished
> That made them languid and frail

The kilt, plaid, philibeg, *feileadh, feileadh-beag, feileadh-bhreacain, feileadh-mor, eileadh* all affronted long-standing mainstream European structures for the differentiation, through dress, of men and women: they were skirted, open to the world, readily raised, and worn by men. The international appreciation of Scottish Highland kilt-like garments undoubtedly owes a great deal to the pleasurable flavour of this anomaly.

The use of the kilt as a metaphor for political and moral freedom, is a useful guide to the vital change surrounding Highland dress at this time; for it was not minor changes in the content or form of the dress that violated native authenticity, but rather the complete change of context in which the dress was worn and appreciated. Before 1745, the bareness of the Highland knee was regarded as a sign of primitive savagery, and the freedom of movement of the Scottish Highlander was something that could only be deplored, from the point of view of the law-abiding Lowlands. After 1745, the bare Highland knee became a piece of noble savagery, and the freedom of movement

of the Scottish Highlander became a laudable escape from the un-natural constraints of urban industrial civilisation. The kilt suggested an apparently ready access to Highland masculine sexuality, and so to passion and violence; these also changed from being deplorable to desirable features. The kilt, moreover, in whatever form, moved from being the dress of the most poverty-stricken at the periphery, to being the party-dress of the most privileged at the centre. These changes of context give a strong flavour of inauthenticity, as Trevor-Roper has noted; the problem is more than a cut of cloth, however.

The model of romantic appropriation of fringe customs can be expressed in a simple economic form. We can take an example from furniture: it could be a 'Welsh dresser', or a Breton '*lit clos*'. When an item of furniture goes out of fashion at the centre, it is economically as well as morally devalued. The devaluation progresses slowly across the map, from centre to periphery. People throw away their old-fashioned furniture, burn it, or use it to keep the hens in. Even-tually, only a few of the most unfashionable people on the periphery still have their old furniture. At this stage, their furniture is both valueless and comparatively rare. Now the arbiters of fashion from the centre can step in; they can simultaneously buy up the valueless furniture for small sums, and redefine it as highly fashionable. The very scarcity of the furniture invites the redefinition, since those who appropriate it are making their fashion exclusive. The redefinition is also economically rewarding for those who put it into effect. Some of the remaining original owners of the furniture may, by luck or judgement, benefit from this; most will be losers, however, and the redefinition of value is out of their hands. A discourse of authenticity and aesthetic appreciation will grow, materially embodied in an-tique shops. The peasants will eat their dinner off formica-topped tables, and buy their furniture in the supermarket. The economic aspects of this example are congruent with the moral aspects of all examples. In romantic appropriation of the fringe, there is not always an object to be bought and sold; the re-evaluation even of ideas, however, is similarly structured.

Clearly, any such re-evaluation must involve the meeting of groups of people who are far apart, not necessarily geographically, but socially and morally – a meeting of the most forward and the most backward, the most sophisticated and the most naive, the most advanced and the most retarded (the adjectives are not mine, but an attempt to render the common language of expression in such a situation). The two parties to this meeting are ostensibly dealing

with the same material – the same item of furniture, the same language, the same custom. The complex of attitudes within which they understand the situation, is, however, quite different. Indeed, this difference is a prerequisite of the re-evaluation.

Those at opposite ends of the process do not readily understand one another's values and ambitions. Language is again a useful example. The last speakers of a minority language have every reason for following those who have gone before, by converting to the majority language. The compulsion becomes more imperative, as the number of remaining speakers dwindles. The minority language reaches its final state within a bilingualism, in which the minority language is the language of home, hearth, old age and old fashions, and the majority language the language of business, industry, fashion, ambition and youth. This structure will be generalised throughout the bilingual population, and multiply realised in social structure, conversation and symbolism.[36] At this point when the language is dying out, however, it becomes ripe for romantic re-evaluation. Those who carry out this re-evaluation are typically, as we might expect, highly educated, relatively wealthy and privileged, urban, and already fully and securely fluent in the majority language. For them, the acquisition and use of the minority language occur in a symbolic environment where these are wholly admirable: in university corridors and urban drawing rooms, language-classes and certain carefully controlled environments in fringe areas.[37] Those who learn the language typically discover that those who have it as a first language, and live in the area traditionally associated with its use, do not wish to speak it to the learners. The learners deplore this as a lack of commitment to the language displayed by its native speakers.

The learners try to explain why the native speakers will not speak to them in the minority language, elaborating misguided theories of language-shame and oppression. The learner needs some theory, however, to explain what seems a genuinely anomalous phenomenon: the learner has learnt the language, or aspires to learn it, and gets credit, in the eyes of himself and his peers, for doing so; he does not understand that the native speaker uses and values the language in a completely different social, moral and symbolic context. The learner does not understand this other system of values, and assumes that his system of values is the only correct and self-evident system: anything else is a distortion, an error, or a false consciousness. Bluntly, the learner admires the minority language, and is indifferent to his own majority tongue, which is banal and of easy access to him; the

native speaker admires the majority language, and is likewise indifferent to his own, which is banal and of easy access to him.

We could think of the minority language as a loaf of wholemeal bread; long regarded as lower in status than white bread, wholemeal bread has retreated into the social and geographical periphery of life. Eventually, white bread reached the extreme fringe as a fashionable innovation (modern, convenient and clean, as opposed to old-fashioned, inconvenient and dirty), and is now the characteristic bread of Highland Scotland and the Hebrides. As soon, however, as brown bread began to fall 'off the bottom of the scale' (Mennell, 1985: 303), it reappeared, a novel high-fashion, at the top. In Edinburgh wine-bars the sandwiches are now invariably made from wholemeal bread. The Gaelic learner, trying to speak his Gaelic to a Highland crofter, is offering a wholemeal bread sandwich.

Those who write about Celtic areas, celebrating their language and culture, are typically the orchestrators and perpetrators of such romantic re-evaluations. They entice their readers to visit the Celtic areas, and it is characteristic that the visitors should find little of what they came for, outside the carefully tended tourist environment. Instead of rural people performing rites, speaking Celtic languages and dancing at the crossroads, they find a semi-urban proletariat, speaking English, playing pool, and watching 'Neighbours' on television. They find a curiously vulgar version of their own normality (only factory-produced sliced white bread is offered). They assume that they have got there just too late; and so, in a sense, they have: but if they were not too late, they would not have come.

These features intrude into all aspects of the public celebration of Celtic life, its reality, and the visitors' view of this reality. They explain why the Celtic language-learners speak among themselves. They explain why the curator of the folk-museum locks up at the end of the day and goes home to his television. They explain why so many craft shops are run by escapees from urban majority life. They explain why people emigrate from the cities in search of the fulfilment of fringe rural life, and find themselves living in fringe communities where communications with the older natives are virtually non-existent. They explain why so many people of fringe and minority origin, that live lives as factory workers, doctors, clerks, engineers, accountants, labourers, nurses, teachers, businessmen, and so on, live peacefully and prosperously in towns all over Britain and the world, and have little or no interest in the discourse of belonging which others conduct, uninvited, on their behalf.

10

Classification and Culture-Meeting

In Chapters 11 and 12 I discuss in detail some accounts of culture-meeting involving the Celts. Here, I deal with culture-meeting in general, and its expression in written accounts. I have already referred to two notions – that society is 'a web of boundaries', and that any society tends to 'bound' itself away from its neighbours as 'culture' to 'nature' (p. 28). Here, I present the argument behind these rather vague assertions.

When we look at ourselves, at our language, culture and society, we see a familiar pattern, in which everything seems to have its place. This pattern – what we eat and what we do not, the sexual division of labour, the organisation of family life, how we dress, the use of space in the house – has the appearance, if we are not thinking hard, of a normality so natural that it is difficult to imagine things being otherwise. Experience of other cultures, however ,brings experience of different social realities, which offend this sense of normality. The subject of social anthropology has tried to make this experience intelligible. Social anthropologists have gone to other societies, and tried to become a part of them, in order to see the world through new eyes – through, as it were, a new normality.[1]

This enterprise led to an understanding of the social and unique nature of any particular 'normality': social practices were not given in nature, or even in human nature; rather, they were a creation, which might easily have been created otherwise. Other cultures were 'normal' to those that lived within them, and it seemed inadequate to regard them as 'deviations' from the 'real normality' represented by the observers' culture. Another framework of interpretation was required. What follows is an attempt to give a view of this problem which will be both comprehensible to the general reader, and broadly acceptable to the anthropological community.[2]

We can start by imagining that 'reality' is unstructured, and that it is human intervention which imposes structure and differentiation

upon it, breaking it up into significant units, or 'classifying' it. The units thus created become, in all important senses, 'real' for the society which has produced them. So, the classification of space (into domestic, private, public, outside, inside, safe, dangerous, etc.), of people (kin, strangers, friends, foreigners, adults, children, husbands, wives, cousins, marriageable and unmarriageable people, etc.), of plants (wild, domestic, edible, inedible, weeds, vegetables, flowers, trees, etc.), of animals (wild, pets, domestic, edible, inedible, vermin, etc.), and so on, are the result not of recognition of an order that was pre-ordained in things, but that was imposed by the human imagination upon reality.[3]

To give substance to this idea, we can look at some examples of classification in action. The first two examples, the classification of kin and colours, have been much discussed, and are well-known areas through which our understanding of this kind of problem has been advanced. Other examples which follow, under various heads, are areas of use in understanding what we might call 'the Celtic/ non-Celtic confrontation'.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF KIN

Early anthropologists discovered that the peoples they studied had systems for classifying kin ('kinship systems') which were very different from our own (the 'our' here refers, broadly, to modern British normality). We regard our own system as based on the nuclear family, and as being symmetrical in structure around this: the names we use for the wife's side of the family are the same as for the husband's – grandfather means both MF and FF; grandmother means both MM and FM; uncle means both MB and FB; aunt means both MZ and FZ; and so on.[4] We also have a term, cousin, which is symmetrically used on both sides of the family, and is also indifferent to sex – it means (minimally) FBD, FBS, FZD, FZS, MBD, MBS, MZD and MZS. A number of our kinship terms are, from the point of view of one person in the system, specific to only one other – mother, father, husband, wife; and some others are restricted to a few individuals – son, daughter, brother, sister, grandson, granddaughter. We ban sexual or marital contact within a symmetrical range of relatives around the nuclear family; within this range, marriage is forbidden and sexual relationships regarded as incestuous. So, for

example, a sexual or marital relationship between a girl and her FB is viewed with exactly the same disapproval as a relationship between her and her MB.

In other kinship systems, however, very different conventions operate. Categories we consider to be homogeneous (containing the same *kind* of people, like 'uncles' or 'cousins') are strictly divided. Individuals within our system (like 'father'), are absorbed into larger categories and not distinguished from them. The nuclear family unit turns out be far from fundamental. The symmetry of terminology and incest prohibitions around the 'nuclear family' is often absent. Even the notion that a child is equally related to both its parents is denied. This is a complex and sometimes technical field, and one idealised example must suffice.[5]

Our own kinship system, although more or less symmetrical about the nuclear family unit, is somewhat biased towards the male line – family names are inherited through this line, as property and titles have tended to be. Many social systems, however, virtually ignore either the female or the male line, and property, names and inheritance pass down through one or the other, but not both – a society which ignores the female line is called patrilineal, and one which ignores the male line is called matrilineal. A matrilineal society challenges many basic assumptions that we might make about kinship (everything said about matriliny is applicable, through the looking glass, to patriliny).

In an idealised matrilineal society, the basic domestic unit might be a man, his sister, and his sister's children. The husband and father, so central a figure in our own view of family life, is only an accessory to the fertilising process. To deny any stake a father might have in the children, some matrilineal societies elaborate theories of conception which greatly reduce, even deny, the importance of the father. Children are most closely related to their mother, and to their mother's brother; the *genetic* father is unimportant. Children inherit from their mother and mother's brother; their *genetic* father's property will pass to his own sister's children.

Because a child inherits its social being through its mother, not its father, the nature of its relationship to relatives on each side is quite different: relatives on the mother's side are closely related, while relatives on the father's side are scarcely related at all. So, for a male child, his mother's brother's daughter (MBD) is forbidden in marriage, and sexual contact with her would be considered gravely incestuous. His father's brother's daughter (FBD), on the other hand,

is not related to him, and may well be a highly desirable marital or sexual partner. The category 'cousin', which our system considers homogeneous, is, within this very different kind of lineal system, highly differentiated. The kinship terminology within such a system will reflect these distinctions, and our term 'cousin' will be simply untranslatable. Other kinship terms may group together people that we would differentiate. One term, for example, may be used for the genetic father and a range of male relatives around him – F, FB, FF, FFB, FBS. So, a term that for us is person-specific, like 'father', cannot receive specific translation, since the term that means 'father' also, and equally, means (say), 'father's brother'.

So, a system like this makes distinctions that we do not, and fails to make distinctions that we consider important. The classification of people is not given in nature, but results from a specific social system.

COLOUR TERMINOLOGY

Colour terminology and perception provide another good example. Our perception of colour, and our division of the spectrum into colours, feel to us like a correct rendition of a pre-given physical reality. Our own colour terms – red, blue, green, orange, yellow, and so on – feel to be based upon inalienable objective fact. Many languages and cultures, however, divide the spectrum in ways different from our own, with different numbers of colour terms with different ranges. This again is a complex and much debated issue, but the substance of the argument can be briefly rendered.

The spectrum of light visible to the human eye is a continuous range of wavelengths, with no discontinuities in it. The retinal and nervous system for the perception of colour puts certain limits upon the arbitrariness of the divisions which we impose upon the spectrum. Within these limits, however, colour systems can vary greatly. The 'simplest' systems, linguistically, have been found to be those which have only three colour terms – black, white and red; within such a system, the term for 'red' might cover a wide range of colour possibilities. A slightly more complex system might have four terms – black, white, red, and a term which covers the area from green to violet, which we might call 'blue-green'. The next more complex system might have five terms, adding a term for 'yellow' (thus splitting the 'red' category). Only in a more complex system still will

the 'blue-green' category be divided, so permitting the distinction of blue and green. Other distinctions can be added, on various classificatory criteria (shininess, lightness, darkness and so on) – grey, brown, silver, purple, orange, and so forth.

As terms are added to the colour lexicon, so the boundaries of the old categories shift. We have, then, a physical reality upon which order is imposed by human thought and language. The categories within one language have the feel of objective order, while differing markedly from the categories of another. In mediaeval Welsh, the grass, the trees and the sky on a fine day were all, as it were, the same colour. The categorisation might be arbitrary, but the social result is as real as anything social can be. If you sent children out in mediaeval Wales in search of objects of the colour *glas*, they would bring back a mixture of blue and green, untroubled by a differentiation of no relevance to them.

The colour example provides an instant and flagrant challenge to an over-naive notion of objective reality. The same principles of arbitrary classification are, however, at work in all other fields of human thought.

NATURE AND CULTURE, ANIMALS, PLANTS AND FOOD

The organic world is abundantly various, and has been the arena readily available, over the millennia, to the classifying activities of the human mind. A major interest of plants and animals has been their use as food, and classifications have proliferated concerning the food-worthiness of the natural world. The use of man-made fire to transform food, in some kind of cooking, became not only a gustatory measure, but a symbolic passage from nature to culture, a humanisation or domestication of the natural world. So we have, in our own culture, an elaborate classification of things that we eat and things we do not, things we eat raw and things we eat cooked – domestic animals, wild animals, vermin and pets, vegetables, flowers, weeds and so on. The content of these categories is highly arbitrary.

There is an abundance of spectacular examples. The Olympics in Seoul in South Korea in 1988 brought to the attention of a horrified Western world, that Koreans eat dog-meat as a normal and unremarkable part of their diet (as do many other neighbouring peoples). For the Western world the dog, for a variety of classificatory reasons,

is the inedible animal *par excellence*, and the idea of eating dog is both
disgusting and offensive. We do not need to go to the other side of
the world to find offence, however. The French consumption of
snails and frogs is, for British observers, deliciously disgusting.
The French eat horse, which the British are inclined to regard as a
domestic pet, and so inedible. The British regard only a few non-
domesticated wild birds as legitimate food (we call them 'game'); the
French and southern European tendency to eat song-birds, there-
fore, seems strange and offensive. There is no need to go into the
detail of these examples, to make the major point – what is and what
is not edible (or domestic, verminous, wild, revolting, tasty, repellent)
is decided by a specific cultural classification, rather than by nature
or natural appetite. Species which are served with ceremony on
important occasions to the most important guests in one society,
may be spurned with cries of horror in another.

GESTURE, NOISE AND BODILY MOVEMENT

We tend to think of gestures, bodily movements and non-verbal
vocalisation as natural responses to natural events. It has, however,
been increasingly recognised that these phenomena are much more
like languages than like the reflexive or instinctive actions of ani-
mals; like language, they vary from one culture to another. The
range of phenomena relevant here is a large one. First, it includes
gestures as we commonly understand them (gestures of excitement,
revulsion, approval, enmity), which can readily be demonstrated to
be arbitrary in their meaning, much as language is arbitrary. The
English word 'cow' (phonetically, [kau]) and the French word '*vache*'
([vaʃ]), although acoustically quite dissimilar, nevertheless mean the
same thing. Similarly, in different 'gesture-languages', different ges-
tures of the body can mean the same thing, and apparently identical
gestures very different things.

Second, however, there are uses of the body (and of groups of
bodies), which we do not readily recognise as being 'linguistic', but
which nevertheless vary systematically from one culture to another.
Phenomena of this kind have not invited study in the same way as
more obviously gestural activity, but they are of the same order. A
simple example which *has* attracted some interest, can be found in
the distance which people consider it normal to maintain between
themselves and others. Some societies accept a small 'interpersonal

distance' as normal; others require a much greater distance: or, sim-
ply put, in the first society people stand and talk closer to one
another, than they do in the second. It is easy to see that members of
the first society would find the second society quite literally 'stand-
offish' – cold, distant and unfriendly; gatherings of groups of people
in the second society would seem sparse and listless. Inversely,
members of the second society would find the first society over-
whelming, encroaching and over-intimate, its gatherings dense and
mob-like. The speed with which groups of people break up or form,
the size and density of the groups so formed, and the fluctuations of
social events which require or forbid group formation, vary greatly
from one society to another. They are an area of language-like activity
in which people themselves are the message; they are not, however,
often consciously thought about, or linguistically glossed. The same
is true for many aspects of bodily posture (postures for boredom,
interest, respect, contempt, fear, courage, and so on), and for non-
verbal vocalisation. This is not to deny that there are certain inalien-
able pan-human, or even pan-hominoid, aspects to this kind of ac-
tivity,[6] but there are also undeniable evidences of an essential lin-
guistic arbitrariness.

We can also include the many 'para-linguistic' aspects of lan-
guage itself – rapidity, loudness and softness of speech, frequency
and duration of pauses, and rate of variation of these. These aspects
of speech performance rarely seem central to language (or to invite
or require translation), but they also are culturally variable.

The importance of this ostensibly non-linguistic activity is that it
provides information about another culture which is available to an
observer without any linguistic sophistication. A speaker of one
language, faced with a different language, cannot understand what
is said. The most naive reaction to this is for the listener to suppose
that, since he can understand nothing, the other language is mean-
ingless or inadequate (as witness the many onomatopoeic render-
ings of other speech as a string of nonsense syllables).[7] Most listen-
ers, however, would accept that the other language was meaningful
but different; for communication, somebody will have to learn two
languages.

'Para-linguistic' activity, however, does not invite so sophisti-
cated an approach. It all seems 'observable' to the naive observer,
without any cross-cultural or linguistic sophistication. Bodily
movement, the loudness, softness, presence or absence of vocalisa-
tion – all these things can be observed by a visitor from another

culture. They are also, however, culturally variable. Faced with this apparently observable activity, a visitor will invariably interpret the phenomena of the strange culture according to the conventions of his own. This is, in situations of culture-meeting, of the first consequence. Every situation of culture-meeting offers multiple possibilities of interpretation and misinterpretation. Bilingualism and linguistic sophistication cannot always be supposed, and do not always develop. Observation of the kind of thing discussed in this section, however, is a minimal consequence of culture-meeting. It might indeed be said to have been, over the ages, the most characteristic framework within which cultures have interpreted one another.[8]

We can take a simple example. Suppose we have a culture, 'culture A', in which, during normal speech between a small group of male friends, there is: a typical rate of production of words per minute, a typical pitch, a typical amplitude, a typical length of pause in speech and a typical range of variation in all of these. Suppose also that culture A expresses excitement or relaxation, interest or boredom, by variations, within a specific range and of a specific frequency, of these factors – rapidity, pitch and amplitude of speech, rate of variation in these, and pause length. Suppose, then, that an observer from 'culture B' appears. Culture B, like culture A, expresses and judges excitement, relaxation, interest or boredom through variations, within a specific range, of the same factors. But the typical state of culture B is quite different – its normal rate of speech, pitch and amplitude are much lower, its normal pauses much longer, and its range and frequency of variation of these much more limited. Culture B, when looking at culture A, is going to perceive culture A as being in a permanent state of volatile over-excitement – a society of garrulous, emotional and over-intense people.

This is an imaginary example, but it has some similarities to a modern north/south European contrast, and to what a northern European perceives when confronted with southern European social normality. All the gestures, bodily movements, non-verbal vocalisations, and 'para-linguistic' activity mentioned above, are apt to this kind of misinterpretation.[9]

MANNERS AND EVENTS

The problem of 'classification' extends into the entirety of social life. The classification of (say) animals, cannot be separated from the

great variety of social events to which these classifications are rel-
evant, and of which they are a part – which animals are considered
edible, and which not; which are ordinary and which for celebration;
which parts are for which guests (how cooked, how served, in whose
presence, on which days). All the great complexity of feasting and
fasting, high-days and holidays, ordinary life and extraordinary dis-
ruptions, is a continuous process of the classification of time, space,
people, things and events.

With classification in this central place, it is easy to see that its
primary location is not in objective physical reality, but in the mind
– in the continuing act of mental classification of which society is a
manifestation. Having begun with the idea of the imposition of an
arbitrary structure upon a homogeneous physical reality, we have
come far and fast to the notion that society is, in a sense, nothing else
but a set of interlocking classifications. For these ideas to be fully
believable, they need to be set out at length, and to be sympatheti-
cally and repeatedly presented; the actual experience of difference,
as during anthropological fieldwork, is a great help.[10]

The idea that social classifications of the world are arbitrary both
in relation to the physical world and to human nature is not imme-
diately palatable. It moves us rapidly away from the familiar, where
everything is fore-ordained and correct, into cosmic chaos, where
anything might be anything. So it does, in a sense, but with the
recognition that reality is re-established, uniquely and afresh, within
every society. As Ardener says:

> a social anthropologist cannot avoid the comment that, in all
> societies, any tampering with the boundaries of categories does
> awaken the fear of anomaly – generating pollution beliefs, inver-
> sion phenomena, and taboo (Douglas 1966). It is the thought
> categories of our own tradition that are tampered with in such
> studies. 'Relativism' may then sometimes appear as a fundamen-
> tal philosophical danger.
>
> (Ardener, 1989a: 11)

The apparent malleability of the physical and natural world which
this argument implies, is often disputed by anthropologists of a
materialist bent.[11] Human or social classification might, they feel,
change our perception of cases of marginal, minor or symbolic im-
portance, but cannot seriously intervene in reality itself – red is, so to
speak, always red; rain is always rain; cows are always cows (and so

on). Or, to put this objection another way, it might be felt that the
category distinction between men and women was of an entirely
different order, physically and conceptually, from the category dis-
tinction between (say) father's brother's daughters and mother's
brother's daughters (to choose a distinction which, in some societies,
assumes the first importance); or that the category distinction be-
tween woodlice and beef cattle was of an entirely different order
from that between slugs and snails, or voles and rabbits; or that the
category distinction between red and blue was of an entirely differ-
ent order from that between purple and magenta, and so on.

We might say, in looking at this question of 'the social construc-
tion of reality', that every case must be argued in detail, on its own
merits. The varied nature of the physical or biological systems in
question, and the characteristics of the different human perceptual
processes, impose limitations and tendencies upon human represen-
tation. There will not, then, be total arbitrariness – the social world
will not be totally relative.[12] The argument for the arbitrariness of
classification resists, however, the intuitive notion that reality will
not be denied. The categories created by the human classificatory
process can readily be shown, within any subsystem of classifica-
tion, to be of equal stature to one another, however much they might
seem to be differentiated, or graded, by a physical reality lying
beneath them. We can take a simple phonetic example. The distinction
made in English phonology between the sounds 'l' and 'r' is one not
made in many languages spoken in the Far East (Japanese is com-
monly cited). The ability to make a distinction in speech between 'l'
and 'r', and to hear this distinction, requires long practice. The
distinction does not leap to the ear or come readily to the instruments
of human speech. It is produced, within an otherwise identical ar-
ticulation, by a minor change of tongue position. The two sounds
which we hear as 'l' and 'r' are heard and reproduced, by speakers
of Japanese, as identical sounds. It might be felt, therefore, that the
distinction between 'l' and 'r' was of a different conceptual and
physical order to the distinction between, say, English 'b' and 's'. In
this latter example, the two sounds are much more obviously
physically distinct in their production. In the English phonic system,
however, the two distinctions, between 'l' and 'r' and between 'b'
and 's', are of exactly equal status – they allow differences of exactly
the same gravity. Light [lait], right [rait], bight [bait], and sight [sait],
are equally different from one another. 'Light' is not closer to 'right',
than 'bight' is to 'sight', because 'l' and 'r' are, in underlying 'reality',

less differentiated than are 'b' and 's'. On the contrary, the differ-
ences between the four sounds are, within the classificatory system
of which they are a part, of precisely the same order. It is in the
nature of social classification to produce differences, categories, op-
positions and distinctions, which are *lived as real* by those who are
members of the society. Apparent variations in the underlying real-
ity can be overridden and obscured by the demands and require-
ments of the system; and it is the system which is socially 'real' and
which dominates perception.

The domain of classification is not always accorded the large
scope that I have given it. It is often glossed as 'symbolic classifica-
tion', with the implication that it is the domain of the imagination in
its more sportive moods – relevant to religion or superstition, but
not to digging potatoes or mending a fuse. There are many grounds,
however, for being dissatisfied with this formulation,[13] and I have
tried to stress the close interlinking, even the close identification,
between classification and reality.

We owe to structuralism the notion that the categories of human
thought and understanding, and the categories in social reality aris-
ing from these, are the product of a system of oppositions. A category
is what it is not because of what it contains, but because of what it is
not – because of the boundaries which divide it from other things.
This truism, clumsy as it sounds, has important implications, lead-
ing to the ideas of classification already discussed, to the arbitrari-
ness of the linguistic sign, and to the imperative status of synchronic
systems: structure, system, boundary, opposition, category, classifi-
cation, anomaly, and so on, are of great importance to modern
anthropology (some of them constituting what Needham called, in
1963, the 'theoretical capital' of the subject[14]).

The notion that a category requires a boundary implies that mini-
mal significance requires an opposition, or a distinction, between at
least two things. Structuralism brought to the fore a concern with
binary opposition, and many anthropological monographs attest to
the centrality of binary thinking in human representation. I have
referred already to the tendency that apparently disparate opposi-
tions have to slide together, and assume one another's substance.
Oppositions with a ready ability to perform this cognitive elision
are, for example : man : animal; culture : nature; self : other; own
society : other society; man : woman. Another familiar range of
oppositions with a tendency to gather round one another contains

pairs like: man : woman; sun : moon; auspicious : inauscpicious; right : left; safe : dangerous; day : night (this sequence can be prolonged indefinitely, according to local cultural and environmental peculiarity).[15]

Human societies also commonly draw an opposition between themselves (their own society or kind) and the rest of the world (both natural and social). In modern anthropology this is often regarded as an opposition between 'culture' and 'nature', or between 'the social' and 'the wild'. There is a tendency for the opposition 'social'/'wild' to collapse into the opposition 'human self'/'human other', and for other societies to be rendered implicitly 'wild' thereby.

It is difficult to present these ideas in a form that is at once intelligible, brief, palatable and convincing. I have tried for two reasons. First, such ideas are basic to modern social anthropology, and if social anthropology is to be understood outside its own professional confines, some non-specialist presentation of these problems is necessary. Second, if we are to understand the conceptual mechanics of culture-meeting, an understanding of classification is vital.

CULTURE-MEETING AND CLASSIFICATORY DISTURBANCE

I bring culture-meeting and classificatory disturbance together in the same title, because the first invariably results in the second. Any specific social classification becomes 'reality' for those who live within it. Classifications of this kind have an imperative position in the imagination, and are the substance of intelligible dealing with the world. It is not surprising, then, that things and events which conflict with a particular cultural classification, meet with various kinds of lively reaction. Many anthropological monographs deal with this issue,[16] but the *locus classicus* is Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*.[17] Douglas showed how classification, by its very existence, generated the possibility of anomaly and ambiguity, when the social or natural world produced phenomena which could not be fitted to the prevailing social classification. She showed that people, when confronted with ambiguity or anomaly, characteristically respond with mirth, disgust, or with attempts to restore order.

The cognitive and moral importance of the right order of things is, indeed, best seen when the order is challenged. Anomalies and

ambiguities readily provoke outrage or mirth, along with sometimes
violent attempts to restore order. Not all anomaly is funny, but all
humour exploits anomaly. It is very easy, once one has a classificatory
set, to shake it up so that jokes fall out of it. We may as well take
familiar examples. In western Europe, we have conventions about
the clothes and manners appropriate to men and women. These
have varied, but a basic distinction between trouser-wearers and
skirt-wearers has long been attested. Skirts are appropriate to women,
and take addition of all the pleasurable diversions of ribbons, bows,
stockings, frilly underwear, and so on. Put the same clothes on a
man, however, and put him on the pantomine stage and general
mirth results. Exaggerate the incongruity further, by putting the
same clothes on a group of large adult male rugby-players, and the
joke is funnier still. Laughter is not the only response, however. If
the same clothes are worn by a man in a serious attempt to pass
himself off as a woman, then the common response is one of strong
disapproval, coupled perhaps with physical violence.

This obvious example serves to illustrate the potential, within *all*
social classification, for the generation of anomaly and ambiguity,
and their attendant responses. Douglas showed that ideas of dirti-
ness and pollution constantly accompanied classificatory ambiguity.
Dirt was 'matter out of place'; classificatory anomaly was 'polluting'.
Other features commonly attested in ethnographic monographs, and
relevant here, are: the use of classificatory inversion to punctuate
normal time; and the exploitation of ritual and symbolic anomaly as
a route to the numinous – the extra- or non-social world of the
supernatural. Many cosmological and symbolic systems seem to be
no more than a playing out of such ideas.[18]

The meeting of different cultures is a sustained experience of
classificatory disturbance. We can take an idealised example, con-
cerning the classification of food: the English distinguish between
those animals that they regard as suitable food for humans, and
those which it is regarded as offensive or disgusting to eat. The line
between the two is, in most respects, clear and definitive. We might
draw it as follows, with the food animals above the dotted line, and
the non-food animals below: example 1 is an opposition between
domestic food animals and pets; example 2 between wild animals
that are suitable or unsuitable for food:

1.   cows   sheep   pigs   (edible domestic)
     ....
     horses   dogs   cats   hamsters   (inedible domestic, pets)

2. rabbits (edible wild, excluding 'game')

....

rats worms frogs snails slugs moles (inedible wild)

In English society, classifications like this are normal. When the English go to France, however, they find that items that ought to belong below the line are found above it (horse in example 1; frogs and snails in example 2). It is characteristic of culture-meeting everywhere that experiences of this kind are misinterpreted. What the English perceive, when confronted with the presence of horse above the line in the first instance, and frogs and snails in the second, is not a minor revision of the category boundaries, but rather their complete absence. As far as the English are concerned, snails and slugs, for example, are the same kind of creature. If the French are prepared to eat snails and frogs, the English readily suppose that they are also prepared to eat all the other creatures which are found in the *English* category which includes snails and frogs. So rather than perceiving a new category structure like this, appropriate to the French:

1. cows sheep pigs horses (edible domestic)

....

dogs cats hamsters (inedible domestic, pets)

2. rabbits frogs snails (edible wild)

....

rats worms slugs moles

The English are inclined to perceive a complete absence of category structure, attributing to the French diet the following:

1. cows sheep pigs horses dogs? cats? hamsters?

2. rabbits frogs worms? snails slugs? moles? (etc.)

The *shift* of a category boundary, which may, in fact, be only very minor (as in the French treatment of snails and frogs as human food), is always open to perception as an *absence* of category boundary, because those who are unaware of the category boundaries of another culture cannot perceive them: once the familiar category boundary is broken, then 'the floodgates open'.[19] The English can see no important difference between slugs and snails, as food items;

they classify them together, and see no reason to suppose that the
French do not do the same. Cross-cultural food perceptions are
commonly summed up in variants of the disgusted English vernacu-
lar condemnation – 'they'll eat *anything!*'. This example is now rela-
tively banal, and many British today are prepared to try snails and
frogs' legs. The principles of this example, however, apply to all
cases of the meeting of different classificatory systems.

The apparent *absence* of discrimination of other people is often
perceived as a natural state, proper to animals who are indifferent to
shame or propriety. Dogs, crows, rats, mice and pigs also 'eat any-
thing'; a people who seem to share this characteristic are readily
classified, in human symbolism, along with the animals. The same
conclusion of 'animality' or 'naturality' can be drawn from apparent
failure of discrimination in the other media of human life. It readily
extends into accusations of stupidity and dirtiness.

The kinship example is important to the history of culture-meet-
ing in this respect. Variation of kinship category boundaries from
one society to another provides constant fuel to accusations of sexual
excess, promiscuity and incest. The suspect society, again, is not seen
to have carefully redrawn the boundaries of kinship and sexuality;
on the contrary, the floodgates open and it is perceived as lost to all
sense of propriety, like the animals – not, this time, 'they'll eat
anything', but rather, 'they'll have sex with anybody' (or even 'any-
thing').

Failure of discrimination can seem not only animal, but also per-
verse and inconsistent, as the kinship example demonstrates. We
might imagine society A levelling accusations, justified in its own
terms, against society B, to the effect that society B is incestuous and
promiscuous; society A will be both aggrieved and unimpressed if it
finds that society B, as well it might, is so lost to any sense of
consistency that it levels similar accusations against society A.

In order to demonstrate the apparent 'opening of the floodgates'
between category boundaries when two cultures meet, I have used,
for clarity of exposition, examples which can be physically embod-
ied – food, animals, kinship categories, and so on. The same princi-
ples apply, however, to conceptual categories; indeed, our picture of
the Celtic fringe owes a great deal to the misapplication of purely
abstract concepts. Any such conceptual meeting contains the potential
for misunderstanding, and there is a multitude of examples.
Prominent, however, have been concepts of our own like 'religion',
'art', 'politics', 'economy' and the various categorical oppositions

which these conjure up (religion : science, art : industry, imagination : rationality, politics : family life, self-interest : mutuality; the permutations are endless). Concepts and oppositions like these are culture-specific. The positivist assumption that such categories are objective and capable of application to all social worlds is, however, commonly made, leading to typical misunderstandings arising from category boundary features. The category 'religion' can be used in example. Our concept 'religion' takes its place in a conceptual system, from which it derives its meaning. It cannot be employed outside that system, as if all peoples had 'religion' in the same sense. Observers from our society might commonly notice that, in other societies (Celtic societies, for example), 'ordinary' activities like planting crops or building a house, have 'symbolic' and 'ritual' practices associated with them which seem to have a 'religious' feel ('religious' in our terms, as opposed, say, to 'rational' or 'scientific'). A category boundary seems to fall, and a floodgate opens; the other society in question is likely to be understood, by our own, as 'pervaded by religion', 'magic-ridden', 'superstitious' and the like. Such statements have been commonly made, over the centuries, about the Celtic fringe: how often has one read of the Celts, that they know of no boundary between the real and the spiritual, that mystery and imagination pervade their realm? Judgements of this kind, flattering and exciting though they sound, are based upon a category error (or a series of such errors). It is not that the Celtic fringe is full of religion, but rather that the category 'religion', as understood in one society, is inappropriate to description of the other, and generates factitious descriptions when it is thus misapplied.

I have noted that societies commonly use category inversion, within their own terms, as a temporary route to the numinous or the supernatural. The fact that the Celts are so commonly perceived as existing in a state of categorical uncertainty has also helped to make them, I think, unusually predisposed to accusations of irrationality and other-worldliness (no matter whether these were politely or critically expressed).

The constant sense of excess that the Celts offer to those who have written about them must be understood, I think, as the accumulation of misunderstandings of boundary problems of this kind. They lead to pejorative judgements (more likely to be expressed and felt at the vernacular level), often expressed in jokes, or in statements like the following: 'they're dirty'; 'they're idiots'; 'they'll do anything'; 'they're just like animals'; 'you never know where you are with them'; 'you

can't rely on them'; and so on. At a more intellectual and literary
level, they are the basis of the sense that the Celts readily and
mysteriously overlap into nature, are erratically creative or irra-
tional, are free from structure, and so on.

The question of the presence, absence and location of structure in
human systems has been much debated in philosophy and the social
sciences; and although the Celtic example offers much useful mate-
rial, I do not have space here to go in any detail into these debates.
A word or two, however, may be useful, for ideas of 'freedom from
structure', or of unusually fluid structure, are so commonly applied
to the Celts. I take it as axiomatic that *all* societies are, in some sense,
equal in the amount of order they contain, and in their defining
power. This position is in some ways no more than an orthodoxy of
twentieth-century European liberalism, an apology for centuries of
holding others in contempt. I call it an axiom, rather than a theory or
an observation, for it is very difficult to see what one would measure
in order to establish it, or indeed to disprove it. It is at least clear,
however, that almost all previous suggestions that it is *not* so, are
corrupted by self-flattering perceptions and misunderstandings. We
have millennia of records of other people, where the accusation of
disorder is manifestly the result of failure to perceive a different *kind*
of order. The perception of disorder was real enough, the product of
experience; but it was never an objective assessment from within the
structures perceived as disorderly: from within those, we must as-
sume, order reigned.

Nevertheless, we might allow the possibility that orderliness is
differently embodied in different societies – that it is, for example,
internalised, ideologically rendered, or language-embodied, in some
societies, and in others realised in events, in action, in the movement
of people, and more constantly tested in experience.[20] Although the
distinction is only relevant for recent centuries, there has often seemed
to be an association between 'Celts' and Catholicism, as Emerson
noted: 'Race avails much, if that be true, which is alleged, that all
Celts are Catholics, and all Saxons are Protestants' (Emerson, 1902:
27). Protestantism provoked an internalisation of conscience and of
the pursuit of moral order. Piety, worship, intercession, prayer, sin
and repentance were removed from the sphere of action to the
sphere of thought: one could sin in mind, repent, pray and sin again,
without anybody else noticing. Under the older Catholic dispensa-
tion, by contrast, one sinned in action, and repented in action as well;
prayer, piety, intercession and repentance were expressed in overt

semiotic forms – in the movement of body and limbs, the formulae of prayer, the movement of beads. The disturbance and restoration of moral order were embodied in action at every level, and in the public domain: all the ritual of vernacular Catholicism – all that which looks 'colourful' and 'superstitious' to the Protestant – existed to provide an external embodiment of internal moral affairs. This difference of the embodiment and expression of order has, I think, probably flavoured the Celtic/non-Celtic opposition, where this has, in recent centuries, seemed congruent with the Catholic/non-Catholic opposition.[21] This affinity of the 'Celtic' character and Catholicism is shown very clearly in the unease with which Scottish Gaelic intellectuals confront the hard-line Presbyterianism of much of the modern Scottish Gaidhealtachd (including, crucially, the Hebridean island(s) of Lewis and Harris, with the largest surviving population of Gaelic speakers). The Presbyterian tradition is deeply ingrained in the social life and morality of these areas, and as such might be expected to merit respect and even applause from those intellectuals who set themselves up as its representatives, particularly those whose enterprise is the collection of customs, or the revindication of the rights of the people. We find, however, a frequent resentment of the Presbyterian tradition, a suggestion that it is an *intrusion* (as if everything else were not), and a dislike of its moralities.[22] The reason for this, I think, is that there is a fundamental clash between the idealisation of the Celts as 'free from structure', and the rigorous internalisation of rule encouraged by the Protestant conscience.

In this example, there is no 'freedom from structure', but rather structure differently realised and embodied. Differences of this kind are further grist to the mill of cross-cultural misinterpretation. For of course the notion that other societies are relatively 'free from structure' is the result of category misunderstandings, of a failure to perceive different *kinds* of structure. Structure is, for any society, a minimal condition of intelligibility – no human society is or can be free from it. The Celts, however, to those that have observed them, have offered the allure of this freedom, and commentators continue to glory in this. Rankin concludes his excellent work on the Celts and the classics thus:

> The Celtic peoples of Antiquity showed the same delight in opposing each other, the same tragic tendency to call in the aid of rapacious foreigners, that have bedevilled their descendants and successors in Scotland and Ireland in medieval and modern cen-

turies. [This] has helped to make the Celtic people of today dwell-
ers on the margin, people whose main contribution to the political
thought of Europe has been a sense of inspirational and dedicated
resistance to alien government. . . . Contact with the Roman ver-
sion of Hellenic civilisation destroyed what might have devel-
oped into a brilliant and creative Celtic-Hellenic society – if Greek
ideas had been gradually filtered into the Celtic world. . . . [W]e
can feel free to speculate about the possible development of Celtic
society had it not been enmeshed in the greedy, socially inflexible
and militaristic reticulations of Roman overlordship.

(Rankin, 1987: 296–8)

These are the free-ranging, creative Celts again, free from structure,
but at the same time curiously incapable of *building* structure – you
can't, it seems, have it both ways. Judgements like this are not
essentially about the Celts, but are about how the Celts are perceived
by others. The Celts *were* in structures, consistent and rational struc-
tures of their own, but the accounts we have of their structures are
filtered through category misunderstandings, and expressed through
the categorical proprieties of others. The problem for the Celts is not
that they were overwhelmed by alien armies; it is, rather, that they
have, over the centuries, been overwhelmed by alien categories, and
required to express *themselves* through somebody else's misunder-
standing. Small wonder that their history appears mysterious and
turbulent, however prosaic it might have seemed from within.

11

The Celts and the Classics

The references to the Celts in the classics are usually taken as evidence about the Celts. As such they have been minutely inspected by Celtic scholars. These references, however, are necessarily embedded in a cultural meeting – a cultural meeting, moreover, where the organising principles of observation and understanding are not on the Celtic side. The classical sources tell us primarily about the classificatory systems of the classical authors. It is more difficult to say what they tell us about the Celts.

Classical references to the Celts are sparse. The sentences commonly cited in modern works on the Celts are not, as the reader might suppose, selections from a much larger corpus of material. Literate Greeks and Romans took little interest in barbarians; such interest as the classical world found in barbarians arose, as in other ages and places, from the dramatic affront they provided to 'civilised' social normality. What we can glean from the information offered is limited: we have a rough idea of the normal practice or opinion of the classical author, and a clear indication that Celtic practice contradicted this; the precise nature of this contradiction is, however, invariably concealed from us. In trying to construct a positive picture of the Celts, we have only the vaguest of negative evidence.

Below, I shall discuss some of the major quotations from the best-known sources in the light of the previous chapter. Many works cite the classical authorities straight, as objective information about the Celts; several works have collected the Celtic information contained in the classics,[1] and the recent work of Professor H. Rankin is of great value in this respect.[2] The method of all these, however, is to take classical evidence, and to construct an apparently objective historical picture of the Celts. From what has been said, we should perhaps be sceptical about the validity of this procedure.[3]

Herodotus made a few early references (see p. 32), but the main authorities writing in Greek are Polybius (c. 202–120 BC), Strabo (c. 64 BC–AD 19), and Diodorus of Sicily (c. 80–20 BC). Strabo and Diodorus are the most commonly cited, and both are thought to

cull their information from the earlier, lost work of Posidonius
(*c*. 135–51 BC). Some of the ethnographic observations contained in
these works were, at best, second- or third-hand, although Polybius
at least was widely travelled. Behind the works of all these writers,
however, lay the great fund of observation and experience which
resulted from the meeting of the classical world with its barbarian
frontiers – distilled, perhaps, into gossip and anecdote. Various head-
ings for discussion suggest themselves; we can begin with drink.

DRINK

In this major theme of classical commentary, Celtic intemperance is
ever apparent. Diodorus, writing on Gaul, provides a much-quoted
description:

> [T]he land produces neither wine nor oil, and as a consequence
> those Gauls who are deprived of these fruits make a drink out of
> barley which they call zythos or beer, and they also drink the
> water with which they cleanse their honeycombs. The Gauls are
> exceedingly addicted to the use of wine and fill themselves with
> the wine which is brought into their country by merchants, drink-
> ing it unmixed, and since they partake of this drink without
> moderation by reason of their craving for it, when they are drunken
> they fall into a stupor or a state of madness. Consequently many
> of the Italian traders, induced by the love of money which charac-
> terises them, believe that the love of wine of these Gauls is their
> own godsend. For these transport the wine . . . and receive for it
> an incredible price; for in exchange for a jar of wine they receive
> a slave, getting a servant in return for the drink.
>
> (v. 26)

Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*c*. 25 BC), writing in Greek, said:

> The *keltoi* at that time had no knowledge either of wine made from
> grapes or of oil such as is produced by our olive trees, but used for
> wine a foul-smelling liquor made from barley rotted in water, and
> for oil, stale lard, disgusting both in smell and taste.
>
> (*Roman Antiquities*, 7. xiii)

The *keltoi*, having made an expedition against Rome for the sec-

ond time, were plundering the Alban district. There, as all gorged themselves with much food, drank much unmixed wine.

(ibid.)

Ammianus Marcellinus (*c.* AD 330–400?), writing in Latin, on the Gauls:

It is a race greedy for wine, devising numerous drinks similar to wine, and some among them of the baser sort, with wits dulled by the continual drunkenness (which Cato's saying pronounced a voluntary kind of madness) rush about in aimless revels.

(xv. 12.4)[4]

The use of differences in food and drink to construct derogatory images of other people is, of course, widespread and ancient. The writers cited were clearly observing a contemporary boundary between those who drank alcoholic drinks produced from grapes, and those who drank alcoholic drinks produced from barley, or some other form of grain – a boundary between wine and beer (or ale). For the classical civilisations of the northern Mediterranean, the boundary between grape and grain was a marker of the frontier of civilisation itself. This boundary has since moved slowly northwards. So, too, has the boundary between users of olive oil and users of animal fat, also noted by Dionysius. The climatic tolerance of vine and olive tree has, however, limited the spread of these forms of 'civilisation', and much of northern Europe is still, in these terms, in its 'barbarian state', as an English beer-drinker frying bacon in lard would testify.

Wine, for those who did not produce it, was a luxury. It spread from the Middle East to the other Mediterranean civilisations, and was traded up the Danube and the Rhône as early as the seventh century BC. Wine from Italian sources reached central Gaul by the mid-first century BC, and was drunk by the Belgic aristocracy of south-east England by the early first century AD.[5] As a *popular* drink, however, its spread has been very different, closely linked to the spread of viticulture itself. Vines were grown as far north as southern Britain in the Roman period, but the climatic constraints have generally restricted viticulture to southern and middle France. The popular drinks of Brittany, Normandy, north-eastern France, northern Germany, Scandinavia and the British Isles were, and in many of these areas remain, those made from grain, honey and apples – ales and beers, mead, cider, and their distilled spirits.

How should we take the references to Celtic drunkenness? We could simply regard them as evidence that the Celts had immoderate appetites, little self-control, and preferred wine to ale, drinking as much of it as possible whenever they could. I think, however, that Diodorus' account is not based upon simple observation of objective states of affairs, but upon naive reporting of problems of category mismatch and misunderstanding, between the 'Celts' and their observers. We cannot *ever* be sure of the precise nature of the category mismatch, when we only have access to evidence from one side of it. Nevertheless, a few suggestions can be made.

It is worth beginning with the perplexing Celtic system of values. The Celtic chiefs were prepared to value wine above slaves, a gross anomaly in Mediterranean eyes, and one which Mediterranean traders were quick to exploit. The trade routes from the Mediterranean to the north, whatever else they might carry, were created and sustained by wine going north and slaves going south.[6] A mismatch of values is a prerequisite of trade of any kind, but gross disparity of estimation of this kind is particularly characteristic of early contact between civilisation and its frontiers. It has been an enduring source of the civilised estimation that primitive peoples were 'irrational'; in their own terms they were not, of course, but it was not their terms that structured the historical record.

We can also look at the adjectives used by Diodorus for the Celtic attitude to wine: 'without moderation', 'craving' and 'stupor or a state of madness', may well be based upon a misunderstanding, by Diodorus' sources and informants, of 'Celtic' means of expression of like, dislike, enjoyment, enthusiasm and so on. These need only have been differently structured from those of their Latin or Greek observers, for adjectives of this kind to proliferate; different gestures and vocalisations, different timing and spacing of expressions of pleasure or desire, and so on – all these could provoke a judgement of excess, even though the Celts may have been no more immoderate, stupid or euphoric than the traders that catered to them.

When a grain culture meets a grape culture, however, there is typically a further elementary category misunderstanding, as much manifest today as in the first century BC. When northern European beer drinkers first meet wine and wine-drinking culture, they commonly drink the wine in beer quantities, and get exceedingly drunk. The Gauls of Diodorus drank themselves into a 'stupor or a state of madness'; so, young English men in French channel ports and at Continental supermarkets where the wine is sold cheap in litre bottles, drink to states of advanced intoxication. A pint of beer does not

do the same things to you as a pint of wine; the categories are not entirely congruent: after two pints of beer, you can still say things like 'entirely congruent'; after two pints of unmixed wine, your tongue gets tangled up with your teeth.

The meeting of European culture with less powerful neighbours has, in the modern period, often involved the latter in sudden exposure to alcohol, with deleterious consequences. Sometimes, as in the case of indigenous Americans and Australians, there was no native tradition of alcohol use, and sudden exposure to the strongest and most portable of European alcohols – spirits of various kinds. Europeans often regarded the proclivity of their subject peoples for alcohol as an inherent weakness of character. When the classical civilisations of the Mediterranean met the northern barbarians, both parties were already familiar with alcohol. Exposure to a new and stronger drink, however, can have similar if less dramatic effects, to initial exposure to alcohol. Alcohol needs social sanction and experience to dignify its use, gathering around itself a local structure of management and control. There are great cultural variations in drinking habits, and in attitudes to drink and drunkenness. Some cultures drink every day, in modest quantities; some cultures drink only occasionally, and then to excess. If the barbarian habit was for immoderate binge-drinking and the classical habit was for moderate quotidian drinking, then the classical perceptions quoted above might readily arise.

The references to the Celtic or Gaulish taste for *unmixed* wine are interesting in this connection. The Greeks and Romans invariably drank wine mixed with water, distinguishing lexically between this and 'pure wine', which was used for religious libations, and associated, when drunk, with extremes of intoxication.[7] The Gauls were, so to speak, making a mistake by drinking it neat. There is still a tendency in Europe, on a north–south axis, for weaker or watered wines to be drunk on a quotidian basis in wine-producing regions, and for 'unmixed' wines to be drunk where they are imported. Wine-producing regions are also notable for their *absence* of binge-drinking, and their intolerance of extreme public drunkenness, in contrast to the more northerly parts of Europe. Possibly something like an ancient pattern is preserved, although clearly its frontiers have moved, the personnel involved have changed, and being 'Celtic' has nothing to do with it.

If my arguments here are correct, the Celts were not riotous drinkers; rather, they were exposed to a drinking tradition not their own, and handled it in an inexperienced manner. In a sense, the

Romans were the drinkers. It is an entirely typical feature of the historiographical construction of the Celts that, because of their naivety in drinking, they should be remembered as drinkers. I believe, although this chapter is not the place for extended discussion, that the *modern* commonly cited affinity of the Celts and strong drink is the product, both in its causation and reporting, of structures very similar to those discussed for the classical examples.

SEX, MATRIARCHY, HOMOSEXUALITY, INCEST AND CANNIBALISM

Accusations of sexual impropriety abound when two different social systems meet. Victorian anthropologists expressed the theory that 'primitive' peoples had originally lived in a state of primitive promiscuity, in which everybody had sex with everybody else. In consequence, children did not know who their fathers were, and so social systems structured themselves round the female line – as matriarchies. Versions of this theory are still common in pop-anthropology.[8]

The source of the information which gave rise to these theories can now be better understood. Victorian observers noticed that the 'primitive' peoples with whom they came into contact did not observe the same rules relating to sexual contact as they did themselves; the floodgates opened, and the 'primitive' code of sexual conduct was interpreted as an absence of any such code. Similarly, differences between the roles of men and women in Victorian society, and their roles in primitive social structures, were interpreted as a complete inversion – woman-rule, as opposed to man-rule. The classical authors had earlier come to similar conclusions. Strabo provides the most general statement, writing of the Gauls:

> But as for their custom relating to the men and the women (I mean the fact that their tasks have been exchanged, in a manner opposite to what obtains among us), it is one which they share in common with many other barbarian peoples.
>
> (4.4.3)

The upside downness of sexual roles among barbarians, Celts included, had many aspects. Prominent among these was the warlike nature of Celtic women. The Amazons had served Greece as a sexual

fantasy for many centuries, a fantasy which disappeared into the
distance as it was approached, always beckoning, never discovered
(not unlike the Celts themselves[9]). There was doubtless a large pro-
portion of theoretical fantasy in the idea, but it is also likely travel-
lers' tales told of the same role-inversion that Strabo reports, with
some basis in observation. One of the most striking figures in British
historiography, Boadicea, owes her place not simply to her political
importance, but to the sexual anomaly which her activities presented
to the Roman British authorities, to their chronicler, Tacitus, and to
subsequent historians. In the *Agricola*, Tacitus writes: 'the whole is-
land [of Britain] rose under the leadership of Boudicca, a lady of
royal descent – for Britons make no distinction of sex in their ap-
pointment of commanders' (p. 16). Boadicea's position may have
been as unique as Mrs Margaret Thatcher's, but her very existence
seemed to make anything possible. Like Mrs Thatcher, she excited
the imagination of the world, perhaps for rather similar reasons.
Ammianus Marcellinus writes of the Gauls:

> Almost all the Gauls are of tall stature, fair and ruddy, terrible for
> the fierceness of their eyes, fond of quarrelling, and of overbear-
> ing insolence. In fact, a whole band of foreigners will be unable to
> cope with one of them in a fight, if he call in his wife, stronger
> than he by far and with flashing eyes; least of all when she swells
> her neck and gnashes her teeth, and poising her huge white arms,
> begins to rain blows mingled with kicks.
>
> (xv. 12.1)

Fierce, insolent pugnaciousness is a recurrent Celtic theme; here
it occurs among women. Like many modern western European ob-
servers, the classical authors were inclined to regard their own
conception of the sexual order of things as given in nature and
fundamentally normal; within this normality, women did not fight.
We do not need to take Ammianus' account altogether literally,
however. We have seen that, for one normality, the minor infractions
of order presented by another normality, can have the appearance or
feel of total inversion; it is likely that such minor infractions lie
behind the belligerent women described above. Such infractions
need not even have been in the direction of giving greater power to
women for them to have been perceived as a complete breakdown,
or inversion, of the proper moral order, and to have generated
descriptions like that of Ammianus.

Many modern writers have interpreted the classical sources as evidence that the Celts were 'matriarchal'.[10] Others have argued that this is still fundamentally the case, with a direct continuity between the modern Celtic fringe and ancient Gaul. This argument is particularly strong in France, perhaps because it has a psycho-sexual element whose appeal has tended to be greater to French intellectuals than to British. Philippe Carrer carries argument of this order to a peak, closely followed by several others.[11] Responsible anthropologists today are reluctant to employ terms like 'matriarchy' and 'patriarchy', for, in describing *real* social structures, they are so vague as to be useless, however popular they have become in literary criticism and pop-psychology. My interpretation of the classical sources certainly does not support the modern theorists of Celtic matriarchy. Given the undoubted patriarchal tendencies of classical Greek and Roman culture, and of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the suggestion of matriarchy has felt pleasingly subversive and exciting. As such, it has been thrown into the Celtic fringe, along with many other exciting contradictions, as the result of a central desire to exorcise abnormality from itself, but keep its excitement close to hand. The modern desire to find matriarchy in the Celtic fringe is powered by precisely the same intellectual forces which led classical commentators to seek there for sexual and moral anomaly. Such is the continuity between ancient and modern accounts – a continuity not of substance, but of perception and thrill.

Inversions of sexual conduct are found also in the accounts of who has sex with whom. Diodorus of Sicily, writing of the Gauls, says:

> Although their wives are comely, they have very little to do with them, but rage with lust, in outlandish fashion, for the embraces of males. It is their practice to sleep upon the ground on the skins of wild beasts and to tumble with a catamite on each side.[12] And the most astonishing thing of all is that they feel no concern for their proper dignity, but prostitute to others without a qualm the flower of their bodies; nor do they consider this a disgraceful thing to do, but rather when anyone of them is thus approached and refuses the favour offered him, this they consider an act of dishonour.
>
> (v. 32)

Homosexual, then, and promiscuous and shameless with it. They sleep on animal skins, apt to those who know no law of propriety or

restraint. Strabo corroborates the previous judgement, as an oft-repeated tale:

> And the following, too, is one of the things that are repeated over and over again, namely, that not only are all Celti fond of strife, but among them it is considered no disgrace for the young men to be prodigal of their youthful charms.
>
> (4.4.6)[13]

The further we go from the Mediterranean, the more atrocious the habits. Strabo says of the British: 'Their habits are in part like those of the Celti [i.e. the inhabitants of Gaul], but in part more simple and barbaric' (4.5.2). If the British are more barbaric than the Gauls, the inhabitants of even more distant Ierne (Ireland) are more barbaric still, as Strabo tells us:

> Besides some small islands round about Britain, there is also a large island, Ierne, which stretches parallel to Britain on the north. . . . Concerning this island I have nothing certain to tell, except that its inhabitants are more savage than the Britons, since they are man-eaters as well as herb-eaters [eaters of grass?], and since, further, they count it an honourable thing, when their fathers die, to devour them, and openly to have intercourse, not only with the other women, but also with their mothers and sisters; but I am saying this only with the understanding that I have no trustworthy witnesses for it; and yet, as for the matter of man-eating, that is said to be a custom of the Scythians also, and, in cases of necessity forced by sieges, the Celti, the Iberians, and several other peoples are said to have practised it.
>
> (4.5.4)

The reporting of Ireland may be fantastical hearsay, as Strabo graciously acknowledges. A man's willingness to couple with his mothers and sisters is evidence, for Strabo, of a complete absence of sexual discrimination – not only promiscuity, but incestuous promiscuity. Of all the dietary oddities of other people that which most excites the human imagination, in fact or fantasy, is cannibalism – a vice often lodged with neighbours, primitives, or, as in this case, the people on the edge of the world. For a man to eat his *father* is a compounded vice. So extreme are the antisocial vices that Strabo reports for Ireland, that one wonders what he would have sought to find in an island still further away – men who openly had sex with their fathers while

eating them alive, perhaps? – just as well for Icelandic historiography, that they do not have this to live down.

And yet we need not dismiss the reports from Ireland as entirely without foundation, however distant or misunderstood. A theoretical extreme of the kinship principle 'patriliny', can predicate that a man is not kin to his mother, or to her sisters. According to such a principle, a man's female 'blood' relatives are his father's sisters, and his father's sisters' daughters. Even a mild form of patriliny might produce pairings which would, to a classical mind, seem incestuous, as between a male and the relatives on his mother's side. Again, minor infraction can suggest the absence of any rule, an impression duly confirmed by imaginative retelling.

The story of cannibalism and father-eating may also have a ghostly truth. Modern researchers, looking for authenticated cases of socially systematic cannibalism, have had little success.[14] What are well-reported, however, are cases of ritual cannibalism, where some part (perhaps processed or decayed) of an ancestor is consumed in small quantity, to forge some kind of symbolic continuity between the generations. Possibly the inhabitants of 'Ierne' once practised something similar. This is very far from sitting down with a knife and fork to roast leg of father; creatively reported, however, full-blown culinary cannibalism can be readily imagined.

VOICE AND VIOLENCE

The Celts of antiquity take their most characteristic literary form in references to violence, passion and impetuosity. We have already heard Ammianus on quarrelsome Gauls; he goes on: 'The voices of most of them are formidable and threatening, alike when they are good-natured or angry' (xv. 12.2). Diodorus says: 'The Gauls are terrifying in aspect and their voices are deep and altogether harsh' (vi. 31). These references are to vocal violence. I have already referred to the different paralinguistic features by which one culture might judge another – pitch, rapidity and amplitude of speech, and variations of these, for example (see p. 153). Although there is no well-established language to describe this area, which falls between the traditional competences of linguistics and anthropology, I believe that differences in such matters explain the judgements cited above.[15] Suppose that the Gauls had, as a normal verbal condition, a lower pitch, greater rapidity and greater amplitude of speech, coupled with frequent large variations in these features, than had their

classical observers; they would then readily appear, to those observ-
ers, to be loud, formidable, threatening and harsh. They would not,
in their own terms, have been anything of the sort, of course, for
their own experience of themselves would have been of moderate
normality. They might even have found, in the speech of Greek or
Latin visitors, angry voices that threatened and bullied. There are
many subtle vocal means of projecting such impressions within any
one language, and these will have random, arbitrary and unpredict-
able effects within the conventions of another.

We might seek modern European parallels. During fieldwork in
Brittany, I was exposed to ordinary French verbal and gestural pat-
terns (the sustained high tone of speech, the magnitude and
abruptness of gesture), which felt, at first, like a permanent state of
tension, aggression or excitement. Timothy Jenkins, a colleague do-
ing similar work to my own, but in Gascony, well-expressed this
perception by saying 'every conversation feels like having a fight'.
This was not a function of ordinary linguistic inadequacy, for both of
us were fluent enough in the language *sensu stricto*; if there *was*
inadequacy, it was in the *non-verbal* aspects of language. Nor was the
sense of 'fighting' anything to do with real hostility, for both of us
had been lucky enough to find kind and helpful friends and hosts. It
derived, rather, from para-verbal features of spoken French which,
when experienced according to English convention, suggested a
high state of emotional arousal. After I had learnt to experience
French conventions as normal, and to imitate them in speech and
gesture, I experienced the return to England as an abrupt decline in
the emotional temperature; friends in England remarked how hasty
and argumentative I seemed to have become. The effect wore off,
and a return to France led to the reverse experience; France seemed
noisy and emotional, and friends in Brittany remarked that I had
recovered my quiet English manners.

This is a crude summary of a complex problem. In thousands of
literary testimonies, however, northern and southern Europe, from
Oslo to Palermo and all points between, have expressed their expe-
rience of one another within a similar structure. There are, in mod-
ern Europe, *real* undeniable cultural differences of a gestural, non-
verbal and para-verbal kind. These pose a comparative problem, as
we grope for a language to express them. Within every social milieu,
the prevailing conventions are signals of normality and moderation.
Only when comparison is forced upon the attention, through expe-
rience of other people and places, does 'difference' even begin to
exist, and to demand a language of expression (a language which

can only traduce the fundamental normality of one or other of the parties involved). There is a fascinating similarity between Jenkin's formulation that 'every conversation feels like a fight', and Ammianus, over 1600 years before, who found the voices of the Gauls 'formidable and threatening, alike when they are good-natured or angry'. We do not even need to suppose a specific continuity of difference here; rather, that a similar structure of perception is involved. We need not suppose, then, that the Gauls really *were* 'formidable, threatening, quarrelsome and terrifying', any more than we need impute these qualities to every modern French shop-keeper.

The observation of vocal features which are not *linguistic* in the normal sense has a central place in the judgement of one culture by another, for it is a field in which all can participate, regardless of their linguistic skills. There are other areas of perception, beyond the obviously gestural, relating to forms of social activity and gathering, which offer the same apparent potential for cross-cultural translation and mistranslation. The movement of limbs and bodies, their waving, gathering and dispersal, will contain an apparent message to an outside observer, however irrelevant that message might be to the true nature of the events in indigenous terms. Diodorus says of the Gauls: 'it is their custom, even during the course of the meal, to seize upon any trivial matter as an occasion for keen disputation and then to challenge one another to single combat' (v. 28). And Strabo:

> The whole race which is now called both 'Gallic' and 'Galatic' is war-mad, and both high-spirited and quick for battle, although otherwise simple and not ill-mannered. And therefore, if roused, they come together all at once for the struggle. . . . And on account of their trait of simplicity and straightforwardness they easily come together in great numbers, because they always share in the vexation of those of their neighbours whom they think wronged.
>
> (4.4.2)

Livy called them 'a people whose very life is wild adventure' (Livy, p. 383), and Ammianus tells of Gauls who 'rush about in aimless revels' (xv. 12.4).

It is generally true that the movements of people who are operating to social rules which are obscure to the outside observer, will seem aimless, sudden, capricious, over-enthusiastic or curiously lukewarm, and potentially hostile. The 'swarming' aspect was, indeed (see p. 38), built into Greek vocabulary for the description of

units of the barbarian social order. A confrontation between settled urban or agricultural peoples, and nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists, probably lies behind some of the above perceptions. Early colonial accounts of African pastoralists have a similar ring – pastoralists are people to whom certain kinds of movement are entirely normal, but their mobility can seem unsettled and threatening to their settled neighbours. As pastoralism slowly retreated into the barren peripheral ecospheres of Europe, gradually replaced by settled agriculture, so sources of this particular kind of disorder have retreated as well.

The early meeting of Greece and Rome with the European barbarians was a meeting between a more or less centralised polity and (for want of a better word) a tribal polity, with no aspirations towards centralisation. Within a tribal polity, inter-tribal relationships may have a structure far removed from random conflict, as modern anthropological studies have shown. They are, however, typically incapable of responding to centralised aggression in anything other than a sporadic and inchoate manner. Rome understood organised resistance, such as the alliance under Vercingetorix gave to Julius Caesar; it was not this that gave the Gauls their reputation for being warlike, but rather the apparently pointless raid, the capricious renunciation of treaty, the sudden changing of sides. All this made sense, no doubt, within the smaller scale politics of tribal relationship. To Rome, however, it seemed like disorderly violence.

Part of the explanation for the 'violent' character of the Celts must come from their genuine conflict of interest with those who were trying to conquer and govern them. The barbarians were invaded and conquered by Rome – at war with those who left the written records. There is, then, no small irony that they should be remembered as 'warlike', and that those who claim them as ancestors should rejoice in the memory. There is a close parallel here with drink – Greece and Rome brought wine to the barbarians, but the barbarians went down in classical written record as drunkards.

THE INCONSTANT SAVAGE

I take this subtitle from a book by H. Porter, about European response to the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Porter does not much explore the suggestion of 'inconstancy', but the epithet is nevertheless telling. *All* meetings between one culture and another

have the potential to generate observations of inconstancy, through the meeting of disparate category systems. It is very likely that the European colonists and invaders of the Americas seemed inconstant to the indigenous inhabitants; as in the Celtic case, however, we only have a record from one side.

The adjective 'inconstant' expresses the most regular feature of the Celtic character, as observed and reported. The term is opprobrious, to be sure, but also expresses perplexity. Many modern authors have taken Celtic inconstancy, as multiply reported, and built out of it metaphors of mystery, superstition, irrationality and esoteric ambiguity. This is entirely in keeping with millennia of reporting. The accusation of inconstancy, however, is one made from the outside. The Celts were not, in their own terms, inconstant at all. Prosaic examples can be drawn from food and sex just as readily as they can be drawn from religion or philosophy: the meeting of disparate category systems generates inconstancy, as two realities, perfectly mundane in themselves, generate their mutual puzzles, anomalies, excitements and offence.

We can only guess the details of the Celtic thought and practice which provoked classical observations; nevertheless the logic may begin to be evident, as in Diodorus' description of the Gauls:

> [W]hen they meet together they converse with few words and in riddles, hinting darkly at things for the most part and using one word when they mean another; and they like to talk in superlatives, to the end that they may extol themselves and depreciate all other men. They are also boasters and threateners and are fond of pompous language, and yet they have sharp wits and are not without cleverness at learning.
>
> (v. 31)

This passage provides a preview of the later widely prevalent notion that the Celts were particularly given to metaphor and simile, and virtually incapable of saying anything directly. Diodorus' very reporting of inconsistency might seem inconsistent, for he tells of a people who, in one breath, mean more than they say (with few words and in riddles, hinting darkly and using one word when they mean another), and in the next say more than they mean (in pompous boasting and threatening). These are twin consequences, however, of a culture-meeting – of a newly problematic relationship between words and things.

I have tried to show that the meeting of category systems is experienced through all possible media; the category systems in question are not simply those of language, but of non-verbal communication and of the concrete world. These different systems have a considerable degree of independence from one another, and are not simple congruent mappings of the same realities. Language can never provide a fully adequate representation of other semiotic systems, or fully substitute for them, and its fit with other systems is continuing shifting. Within one culture, these failures of inter-semiotic accommodation are so familiar that they often pass unremarked. When incongruous worlds meet, however, the problem comes glaringly to the fore. Those involved in the meeting have the impression of people out of place, disjointed gestures, limbs, voices and objects misbehaving, capricious social structures, senseless events. When words no longer seem securely tied to things, then they will necessarily seem to mean both more and less than they should – they will boast and threaten, just as they will hint and riddle; and things will either have no words, or be excessively over-exposed in language. These are, it must be stressed, perceptions of one system from within the conventions of another. The meeting, like all such meetings, is reciprocal; the imbalance is in the recording, and in the historical record.

The location of moral and intellectual disorder outside one's own society undoubtedly has a theoretical dynamic independent of the existence of neighbours. If one's own society is well-ordered, lawful and logical, then chaos, outlawry and unreason belong outside it by theoretical opposition; if the words of one's own language mean exactly what they should mean, then distortion and metaphor lie beyond; if cause and effect are legitimately structured in one's own society, then magical coercion and evil spirits lie in wait at the frontier. I do not wish to deny the existence of purely theoretical elaborations upon ideas of this kind, which do not require any input of observation of the neighbours; it does not necessarily matter, for the well-being of idea-systems of this kind, whether the disorderly irrational wild is an unpeopled forest, an unpeopled desert, the sea, the next-door neighbours or the people over the hill.

There is always the potential, however, in culture-meeting, for the empirical substantiation of ideas which may also exist in purely theoretical forms. It is futile to ask which came first, for the theoretical and empirical aspects of phenomena of this kind are mutually reinforcing and mutually generating. Kirsten Hastrup's recent an-

thropological account of Icelandic outlawry, a mix of human and non-human entities, where robbery, incest, impiety, wild animals, and all manner of supernatural being, co-mingle beyond the carefully tended stockades around the farmstead, well-demonstrates the interaction of idea and object in this area.[16] Strabo says:

> In addition to their trait of simplicity and high-spiritedness, that of witlessness and boastfulness is much in evidence, and also that of fondness for ornaments. . . . And by reason of this levity of character they not only look insufferable when victorious, but also scared out of their wits when worsted.
>
> (4.4.5)

The first point may now seem familiar. The second is repeated by a variety of authorities. Tacitus, comparing the Britons with the Gauls, says:

> [T]here is the same hardihood in challenging danger, the same cowardice in shirking it when it comes close. But the Britons show more spirit: they have not yet been enervated by protracted peace. History tells us that the Gauls too had their hour of military glory; but since that time a life of ease has made them unwarlike: their valour perished with their freedom.
>
> (*Agricola* 11)

In *Germania*, he writes of the trans-Rhine barbarians in similar terms:

> When not engaged in warfare they spend a certain amount of time hunting, but much more in idleness. . . . In thus dawdling away their time they show a strange inconsistency – at one and the same time loving indolence and hating peace.
>
> (*Germania* 15)

Celtic inconsistency in warfare was clearly evident to those who fought against them. A first explanation is that the Celts, fighting the same war as the Romans, sensibly fought with different tactics – outnumbered and outdisciplined in set-piece conflict, they resorted to what we would now call 'guerrilla' tactics. This may be true, but it assumes that the Celts *were* fighting the same war, with a similar conception of what war *was*, and this is doubtful. It seems likely, from what little we know of the early Celts, that inter-tribal violence

was a structurally consistent feature of their social organisation. In such a system, young warriors are encouraged, when there are not agricultural or pastoral demands on their time, to make forays against the neighbours, who will respond in kind. After a few vigorous encounters, the settling of an account or two, a few deaths, and some plunder of cattle, the warriors return to domestic life covered in glory, and live peaceably until the next warfare season, or until age elevates them to greater dignity. Such a social system seems, to an onlooker, to be perenially violent, and so it is. We must be careful, however, how we describe it. If we call inter-tribal violence of this kind 'warfare', then we implicitly put the entire tribal structure on a permanent war-footing. This is not, however, in the spirit of the events. Seasonal conflict of this kind might be better compared with the cricket season, or the summer holidays, than with 'warfare' in the modern sense.

The style of fighting is also relevant. What mattered, perhaps, was *to be seen to be brave*. Once that had been achieved, there was no need to hang around to get killed. The curious mixture which the classical authors observed, of bombast and cowardice, reckless advance and craven retreat, makes sense in such terms. Perhaps the Celts did not, until it was too late to do anything about it, have any idea of war as a means of achieving trans-continental domination. They fought the Romans as they fought one another. It is another irony that their lack of preparation for 'warfare', in the larger sense, should have earned them a reputation for spontaneous violence.

The anthropologically famous case of the Nuer, the southern Sudanese tribe described by Evans-Pritchard, offers many parallels. Nuer social structure had many of the features I have described – seasonal warfare, a reputation for violence, admiration of warrior youths. It was perceived by its colonial administrators much as the Celts were perceived by Caesar and Tacitus; even so, it was fragmented and vulnerable. When its endemic violence broke out, the colonial authorities perceived this as a challenge to their monopoly of judicial violence, and the natives were 'taught a lesson' from time to time, with the aid of aeroplanes and machine-guns. There can be little doubt that the Europeans appeared to Nuerland (as elsewhere) as the purveyors of large-scale, capricious and brutal violence. This is not how Europe remembers the encounter, however, nor how colonial administrators perceived their task. Nor, after decades of adaptation, is it necessarily how colonised societies will remember their own history. With only one historiography available, it is en-

tirely possible that the habits of old Nuerland, now so sadly over-
whelmed by famine and civil war, will be remembered, by latter-day
Nuer, as a heroic age of primitive violence, now regretfully super-
seded.[17]

THE CELTS OF ANNA COMNENA

Anna Comnena (1083–1153) was the daughter of the Byzantine Em-
peror Alexius, whose life she describes in *The Alexiad*; the events she
recounts are of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. In the
Greek of the Eastern Roman Empire, Byzantium, the term *keltoi*
continued to be used as (I believe) it always had been in Greek – as
an indiscriminate term for barbarians in the north and west. What
follows are some citations from *The Alexiad*, in which Anna Comnena
describes the leaders and warriors of the first crusade. A continuity
with classical assessment of the Celt will, I hope, be self-evident.
Anna tells of the Emperor Alexius, reacting to the news that barbar-
ian armies were approaching Constantinople:[18]

> He dreaded their arrival, knowing as he did their uncontrollable
> passion, their erratic character and their irresolution, not to mention
> the other peculiar traits of the Kelt, with their inevitable conse-
> quences: their greed for money, for example, which always led
> them, it seemed, to break their own agreements without scruple
> for any chance reason.
>
> (10 v. 308)

> Kelts assembled from all parts, one after another, with arms and
> horses and all the other equipment for war. Full of enthusiasm
> and ardour they thronged every highway, and with these warri-
> ors came a host of civilians, outnumbering the sand of the sea
> shore or the stars of heaven, carrying palms and bearing crosses
> on their shoulders. There were women and children, too, who had
> left their own countries.
>
> (10. v. 309)

> The Kelts, as one might guess, are in any case an exceptionally
> hotheaded race and passionate, but let them once find an induce-
> ment and they become irresistible.
>
> (10. vi. 311)

The truth is that the Keltic race, among other characteristics, combines an independent spirit and imprudence, not to mention an absolute refusal to cultivate a disciplined art of war; when fighting and warfare are imminent, inspired by passion they are irresistible (and this is evident not only in the rank and file, but in their leaders too), charging into the midst of the enemy's line with overwhelming abandon – provided that the opposition everywhere gives ground; but if their foes chance to lay ambushes with soldier-like skill and if they meet them in a systematic manner, all their boldness vanishes. Generally speaking, Kelts are indomitable in the opening cavalry charge, but afterwards, because of the weight of their armour and their own passionate recklessness, it is actually very easy to beat them.

(11. vi. 349)

The Keltic counts are brazen-faced, violent men, money-grubbers and where their personal desires are concerned quite immoderate. These are natural characteristics of the race. They also surpass all other nations in loquacity. So when they came to the palace they did so in an undisciplined fashion, every count bringing with him as many comrades as he wished. . . . Once there they did not limit the conversation by the water-clock, like the orators of ancient times, but each, whoever he was, enjoyed as much time as he wanted for the interview with the emperor. Men of such character, talkers so exuberant . . . they talked on and on with an incessant stream of petitions.

(14. iv. 450)

An ambassador was . . . despatched to the governor of Antioch (Tancred), charging him with injustice and perjury; he was told that the emperor would not for ever submit to his scorn, but would repay him for his ingratitude to the Romans. . . . The barbarian lunatic in his frenzied rage absolutely refused to listen; he could not bear either the truth of these words or the frankness of the envoys, and immediately reacted . . . : glorying in his own boastfulness he babbled that he would set his throne high above the stars . . .; he spoke with emphasis of his might, mouthing out the words like a tragic actor – how he was undaunted, how no one could withstand him. . . . [T]he envoys returned and gave a graphic account of the Kelt's madness.

(14. ii. 439–40)

These 'Kelts' are otherwise known by Anna Comnena as 'Franks', 'Latins', or more generally 'barbarians'. They are, as already noted, the leaders and warriors of the first crusade, coming in what Byzantium perceived to be disorganised masses, moved by crude enthusiasms towards an obscure and irrelevant purpose. Tancred was a crusader who temporarily set himself up as an independent power in Antioch. Anna Comnena calls the crusaders 'indifferently Latins, Franks, or Celts, thereby denoting any one from the other side of the Adriatic, and predicates for them all a number of most unpleasant vices' (Buckler, 1929: 440[19]).

> To the Byzantines the Crusaders, huge bodies of men, women and children, preceded by portents, speaking uncouth tongues, liable to plunder for their daily needs, were the most terrible kinds of barbarians, alarmingly numerous, and engaged on a work which interested the Empire hardly at all.
>
> (Buckler, 1929: 458)

Chapter 12 describes the works of Gerald of Wales, writing only half a century after Anna Comnena, but from a very different perspective. Gerald was one whom Anna Comnena would have called a 'Kelt'; he would not have recognised the appellation, however, for he was engaged in constructing a picture of those whom *he* considered to be barbarians outside the bounds of law and civility – the Welsh and the Irish.

Our classical picture of the Celt comes predominantly from those who recognised Rome as the centre of the world, and Latin as a language of civilised distinction. When the Roman Empire lost its western half, however, then the prestige of Rome and of Latin declined, at least as far as Byzantium was concerned. I have referred above to the 'inconstancy' of the Celt, as seen from Rome. Anna Comnena, describing the crusader leader Bohemond, the arch-villain of her piece, gives him an ugly character, and finishes: 'As for inconstancy, that followed automatically – a trait common to all Latins' (10. xi. 329).

12
Gerald of Wales

In the post-classical period, records of the customs of 'the Celts' (or their various successor ethnicities) become very sparse. Historical records of various kinds are available, but there are few attempts at ethnography. The Anglo-Saxon settlement of England, however, undoubtedly provided rich opportunities for the observation and construction of boundaries between Anglo-Saxon and Welsh, and for elaborations upon the relative character of these two peoples, as they were coming into being in opposition to one another. The early Icelandic material presented by Hastrup[1] shows, within the best documented early Germanic example, sophisticated use of the boundary between the social and the non-social: beyond the domestic space of family and farm was an area of the breakdown of law, morality and reason, the habitat of outlaws, monsters and goblins. Early Anglo-Saxon society no doubt made similar moral use of its ethnic and geographical frontiers. In *Beowulf*, Grendel lies beyond the frontier:

> a fiend from hell
> was that grim guest Grendel called
> infamous march-stepper, he who moors held
> fen and fastness;
> . . . Cain's kin . . .
> thence were born monsters and elves
> and orcs, likewise giants,
> they against God strove[2]

This is a ready blend of Christian and pre-Christian images of moral atrocity, with Grendel accommodated to Genesis through descent from Cain, and spawning all the antisocial creatures of outer desolation – monsters, elves, orcs and giants. It was this kind of outer desolation that, in Anglo-Saxon terms, the Welsh inhabited, and there is, in this sense, ancient foundation for the notion that unreason rules in the Celtic fringe. Unreason, however, given a pretty face

by romanticism, was more likely to seem vile and diabolical in this early period. One of the earliest suggestions of what the Anglo-Saxons thought of the British or Welsh comes from Felix of Crowland's life of St Guthlac (referring to the early eighth century), where British is made the language of devils:

> What follows occurred in the days of Coenred, king of the Mercians [704–9], when the pestiferous British foes of the Saxons were embroiling the English in piratical raids and organized devastation. One night at the time of cockcrow, when according to his custom the hero Guthlac of blessed memory began his vigils, suddenly as if he were lost in a trance he seemed to hear the roaring of a tumultuous crowd. At that he started up from his light sleep and rushed from the cell where he sat. Standing with ears cocked he recognized words and the native mode of speech of British soldiers coming from the roof; for when in former times he had been isolated among them on his various expeditions he had learned to understand their cacophonous manner of speaking. Just as he had made sure that it came through the thatch of the roof, at that moment his whole settlement seemed to burst into flames.
>
> (Felix of Crowland, ch. xxxiv[3])

Several features of Anglo-Saxon settlement and social life contributed to the opposition Anglo-Saxon/Celtic as it is commonly understood today. The British of Roman Britain had tended to be pastoralists; as cultivators, they tended to the shallower soils of high ground, living on the heights, that is, not in the valleys. The Anglo-Saxons, equipped by Continental experience for dealing with the clearance and cultivation of the deep clays of the wooded lowlands, tended to live in the valleys, not the heights, as farmers, not pastoralists.[4] These were tendencies only, not hard and fast rules, and had nothing to do with being 'Anglo-Saxon' or 'Celtic': they were the product of different ecological constraints in southern Britain and northern Germany, and of the gradual advance in agricultural techniques. Nevertheless, they gave to the Anglo-Saxons, from the first, the possibility of opposing themselves to the British (or 'Celts'), as settled farmers to unsettled pastoralists, as valley-dwellers to mountain-dwellers. In vernacular discourse, such oppositions may well be as old as the Anglo-Saxon settlements themselves, elaborated over the centuries, and surviving in Lowland images of the kilted Highlander of the Scottish bens, and the pastoral Welsh moun-

tain shepherd of bestial sexual habits.[5] If this ideological opposition is indeed a survival from so long ago, however, it has continually restructured itself in new environments, new geographical locations and around new groups of people.

Settled farming peoples and mountain pastoralists, as neighbours, tend to view one another in rather predictable ways. From the valleys the mountains look like a natural wilderness, dangerous and insecure, and the pastoralist society, with its mobility, seems to share that insecurity. This insecurity then becomes a figure for logical, moral and sexual insecurity, with all that these offer in outrage and excitement (bestiality, lust, abduction, elopement, witchcraft, and so on). The secure settlement of farming life offers order in morality and reason, but fails to offer the potential excitement of *disorder*. We can construct an opposition like this:

Celt – mountain-dwelling, exciting, disorderly, impatient, destructive

Anglo-Saxon – lowland-dwelling, dull, orderly, patient, constructive

and suggest that versions of this might be very old in the common discourse of popular England (whatever 'ethnic' labels were used to sum up the opposition). Oppositions of this kind are attested in various modern ethnographies, in the foothills of the Pyrenees, in Greece and in Brittany.[6] A full study of this system of metaphors does not belong here,[7] but it presents a variety of possibilities, according to which half of the opposition you are looking out from, and whether you are writing in compliment or dispraise. There is a real possibility that such ideas, in the opposition of valley and mountain, farm and pasture, are ancient.

Only many centuries after the Anglo-Saxon settlements, however, do we get a detailed written account. Gerald of Wales, 1000 years after Tacitus, wrote four remarkable and detailed accounts of Wales and Ireland. These can be counted among the first 'ethnographies' of the post-classical world, and are unparalleled, at least in the British context, for several subsequent centuries. Their place in this book is as a *point d'appui*, by means of which we can polevault from the classics into the Enlightenment. Little further apology will be offered for the many problems that such a feat of athleticism poses.[8]

The four works for which Gerald is best remembered are *Topographia Hibernica* ('The Topography of Ireland'), 1188; *Expugnatio Hibernica* ('The Conquest of Ireland'), 1189; *Itinerarium Kambriae* ('The

Itinerary through Wales'), 1191; and *Descriptio Kambriae* ('*The Description of Wales'*), 1194. The dates of composition are approximate; all four were substantially emended by Gerald in later years, and exist in various recensions. I am not much concerned with which version I cite, on the general anthropological principle that one version of a myth is as good as another. Historians do not, of course, view the matter in the same light.

Apart from *The Conquest of Ireland*, these works are explicit attempts to describe strange places, and the manners and customs of their people. *The Conquest of Ireland* is expressly an account of the first Norman attempts at conquest of Ireland, but it also contains much description of people and manners. These four works have attracted the interest of historians, but have not much interested modern social anthropologists: as very early ethnographies of Europe they are of great intrinsic interest, as well as providing rich material for the currently fashionable discussion of ethnographic writing.

Gerald was born *c.* 1146 in the castle of Manorbier, in what is now Pembrokeshire (or Dyfed). He is often called 'Gerald of Wales', 'Gerald the Welshman', or 'Giraldus Cambrensis', but his lineage was a complex one. In the mid-twelfth century Norman power had expanded only fitfully into Wales, and Wales itself was 'a patchwork of Norman lordships and Welsh principalities' (Bartlett, 1982: 13). Gerald was born into both the Norman and Welsh nobility.[9] The Pembrokeshire of his time was a place where Welsh, French, English, Latin and Flemish were, to various degrees, languages of communication. Branches of Gerald's family, both Welsh and Norman, were deeply involved in the first, semi-official attempts at the conquest of Ireland, from 1169 onwards. Gerald, as a younger son, became a royal clerk to Henry II, and used his local knowledge of Wales in various administrative capacities. He knew of the conquest of Ireland from immediate family sources, and journeyed to Ireland on at least four occasions, spending in all several years there. He studied in Paris, and then became an important churchman, partly through family influence. During a long period as archdeacon of Brecon he acted as a stern reformist, attempting to impose upon Wales the moralities and rules of the Roman Church. He nearly became bishop of St David's, failing partly because of a suspicion at the centre of power that someone with such clear Welsh connections could not be entirely trusted. In the frustration of failure, he became an active defender of the metropolitian status of St David's, and of its independence from Canterbury, so defending aspects of Welsh

independence. He also became a fierce, if belated, critic of the Angevin kings. These activities meant, finally, that his worldly career did not live up to his expectations; this may well, however, have fuelled his literary activities, as it has for others since.

Greater detail of Gerald's life must be sought elsewhere. I give the above summary to show that Gerald had abundant first-hand knowledge of his subjects. He had observed long and hard, and attempted to bring order to his observations. There is abundant evidence of prejudice, misinformation and suppression in his writings, no doubt; in the end, however, Gerald's writings are first-hand accounts, and therein lies their value.

The ethnic situation in which Gerald lived was complex; there were Welsh, Normans, Irish and Gerald's own hybrid Norman–Welsh marcher nobility. I use the term 'hybrid', since Gerald understood his family's status in this way – people derived from both the Normans and the Welsh, with the best qualities of both. The majority figure in the modern British ethnic structure, the 'English', were not clearly present in Gerald's imagery. The proud Anglo-Saxon of pre-conquest England had gone, socially, underground. Norman French and Latin were the languages of civilised discourse in 'England', and it was far from evident that a language derived from Anglo-Saxon, rather than a form of French, would eventually be the common language. The 'English' appear in Gerald's writings as servants and menials (see p. 250). Although the ethnic opposition which Gerald expresses does not clearly contain the element 'English', it is still an opposition between a central defining power and its fringe: as such, it is comparable to the classical examples, and to later expressions of an 'Anglo-Saxon/Celtic' opposition. The independence of this opposition from the specific elements making it up is clear from the ease with which disparate oppositions, Greek/Kelt, Roman/ Gaul, Norman–Welsh/Irish, and Anglo-Saxon/Celt, can be shown to share the same characteristics. Gerald was prepared to view the Normans through Welsh eyes, and the Welsh through Norman eyes, but he tended to view the Normans as over-civilised, and the Welsh as under-civilised. The Irish, from his point of view, partake of some of the qualities of the Welsh, only more so: they are not under-civilised, but uncivilised.

Images from the previous chapter are relevant here: the meeting of different and disparate category systems; the rendering 'wild' of societies beyond the bounds of one's own familiarity, and so on. The second half of the twelfth century was a time when Norman power,

now consolidated, was further expanding into Wales and Ireland. It was also a time when the Roman Church, through Canterbury, was attempting to impose its definitions of morality and sexuality upon older secular and vernacular practices. These activities, of which Gerald was an agent and observer, were a struggle for the control of legitimate definition (which is another, and perhaps more illuminating, way of saying 'a struggle for power'). As such, they provide abundant evidence of the hostile meeting of different classificatory systems. In *The Topography of Ireland*, Gerald speculates on:[10] 'What new and secret works, contrary to her ordinary rules, nature has stored up in these western and extreme borders of the earth' (p. 9). This sentiment, generalised into all areas of human activity and sentiment, might stand as a timeless summary of the Celtic problem. Gerald goes on:

> For as the countries of the East are remarkable and pre-eminent for some prodigies peculiar to themselves and originating there, so also the Western parts are dignified by the miracles of nature performed within their limits. For sometimes, like one wearied with serious affairs and realities, she withdraws and retires for a little space, and, as it were, sportively employs herself with extraordinary freaks in secret parts reverently and mysteriously veiled.
>
> (p. 9)

In this land, categories slither promiscuously into one another, and so procreate monsters:[11]

> It is a fact, that shortly before the arrival of the English in the island, a cow gave birth to a man-calf, the fruit of a union between a man and a cow, in the mountains of Glendalough (Glindelachan), that tribe being especially addicted to such abominations.
>
> (p. 85)

The meeting of two modes for the expression of emotion, and for the socially appropriate moments for its expression, can lead both sides to conclude that the other is of unstable temperament. This perception can be compelling, even if both parties are, in their own terms, stable, moderate and coherent. Perhaps the meeting of Gerald's Normans with the twelfth-century Irish was similar to the modern meeting of northern Europeans with honour-and-shame Mediter-

raneans.[12] For Gerald, Irish instability of temper extended even to the after-life:

> It appears to me very remarkable, and deserving of notice, that, as in the present life the people of this nation are beyond all others irascible and prompt to revenge, so also in the life that is after death, the saints of this country, exalted by their merits above those of other lands, appear to be of a vindictive temper.
>
> (p. 111)

The Irish were, in Gerald's terms, less civilised than himself, and so 'although they are richly endowed with the gifts of nature, their want of civilization, shown both in their dress and mental culture, makes them a barbarous people' (p. 122).

As we have seen, settled agricultural or urban peoples have long regarded pastoral peoples as living in a state of nature, strangers to industries of transformation, the disciplines of labour, and the complexities of social life. Thus did Gerald regard the Irish, strangers even to that most rudimentary of cultural interventions into human animality – shaving:

> The Irish are a rude people, subsisting on the produce of their cattle only, and living themselves like beasts – a people that has not yet departed from the primitive habits of pastoral life. In the common course of things, mankind progresses from the forest to the field, from the field to the town, and to the social condition of citizens; but this nation, holding agricultural labour in contempt, and little coveting the wealth of towns, as well as being exceedingly averse to civil institutions – lead the same life their fathers did in the woods and open pastures, neither willing to abandon their old habits or learn anything new.
>
> (p. 124)

> They neither employ themselves in the manufacture of flax or wool, or in any kind of trade or mechanical art; but abandoning themselves to idleness, and immersed in sloth, their greatest delight is to be exempt from toil, their richest possession the enjoyment of liberty. This people, then, is truly barbarous, being not only barbarous in their dress, but suffering their hair and beards to grow enormously in an uncouth manner.
>
> (p. 125)

The evolutionism is noteworthy, for those who think of it as a nine-teenth-century invention.

We have seen that the meeting of two different kinship systems can lead observers from one to conclude that the other exists in a state of depravity and animal-like promiscuity. Gerald led the at-tempt to impose a particular Church interpretation of marriage rules upon Wales, and his vehement denunciations of the Irish must be understood in this context. He took part in the Church's long struggle to impose its power over legitimate sexuality, and so its control over the social order. Early evidence of this, in the English context, was provided by Pope Gregory's long and anxious letter to Bede.[13] The legitimisation of sexuality comprehended questions of inheritance, divorce, polygamy, bastardy, incest, and reached throughout the social fabric. The Welsh laws (the 'Laws of Hywel Dda') and the old secular laws of Ireland (the brehon laws),[14] also dealt with some of these matters, and had many points of similarity to the laws which Gerald was anxious to impose. They had points of difference, how-ever, pertaining particularly to divorce, the marriage of a man to his deceased brother's wife, and the precise range of relatives prohibited in marriage; when a breach is made in a category boundary, 'the floodgates open': an Irishman's readiness to marry his dead broth-er's wife was, for Gerald, just such a breach; once that was made, then, as far as Gerald was concerned, the boundary between the prohibited and the unprohibited was completely destroyed, not simply altered in detail:

> It is indeed a most filthy race, a race sunk in vice, a race more ignorant than all other nations of the first principles of the faith. Hitherto they neither pay tithes nor first fruits; they do not con-tract marriages, nor shun incestuous connections; they frequent not the church of God with proper reverence. Nay, what is most detestable, and not only contrary to the Gospel, but to every thing that is right, in many parts of Ireland brothers (I will not say marry) seduce and debauch the wives of their brothers deceased, and have incestuous intercourse with them.

(p. 135)

Not surprisingly, these practices produced maimed progeny (p. 147) and

> No wonder if among an adulterous and incestuous people, in which both births and marriages are illegitimate, a nation out of

the pale of the laws, nature herself should be foully corrupted by perverse habits.   (ibid.)

The accusation of unreliability, treachery, is repeatedly found in the judgement of one culture by another. Various possible mismatches of structure might give rise to this. Oath-taking practices which strike one party as solemn and binding may, to another, seem like comic charades; or they may be couched in a symbolism which is self-evident to one party, but virtually invisible to the other. Oath-taking, or giving commitment more generally, may be specifically structured by particular political or kinship structures. Someone giving commitment within what is, to him, a self-evident political structure, knows its limitations, and expects these to be clear to the other party. If the other party, however, takes the commitment as a promise whose binding nature is permanent and universal (as a 'promise' is supposed to be in the English vernacular, for example), he will be disappointed. The meeting of the procedures of commitment of northern Europe with those of, say, Greece or Sicily, raises such problems. The example of the Scottish Highland clans has been noted above, as providing a sustained example of apparent 'unreliability' and 'faithlessness' for the Lowland British observer. The precise details behind Gerald's claims cannot be known, but his judgement is firm: 'They are given to treachery more than any other nation, and never keep the faith they have pledged, neither shame nor fear withholding them from constantly violating the most solemn obligations' (p. 135).

The habit of giving and taking foster-children, the obligations surrounding the foster-roles, and the elaborate structures of political alliance expressed by fostering, also outraged Gerald's sense of propriety:

> Woe to brothers among a barbarous race! Woe also to kinsmen! While alive, they pursue them to destruction; and even when dead they leave it to others to avenge their murder. If they have any feeling of love or attachment, it is all spent on their foster-children and foster-brothers.
>
> (p. 137)

The diversity and arbitrariness of non-linguistic semiotic systems led to some flagrant perversities, as one system looks at another. We might remember Strabo's wonder at the reported habits of the Irish (see p. 173) when we listen to Gerald's judgement:

Moreover, these people, who have customs so different from others, and so opposite to them, on making signs either with the hands or the head, beckon when they mean that you should go away, and nod backward as often as they wish to be rid of you. Likewise, in this nation, the men pass their water sitting, the women standing.

(p. 140)

Although modern discussion of ethnic groups and boundaries accords primacy to the work of Frederick Barth (1969), Gerald had perfectly understood the matter eight centuries previously. One of the Norman-Welsh invaders of Ireland, Maurice FitzGerald, he makes to say: 'What can we [i.e. the Norman Welsh in Ireland] expect? Should we hope for any help from our own race? We are in the grip of a law that just as we are Englishmen to the Irish, so we are Irish to the English'.[15] As Bartlett says, 'the subsequent course of Anglo-Irish history is prefigured in that insight' (Bartlett 1982: 18). The Bishop of St David conspired against Gerald, by Gerald's account, with a timeless ethnic subtlety: 'Thus he was two-handed in his persecution of me . . . for to the French he made me a Welshman and an enemy of the kingdom, but to the Welsh he declared me to be French and their mortal foe in all things'.[16]

The opposition of the Irish to ordered civilisation and Christianity is clear in the following passage; Gerald presents this as a story told to him by sailors who, driven to shelter in the lee of a small island in the sea of Connaught, subsequently met

a small boat rowing towards them. It was narrow and oblong, and made of wattled boughs, covered and sewn with the hides of beasts. In it were two men, stark naked, except that they wore broad belts of the skin of some animal fastened round their waists. They had long yellow hair, like the Irish, falling below the shoulders, and covering great part of their bodies. The sailors, finding that these men were from some part of Connaught, and spoke the Irish language, took them into the ship. All that they saw there was new to them, and a subject of wonder. They said that they had never seen before a large ship, built of timber, or anything belonging to civilized men. Bread and cheese being offered to them, they refused to eat them, having no knowledge of either. Flesh, fish, and milk, they said, were their only food. Nor

did they wear any clothes, except sometimes the skins of beasts, in cases of great necessity.

(p. 139)

These Irishmen also knew nothing of Christ or Lent. As Bartlett says:

> In this permutation of the raw and the cooked, Gerald placed himself – and his readers – on the side of bread, cheese, and Christ, and rendered the Connaughtmen alien and outrageous by placing them on the other side.

(Bartlett, 1982: 162)

Gerald's general picture might be summed up in the following phrases:

> This race is inconstant, changeable, wily and cunning. It is an unstable race, stable only in its instability, faithful only in its unfaithfulness.

(p. 136)

> Indeed this people are intemperate in all their actions, and most vehement in all their feelings. Thus the bad are bad indeed, there are nowhere worse; and than the good you cannot find better.

(p. 141)

Clearly proud of expressions like 'stable only in its instability', Gerald uses them frequently, as in *The Conquest of Ireland*: 'a race constant only in inconstancy, to be reckoned upon for nothing but their instability, and true only in their disloyalty' (p. 255). Such a people invited conquest and civilisation, and the Norman–Welsh nobility who began this conquest are also described by Gerald, in reciprocal terms. Maurice FitzGerald, Gerald's maternal uncle, and son of the Welsh princess Nesta by Gerald of Windsor, was a major figure in the conquest of Ireland; Gerald describes him thus:

> He was of the middle height, neither tall nor short. In him, both in person and temper, moderation was the rule; the one was well proportioned, the other equable. . . . He was a man of few words, but his language was polished and there was more sense than

sound, more reason than eloquence, in what he said; and when
the occasion demanded it, he gave his opinion, though deliber-
ately, with great intelligence. In war he was intrepid, and second
to no man in valour; but he did not run headlong into danger, and
though prudent in making attacks was resolute in defence. He
was sober, modest, chaste, constant, firm, and faithful.

(pp. 246–7)

Likewise Maurice's nephew, Raymond Le Gros, another important
figure: 'He was prudent and temperate, not effeminate in either his
food or dress. He bore heat and cold equally well. He was not given
to anger, and was insensible to fatigue' (p. 266).

We thus have a series of oppositions, still familiar in the self-
understanding of the centre in its relationship to the Celtic fringe:

> moderate : excessive
> equable   : intemperate
> prudent   : imprudent

and so on. We also meet the interesting suggestion that a prudent
conqueror should be a man of few words, talking reason and sense;
opposed to this are eloquence and sound, which by implication do
not contain reason and sense. Such oppositions recur in modern
descriptions of the Celtic fringe.[17]

When Gerald of Wales turns his attention to the Welsh, he is less
forthright than when speaking of the Irish. He was, after all, self-
consciously part-Welsh himself. Had he been successful in his am-
bitions, and become unambiguously a member of the Norman po-
litical and ecclesiastical establishment, perhaps he would not have
been tempted to side with the Welsh. Failure in one cause, however,
drove him in dudgeon to espouse its contrary (and this has been a
major motor of Celtic nationalism over the centuries). Just as Tacitus
used the Germans as figures of primitive comparison by which to
criticise Imperial Rome, so Gerald used the Welsh to criticise the
Angevin monarchy and the Normans. Tacitus felt that the noble
Agricola, his father-in-law, had been treated unfairly by a Rome
perverted in its values. Gerald's complaint was still more immediate.
He felt that the noble Gerald had been unfairly treated by a Norman
England perverted in its values. The Welsh were used by Gerald in
two ways: they were a project for the Angevin monarchy, a primitive
people ready for conquest and apt for the civilising mission; at the

same time, they had a wild nobility, free of the vices of luxury. Gerald's accounts of Wales are a mixture of noble and bestial savagery; in his accounts of Ireland, the nobility had been much more scarce.

The Welsh, like the Irish, are warlike pastoralists, and so, in Gerald's view, at a primitive stage of social development. *The Description of Wales* describes them thus:

> This people is light and active, hardy rather than strong, and entirely bred up to the use of arms. . . . Almost all the people live upon the produce of their herds, with oats, milk, cheese and butter; eating flesh in larger proportions than bread. They pay no attention to commerce, shipping, or manufactures, and suffer no interruption but by martial exercises.
>
> (p. 490)

They are sober, frugal, hospitable and generous (pp. 492–3); the men cut their hair as Caesar described the ancient Britons (p. 494). Moreover:

> These people being of a sharp and acute intellect, and gifted with a rich and powerful understanding, excel in whatever studies they pursue, and are more quick and cunning than the other inhabitants of a western climate.
>
> (pp. 494–5)

Gerald implicitly employs this two-edged compliment to draw the various peripheries, the southern, eastern and western, together. The Welsh quickness of intellect shows itself also in their music: 'Their musical instruments charm and delight the ear with their sweetness, are borne along by such celerity and delicacy of modulation . . . in so complex and rapid a movement of the fingers' (p. 495).[18] Ornaments in music Gerald relates to ornaments in verse, particularly alliteration. He considers the English and Welsh to share facility in this, expressing surprise that the French 'in other respects so ornamented, should be entirely ignorant of this verbal elegance' (p. 497). In the same vein, he describes Welsh wit and facility with words (pp. 498–9). Like many marginal peoples, the Welsh are credited with foresight and spirituality beyond the ordinary understanding (p. 501), just as were the Scottish Highlanders seven centuries later.

These and other things stand, according to Gerald, to the credit of the Welsh. In Book Two of *The Description of Wales*, however, he turns to the characteristics which 'transgress the line of virtue and commendation' (p. 508). Aware that the same characteristics might invite different interpretations, he goes on: 'Evil borders upon good, and vices are confounded with virtues' (p. 508). So, then, for the faults:

> These people are no less light in mind than in body, and are by no means to be relied upon. They are easily urged to undertake any action, and are as easily checked from prosecuting it – a people quick in action, but more stubborn in a bad than in a good cause, and constant only in acts of inconstancy. They pay no respect to oaths, faith, or truth; and so lightly do they esteem the covenant of faith, held so inviolable by other nations, that it is usual to sacrifice their faith for nothing, by holding forth the right hand, not only in serious and important concerns, but even on every trifling occasion, and for the confirmation of almost every common assertion.
>
> (p. 509)

So far, much like the Irish, except that we are given detail of the disparity in oath-taking procedures, and in the gravity of oaths so taken:

> This nation conceives it right to commit acts of plunder, theft, and robbery, not only against foreigners and hostile nations, but even against their own countrymen. When an opportunity of attacking the enemy with advantage occurs, they respect not the leagues of peace and friendship, preferring base lucre to the solemn obligations of oaths and good faith.
>
> (p. 509)

As Bartlett notes, oaths taken under duress, during invasion or conquest, may be speedily forgotten when the duress is temporarily removed. This must be one aspect of the general 'inconstancy' of indigenous peoples when faced with military intrusion. Nevertheless, I think that the problem is more subtle than this. Remembering the classical accounts of the warlike Celts, we read:

> In war this nation is very severe in the first attack, terrible by their clamour and looks, filling the air with horrid shouts. . . . Bold in

the first onset, they cannot bear a repulse, being easily thrown
into confusion as soon as they turn their backs.

(p. 511)

As Gerald himself notes, these are very like the martial characteris-
tics ascribed to the ancient Teutones by Roman historians. He de-
scribes the Welsh readiness and activity in irregular combat, more or
less describing what we might now call 'guerilla warfare' (p. 511; pp.
516–7).

He finds the Welsh 'immoderate in their love of food and intoxi-
cating drink' (p. 512); and:

> As in times of scarcity their abstinence and parsimony are too
> severe, so, when seated at another man's table, after a long fasting
> . . ., their appetite is immoderate. They are therefore penurious in
> times of scarcity, and extravagant in times of plenty.

(pp. 512–13)

And, like the Irish, their sexual habits provoke Gerald's wrath -
cohabitation outside marriage, payment of bridewealth (which he
sees as a form of prostitution), and, above all, incest:

> The crime of incest hath so much prevailed, not only among the
> higher, but among the lower orders of this people, that, not having
> the fear of God before their eyes, they are not ashamed of inter-
> marrying with their relations, even in the third degree of consan-
> guinity.

(p. 513)

Gerald finds the Welsh: 'Involved in such an abyss of vices, perjury,
theft, robbery, rapine, murders, fratricides, adultery, and incest,
and become every day more entangled and ensnared in evil-doing'
(p. 515).

STEREOTYPES

I have tried to show, in my treatment of the classical sources and of
Gerald of Wales, that the construction of images of other people is a
complex interplay of reality and theory; observers may misunder-
stand an alien social reality before their eyes, but their experience of
it is genuine, and their expression of it is a cultural form worthy of

respect as such. I make this point because there is a strong modern tradition of regarding ideas of other people as exclusively theoretical, without any input from reality. In the world of 'anti-racism', it is an article of faith that since pejorative statements about other people are not objectively 'true', they must be lies, and malevolent lies at that. This is a facile position, both intellectually and morally, not least because it does no justice to the powers of observation and thought of ordinary people involved in situations of culture-meeting. The meeting of different classificatory systems provides abundant experiential material for the construction of ideas of other people; and since classificatory systems are the very substance of society, observations from within them have a powerful feel of reality – they are not ephemeral, nor are they apt to intellectual intervention of a re-educative kind. If intellectuals, even with the best intentions, attempt to deny the reality of cross-cultural judgements, they will only discredit themselves in the eyes of those whom they wish to convince.

The idea of 'stereotype' is often used in this connection. The metaphor is taken from a process for the production of metal printing plates first developed in the early eighteenth century, and now completely superseded. All that one can ever get from a stereotype plate is the same print, again and again, of the same page. The implication of the use of 'stereotype' for human judgements is that the image cast is unchangeable, and that its rationality is wholly one-sided – not the result of a continual interplay of information between reality and image, but of a piece of cerebral hardware which produces images independently of experience.[19] I make this point at the end of my chapter concerning Gerald of Wales, since it is pleasant to speculate what Gerald would have said about the subject. The general point concerning the need to take seriously the views that ordinary people have about others, has a more general application, both to the rest of this work and outside it.

13

The Modern Celts

Much that I have already said about the definition of ethnic groups must be taken, *mutatis mutandis*, to apply to the modern Celts. In passing from antiquity to the modern day, I have taken a detour via Gerald of Wales, and in so doing I have bowed to modern retrospective definition of what a Celt is: in modern parlance the Welsh are Celts, although Gerald would not have called them so. I would otherwise have had to leave the Celts in antiquity, and rejoin them in this chapter, in the eighteenth century, with nothing but a gulf in between. For there were, over this period, no Celts in north-western Europe; nobody called themselves, or anybody else, Celts (with the few fantastic scholarly exceptions, to which we shall come). I could have pursued the career of the Byzantine *keltoi*, down to their presumed conceptual disappearance with the fall of Constantinople to the Turks; it is again a measure of the limitations of our historical vision, that this would seem an entirely different subject, interesting though it might be.

It is commonly accepted that no term related to Celtic appears in the records of western Europe (that is, of Roman Catholic Christendom), until the late fifteenth century. Then, the term became part of a fanciful ethnological syncretism, bringing together the Old Testament and the classics, in an attempt to forge an ancient lineage for the modern nations of Europe. The source text for this came from an Italian monk, Annius of Viterbo. In Rome in 1497, in the fine tradition of forgeries which surrounds Celtic subjects, Annius produced a purported genealogy for the nations of Europe. He claimed that his publication was a recently discovered manuscript, given to him by two Armenian monks, of the work of Berosus, who in the third century BC is thought to have written a history of Chaldaea, in Greek. The very existence of Berosus is questionable, but there is little modern doubt that Annius' version of Berosus was a late fifteenth-century forgery, either by Annius himself, or by the two shadowy

Armenian monks. At any rate, whether in good faith or bad, Annius published his pseudo-Berosus, and it became widely popular, going through many editions throughout Italy, France and Germany in the following century.[1]

Annius sought the antiquity of the nations not in the Odyssey, nor yet in the antiquity of Rome, but rather in the peopling of the world after the flood, according to the Old Testament. There was a certain logic in this, and the sons of Noah were to play a prominent part in fanciful recreations of many different national genealogies over the succeeding centuries, particularly in those many areas where scholarship and biblical piety ran together. Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham and Japhet. According to Annius, Japhet is the one to follow, for he had a variety of offspring, among them Comerus, Medus, Magogus and Samotes. Samotes established himself in Gaul, and there begat Magus and Saro; Saro begat Druides, Bardus, Longo, Bardus junior, Celtes, and others. In this fourth generation from Noah, a Celtic flavour is discernible.

Annius, or his source, seems to have culled the names of his eponymous figures very nearly at random from the classics. There is, in his figure 'Celtes', no sensible continuity with ancient usage other than a vague sense of location. The very real categorical continuity of Byzantine usage is entirely lacking here. The importance of Annius is partly that he began the rehabilitation of a word, 'Celt', long forgotten in western Europe; more importantly, however, he is an early indicator of the trends in western scholarship which would eventually lead to the appearance of the Celts in the modern sense.

The sixteenth century saw a great growth in Hebraic scholarship. This took scholars beyond classical Latin and Greek horizons, and gave them an alternative, and even more ancient, view of their own past. The sense of joint heritage from the Old Testament and classical civilisation, which is fundamental to European historiography, received much scholarly elaboration in this period. The period was also one in which the moral unity imposed upon western Europe by the Roman Catholic Church was increasingly challenged. This was, of course, the century of reformation; the reformers did not precisely intend that religion should become apt for 'nationalisation', but this was certainly a major consequence, with Henry VIII a striking testimony to this. Once religion had ceased to be universal, it became apt for the expression of difference, and it can be argued that the modern Europe of 'nations' owes much of its structure to the nationalisation of religion in this period. And with a nationalisation of religion, came a nationalisation of scholarship.

The turbulent national and religious politics of the period pro-
vided plenty of impetus to self-serving reconstructions of history.
Annius was succeeded by many imitators, with many moral and
political axes to grind.[2] The imperial and Catholic universality of the
Roman and classical heritage did not entirely lose its appeal, but it
became increasingly contested by alternative accounts, even within
the Catholic tradition. Rome and Italy had obvious first claim to the
classical inheritance – an inheritance which had only come to France
second-hand, to which Germany's claim had come to seen slender,
and which had been ousted altogether from England on two sepa-
rate occasions. The route to Hebrew, by-passing the classics, provided
a means of asserting the dignity of ancient foundation, which avoided
making the rest of Europe the junior members of the Roman family.
The sixteenth century saw vigorous attempts to show that the vari-
ous languages of Europe were closest to Hebrew, and so were the
privileged ancestor languages of all the rest. This was to continue, in
various different languages, well into the nineteenth century.

The ambiguous relationship between terms like Greek *keltoi*, and
Latin *celtae* and *galli*, provided further ample scope for disagreement
within sixteenth-century politico-literary debate, about whose claim
to European hegemony was the best and the most ancient. As we
have seen, earlier Greek writers had tended to use *keltoi* for Euro-
pean barbarians both east and west of the Rhine. Both French and
German writers therefore had reason for claiming that their polities
and populations were directly descended from this ancient trans-
European people; the purported ancient hegemony on both sides of
the Rhine was then used to justify modern political ambitions. When
things were going well in warfare and political strife, the pan-Euro-
pean category 'keltoi' was a useful ancestry. When thrown back
upon your own borders, however, it made more sense to stress your
own uniqueness, to emphasise that nobody else had any business in
your country. In this context, using the Roman distinction between
Gauls and Germans, France could claim descent from the Gauls, and
so categorically exclude the Germans. Both German and French
writers adopted many varieties of these positions, with an ancient
Celtic-Germanic political and linguistic unity alternately on and off
the agenda, according to the vagaries of sixteenth-century political
and religious strife. Some German authorities continued to stress the
identity of German and Gaulish well into the eighteenth century.[3] It
should be noted that when scholars in this period referred to Celts
and Gauls, they had no modern sense that these were linguistic
categories closely tied to Wales, Scotland and Ireland. On the con-

trary, they were variously arguing that the classical Gauls, Celts or Germans were their own immediate ancestors, and had spoken whatever language was appropriate to the ancestry.

Debate in these subjects tended to focus on France, as the obvious descendant of Roman Gaul. One significant and enduring aspect of debate in France was a tendency to make the Gauls an ancient figure for resistance against tyranny. They became, for French protestants suffering under the French counter-reformation after the massacre of St Bartholomew, an ancestry which had always opposed Roman oppression, whether this took the form of Julius Caesar or the contemporary French monarchy and Catholic Church.[4] This supposed revolutionary, anti-monarchical, anti-tyrannical aspect of the French Gaul surfaced again in the revolution of 1789, when many historians saw the taking of the Bastille as a triumph of republican Gauls over aristocratic Franks.[5] This 'French republican Gaul' still survives as a protagonist, in a sense, in post-war linguistic and political debate about the Breton language, and Breton nationalism,[6] although its lineage is extremely complicated.

Each country was involved, as always, with its own political and linguistic history. German and French scholarship had a stake in the Celts, because they occupied a geography that the classical categories of Keltoi and Galli had also inhabited. Clearly, however, modern French was derived from Latin. The Gauls, if they were to have a place in the French lineage, either had to have spoken the same language as the Romans, or to have assimilated to those who did. It was also clear that German was *not* derived from Latin. It might, indeed, be derived from Gaulish, since virtually nothing was known about it. There was, however, in Germany, the competing interpretation that Germans and Gauls had been entirely different.

The solution to the puzzle lay in the British Isles. Caesar had noted that the inhabitants of southern Britain spoke the same language as the Gauls, and these 'original' inhabitants of Britain started to excite interest. Growing sophistication in Anglo-Saxon and Welsh scholarship, coupled with interpretation of the most ancient texts, allowed an identification of Anglo-Saxon (and so English) with old German, and of Welsh with the original 'British'. If Welsh were like Gaulish, and Anglo-Saxon were like old German, and Welsh and Anglo-Saxon were manifestly very different, then the Germani and the Galli must have been different people speaking different languages. All this took a long time to sort out, with much back-and-

forthing between the ancient references and the modern condition. George Buchanan[7] is often credited with the first linguistic observations of the British situation which approximate to the modern sense of the linguistic categories. He argued that the Britons were Gaulish, and that the 'old Scots language' (that is, Gaelic) was descended from Gaulish also. He also noted that in the Shetlands, Orkneys and Caithness they spoke 'Gothic'. Liberally interpreted, we can regard this as a recognition of two different language-groups, 'Celtic' and 'Germanic'.

Many and various interpretations followed, mixtures of real insight, fanciful use of the Old Testament and the classics, etymological coincidence and national vainglory.[8] A definitive step in the sorting of the linguistic categories was taken, however, by Edward Lhuyd, curator of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in the last years of the seventeenth century, who published the first (and, unfortunately, only) volume of his *Archaeologia Britannica* in 1707. Shortly before, in France, Pezron (1703) had explicitly made the 'Celts' and the 'Gauls' the same people, but he had done so within a text where the offspring of Noah were still prominent. Lhuyd would have none of this fancy, and it is with his work that we get the first secure sense that Welsh, Breton, Scottish Gaelic and Irish Gaelic have something in common, and the first usage of 'Celtic' to describe this commonality. The term continued to be used in other ways, but Lhuyd pointed the way to modern scholarly usage. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the term had more or less settled into its modern role, with increasing linguistic scholarship available to guide its employment.

Lhuyd's work was only a stage in the complex of arguments about priority of occupation in Britain. The question of who came first, p-Celts or q-Celts, and the question of whether this is worth asking, are still debated. It is generally accepted now that the Gaels came to Scotland from Ireland, but it was long before Scottish scholars would accept this cadet status, and there have been authoritative dissenting voices.[9] The relationship of the Gauls to the Breton-speakers of Brittany has also been the cause of much disagreement. Once the identity of Gaulish and British had been established, along with the descent of Welsh from British, and the affinity of Breton with Welsh, it made obvious sense to regard the Breton of Brittany as the surviving relic of the Gaulish of ancient times. This was how it was treated until the late nineteenth century, when the alternative ex-

planation, that Breton was the result of British colonisation of north-west France, came to be widely accepted (again, with dissenting voices).

As we have seen, long before scholarship tied the ancient Gauls, linguistically, to the modern Welsh and Bretons, they had figured as an ancient ancestral figure for the French. The question of what language the Gauls spoke, while much debated, was not vital to this ancestry. It was a social, political and moral claim upon the past, rather than a linguistic lineage. The most important literary monument to this was the highly successful historical novel (read by many unaccustomed to the new genre as a history) by Honoré d'Urfé, *L'Astrée*, published in four parts between 1607 and 1624, in which the ancient Gauls were held up as a model of manners for French courtly society in the seventeenth century. It is from *L'Astrée* that the hugely successful modern cartoon character, the creation of Goscinny and Uderzo, *Asterix the Gaul*, takes his name. *Asterix the Gaul*, like his older near-namestake, is a mirror, in pomp or parody, for France itself – not a figure of 'otherness'.[10]

For France now has two 'Celts' – an indigenous Gaul, the origin of France entire, and the Breton, an intrusive insular Celt. The term 'Celt' can apply to both of them, and they are still associated in the minds of many. Nevertheless, they are not the same thing – the location of Asterix somewhere in north-west France is a vague collusion of imagery, perhaps even an only part-conscious exploitation of an ambiguity, rather than any statement that Asterix is a Breton. For he is not; he is a Gaul. Dubois puts ideas of the Gaul in France into three periods of 'Celticising frenzy':

> l'époque baroque et ses réactions face à la montée de la culture classique; l'époque pre-romantique et romantique et ses reactions face à l'emprise du neo-classicisme napoléonien; les réactions nationalistes de la fin du XIXè siècle qui font echo à la montée du scientisme international.
>
> (Dubois, 1972: 185)

The first of these periods, the Baroque, is unambiguously centred on the ancestral Gaul. This Gaul served as a figure in literary and moral debate at the time, with a certain amount of non-classical disorder invested in the figure.[11] In the romantic period, an equation of the Celt and modern Breton began to be made, and so the story develops confusions and ambiguities. In general, however, the Gaul remained

a figure of majority ancestry, an indigenous wildness tamed under Roman tutelage. He appeared as such in the work of nineteenth-century French historians, such as Amédée Thierry (1828) and Henri Martin (1855), and came to form a conventional beginning for French historiography – 'nos ancêtres les Gaulois' (Duranton, 1969).

As we have seen above, romanticism occurred at an unpropitious moment for the glorification, in France, of fringe minorities; and it was, for reasons related to this, always a lesser force than what Dubois calls 'Napoleonic neo-classicism' (see p. 133). Neither ancient Gaul nor modern Breton could expect to be greatly romanticised in a climate of Napoleonic neo-classicism, but if turbulent Celticism was to flourish anywhere, it was better to have it in pre-Roman France, well away from the British navy. By the third of Dubois's periods, however, the modern Breton has come to occupy centre-stage in France's notion of what a Celt is. Ideas surrounding the Celtic Breton at this stage were imported from Britain, not because the Bretons had imported themselves from Britain in an earlier age, but because the romanticisation of the Celtic fringe was far more advanced in Britain than in France (see p. 136). Before looking further at the French Celt, therefore, we can return to Britain, and the work of Edward Lhuyd.

Lhuyd had grouped together the modern Welsh, Bretons, and Irish and Scottish Gaels, and made the adjective 'Celtic' appropriate to this grouping. Well over 1000 years after the category 'Celtic' had disappeared, then, it was reconstituted, in the early eighteenth century, once again as a category of the fringe. The terminology had been fluid before Lhuyd, and remained so after him. Other possible nomenclatures might have come to the fore, and influenced our sense of genealogy in arbitrary ways: 'Gaulish' would have been a particularly likely candidate, had it not been already usurped by France; 'British' was another possibility, with all the very different political and moral affinities that would have entailed. Lhuyd's usage slowly came to be accepted, and by the early nineteenth century most philologists knew what it meant. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was a term that intellectuals in the 'Celtic' countries were happy to employ of themselves, and of their people and customs. In 1990, the adjective is very much part of common speech. It is still not always understood, and some people, even in 'Celtic' countries, have only a vague idea of its meaning, which may not fully correspond with the philologists' interpretation. Nevertheless, in the late twentieth century, it has become a popular category. Large groups of

people – the Welsh, Irish, Scots and Bretons – are often called 'Celts' by others; and some of these 'Celts' are happy to use the term as a name *for themselves*. The Celts, after centuries in conceptual limbo, have been conjured once more into existence.

I have given this brief description of the procedure which caused the 'Celts' to re-emerge on the fringe of modern Britain, because it is this fringe position which defines their characteristics, and which ties them back to their ancient namesakes. The 'Celts', as we know them today, are a romantic and post-romantic creation, whose ancient genealogy is modern.

THE MODERN CELTS

Lhuyd's work was, in a sense, before its time.[12] The coming together of linguistics and nationalism, and the romantic British interest in the Celtic fringe, all of which would have pounced upon a work such as Lhuyd provided, were still in the future. When interest in the Celts *was* provoked, it was centred less upon scholarship, than upon forgery, fantasy and wish-fulfilment. Macpherson's Ossian, and the *Barzaz Breiz* of Villemarqué, have already been mentioned. William Stukeley, in his 1740 publication *Stonehenge, a Temple Restored to the Druids*, made the first steps in the creation of modern (and entirely bogus) druidism, and provided the intellectual foundation for the baseless association of Celts and Druids with stone-circles, now so regularly made in the popular imagination. I have said (p. 116) that all popular sense of pre-Christian or pagan religion in Britain has a tendency to gather round the 'Celts', as a figure of simple opposition to central normality. The association of 'Celts' and the mute monuments of prehistory is striking evidence of this (and may in some senses be as old as the Anglo-Saxon invasions: the monuments of Avebury, for example, first appear in written record in the thirteenth century as 'Waledich', from Weala-dic – the dyke of the Britons'; see Vatcher and Vatcher, 1976: 38). The 'Celts' in Britain, on archaeological criteria, might not date from much before the end of the first millennium BC, while whoever put up Stonehenge did so several thousand years before; Stukeley could not know this, for the chronologies of prehistory would only be subsequently established. What *is* interesting is that the popular intellect has not abandoned Stukeley's thesis, and that the latter-day Druids still celebrate the solstice at

Stonehenge. The Glamorganshire antiquary Edward Williams, in 1792, styled himself 'Iolo Morganwg', and, heavily embroidering such evidence as the classical authors offered, held the first modern druidical rites on Primrose Hill, in North London. He thus inaugurated the tradition that was to become the now annual Welsh Eisteddfod, with its cloaked bards, dressed up as the Druids of eighteenth-century fancy.[13]

It is difficult to look at the ancient Celts directly, without one's gaze passing through the various distorting lenses that romanticism and Nationalism put in the way. Now, however, that we have reached the late eighteenth century, with the Celts firmly established on the British periphery, we can enter the door marked 'romanticism', and stay there; it is where the Celts still live. The Celts, in their modern guise, might be said to derive from three processes:

1. The elaboration of an opposition self/other, with the 'Celts' (under whatever title) figuring as the 'other', and with Greek/ Keltoi, Roman/Galli, Anglo-Saxon/Walch and English/Celtic succeeding one another. Geographically and conceptually, the second of each of these pairs is peripheral. The content of the second (or rather, what is *noticeable* about the second) is primarily determined by the content of the first.

2. The steady progression of fashions from a centre to a periphery, with new fashions appearing at the centre, and steadily moving to the periphery, replaced in their turn by the same continuing process. This process is in many respects indifferent to boundaries constructed under the first process: the *content* of categories constructed under the first process can change continuously, while the categories themselves appear static.

3. A systematic function of the meeting of incongruent category systems, causing the perceiving culture to construct the perceived as inconstant, unreliable, irrational, given to excess and inadequacy, and so on.

Processes 2 and 3 provide constantly renewed material for process 1. It is not always easy to sort out the effects of these different processes, for they overlie one another; the observations resulting from them are in many respects incompatible, and so are the object of a good deal of creative forgetfulness and fudging (in order, for example,

that process 2 should always seem to provide support for process 1).
The picture is further complicated by romanticism, which deserves a
paragraph to itself, as a fourth process:

4.   Romanticism: this glamorises the 'other' that is constructed in
     processes 1 and 3, and introduces a complicated refraction (which
     I have called 'an apparent counter-current') into the observation
     of process 2.

The first three processes, acting together, have produced the various
marginal ethnic categories which I have discussed; and, with the
addition of the fourth, are responsible for our modern category
'Celtic'. Individually, the processes are simple enough, but they are
difficult to sort one from the other, and from the uncritical intellec-
tual *status quo* of interpretation in which they are embedded. I could
not have attempted this by reading alone; the experience of living in
the Celtic fringe, studying some of its languages and people in
detail, listening to these people talk about themselves, and listening
to others talking about them, has been essential.

There is, in relation to processes 1 and 3, a potential equality in
perception – any group can perceive another in these ways; any
inequality is a product of historiography (we know the story from
only one side), or perhaps, in situations of gross demographic pre-
ponderance of one group over another, a product of experience, and
of common discussion and analysis of that experience. The view of
these matters from the 'Celtic' side, with the Greeks, Romans, Anglo-
Saxons or English as *marginal* categories, must have existed, and
partial reconstruction of this might be possible; certainly, an account
from the 'Celtic' side would be unequivocally welcome.[14]

We have already seen that the Celts, in various pre-romantic
forms, have been constituted as the opposite of their self-consciously
civilised observers. So, the series of oppositions out of which the
Celts have been made might, in pre-romantic form, look something
like this:

Self	:	*Other*
rule	:	disrule (absence of rule)
order	:	disorder
culture	:	nature
human	:	animal
controlled	:	uncontrolled
lawful	:	lawless

clean   :   dirty
reason   :   unreason
intellect   :   emotion
constant   :   inconstant
modern   :   backward
progressive   :   regressive

We might add a series to do with food and its moralities:

cooked   :   raw
bread   :   meat
farmers   :   pastoralists
settled   :   unsettled

and note how readily these food-related oppositions can transform themselves into the moral judgements of the first series. We might also include a few oppositions relating to belief:

Christian   :   pagan
religion   :   superstition
religion   :   magic
rational   :   irrational

This last series needs to be put into a subtle and gradually changing argument about the relative positions of science and religion since the Reformation and Enlightenment, for as it stands it crosses centuries in an awkward manner. For many rationalists of the post-Enlightenment period, religion itself was irrational, and so belonged on the right-hand-side of the column. In general, however, those who adhere to a particular religion regard it as normal, and tend to produce derogatory formulations of the beliefs and practices of others; 'superstition' and 'magic' are both much-used terms in this context, employed by the Christian Church to characterise pagan practice, and by the Reformed Church to characterise Roman Catholic practice. The relegation of religion itself to the right-hand column is relatively modern, and is tied up with developments in the intellectual background of science and religion; these developments are, in a sense, obvious enough, and my reason for treading warily is that they have a rather complex relationship with my main subsequent theme, which is the romantic revision of these ideas. We must, therefore, leave religion hovering uncertainly (as it still does) over the colon separating one half of the opposition from the other.

As we have seen, a variety of ethnic oppositions might line up with, and produce, the above series of images:

Greek	:	Keltoi
Roman	:	Gaul
Anglo-Saxon	:	Welsh

With the intellectual revolution that we call romanticism, the entire system of oppositions listed above undergoes a subtle metamorphosis. What I have called the 'centre' continued to characterise itself by the left-hand column, and the 'periphery' by the right-hand column; but the balance of virtue shifted. Where previously goodness had resided on the left margin, romanticism shifted it to the right. As it did so, new adjectives appear which, while expressing the same series of oppositions, also express the new moral valuation. The list above, therefore, acquires a new series of glosses from the romantic reappraisal (the original list is in parenthesis):

Self	:	*Other*
constraint	:	freedom
(rule)		(disrule – absence of rule)
predictable	:	unpredictable
(order)		(disorder)
artificial	:	natural
urban	:	rural
(culture)		(nature)
artificial	:	natural
(human)		(animal)
reserved	:	impulsive
formal	:	informal
(controlled)		(uncontrolled)
conventional	:	creative
(lawful)		(lawless)
sterile	:	fertile
(clean)		(dirty)
calculation	:	imagination
(reason)		(unreason)
measurement	:	passion
(intellect)		(emotion)
dull	:	exciting
(constant)		(inconstant)
rootless	:	true to nature

artificial	:	natural
(modern)		(backward)
industrial	:	agricultural
(progressive)	:	(regressive)

A radical reappraisal of 'natural' food began some time ago, and has now reached into the diets of all in the Western world; the culture/nature opposition has been rendered in this area as

| processed | : | natural |
| artificial | : | wholesome |

The reappraisal of the social life of pastoralists is congruent with the general reappraisal of the opposition 'settled: unsettled', with pastoralism benefiting from all the glamour that the right-hand list has now received.

In religion, and the sphere of belief systems in general, the same words were employed, but the values attached to the right-hand list changed:

Christian	:	pagan
religion	:	superstition
religion	:	magic
rational	:	irrational

The right-hand list was Christianity's own opposition to itself, and as such had been commonly perceived as diabolical, evil, terrifying. The Reformation had ousted what it saw as 'magical' practices from formal religion, thus confirming their apparently evil and illegitimate nature, with the ugly witch-crazes of the seventeenth century as one outcome.[15] As religion declined in importance among intellectuals, however, so their tolerance of apparently alternative religious practices increased, until with romanticism magic and superstition begin to re-enter popular intellectual discourse as charming features of primitive life. The misery, fear and claustrophobia that had come of living in witch-ridden conceptual systems was effaced;[16] the potential for distress was forgotten, as was the helpless misery of supernatural attack – the wasted children, the men driven mad, the failed crops and dry cattle.[17] Instead, all these became a celebration of an alternative and colourful rationality – where once the witches had terrorised, they now offered alternative entertainment to jaded rationalists.

The older ethnic labels for the oppositions cited here were re-
placed by the following:

classical	:	barbarian
neo-classical	:	Gothic
Anglo-Saxon	:	Celtic

The first opposition was retrospectively interpreted, according to the
romantic reappraisal as given above. The second was not so much a
matter of ethnic labelling, as a literary and moral question; the neo-
classicism of the eighteenth century gave way to new trends in
literature, art, architecture and morality, which were in explicit con-
trast to neo-classicism, and to which the label 'Gothic', with its
barbarian overtones, seemed appropriate. The third opposition car-
ried all the weight of the oppositions so far listed, all their moral,
historical, aesthetic and intellectual burden; but it was also a full-
blown ethnic opposition, full of real people and real societies, appar-
ently exemplary of these new interpretations.

I have argued elsewhere that romanticism created the fringe Celtic
minorities as figures of wish-fulfilment, of opposition to the prevail-
ing philosophy and actuality of industrialising England. The ethic of
industrial progress, Promethean though its achievements truly were,
was fundamentally pragmatic, with an underlying belief in the power
of science and reason. It produced both prosperity and squalor of
unprecedented magnitude, and not surprisingly was given to reflec-
tion upon its own nature, and some doubt about the genie of techno-
logical progress that it had freed. So, a series of oppositions to the
ethic of science and industry appeared:

material	:	ideal
utilitarian	:	beautiful
rational	:	emotional
science	:	sentiment
science	:	art

And so on. Having discussed these ideas at length elsewhere, I am
content here to evoke Mill's 'Utilitarianism' and Dickens's Thomas
Gradgrind[18] as evidences of the nature of the discussion.

The opposition Anglo-Saxon/Celtic partook of this series of op-
positions as well. The creative imagination of the romantic aesthetic
was largely built out of the righthand column of attributes, and this

creative imagination was also invested in the Celts. So, there was an increasing elaboration of the Celts as free, unpredictable, natural, emotional, impulsive, poetical, artistic, expressive, unreliable (and so on), in opposition to Anglo-Saxons who are restrained, predictable, cultured, stolid, scientific, rational, reliable, impassive (and so on). Many centuries of the observation of others, of the construction of self-centred historiography and ethnography, were given new life as a comparative ethnography of Britain – one which still survives in the minds and imaginations of many writers and observers.

Ernest Renan and Mathew Arnold again express most of the relevant metaphors. Renan wrote of the Bretons that they were:

> une race timide, réservée, vivant toute au dedans, pesante en apparence, mais sentant profondément, et portant dans ses instincts réligieux une adorable delicatesse. La même contraste frappe, dit-on, quand on passe de l'Angleterre au pays de Galles, de la Basse Ecosse, anglaise de langage et de moeurs, au pays des Gaels du Nord.
>
> (Renan, 1947–64:252)

> S'il était permis d'assigner un sexe aux nations comme aux individus, il faudrait dire sans hésiter que la race celtique . . . est une race essentiellement féminine.
>
> (ibid.: 258)

> Comparée à l'imagination classique, l'imagination celtique est vraiment l'infini comparé au fini.
>
> (ibid.)

> L'élément essentiel de la vie poétique du Celte, c'est l'aventure, c'est-à-dire la poursuite de l'inconnu.
>
> (ibid.)

Matthew Arnold interpreted and embellished Renan for the British audience, in what was arguably the most influential piece ever written in the field of Celtic studies (however much modern academic professionals might wish to disclaim it). Arnold noted that:

> If his rebellion against fact has . . . lamed the Celt even in spiritual work, how much more must it have lamed him in the world of business and politics. The skilful and resolute appliance of means

to ends which is needed both to make progress in material civili-
sation, and also to form powerful states, is just what the Celt has
least turn for.

(Arnold 1891: 88)

He contrasted the German and the Celtic genius; the German genius
is:

Steadiness with honesty; the danger for a national spirit thus
composed is the humdrum . . . . The excellence of a national spirit
thus composed is freedom from whim, flightiness, perverseness;
patient fidelity to Nature, – in a word, *science* – leading it at last,
though slowly, and not by the most brilliant road, out of the
bondage of the humdrum and common, into the better life. The
universal dead-level of plainness and homeliness, the lack of all
beauty and distinction in form and feature, the slowness and
clumsiness of the language, the eternal beer, sausage and bad
tobacco, the blank commonness everywhere, pressing at last like
a weight on the spirits of the traveller in Northern Germany, and
making him impatient to be gone, – this is the weak side; the
industry, the well-doing, the patient steady elaboration of things,
the idea of science governing all departments of human activity,
– this is the strong side.

(ibid.: 82)

By contrast:

Sentiment is, however, the word which marks where the Celtic
races really touch and are one; . . . it may be seen in wistful regret,
it may be seen in passionate penetrating melancholy; but its essence
is to aspire ardently after life, light, and emotion, to be expansive,
adventurous, and gay.

(ibid.: 84)

The sensibility of the Celtic nature, its nervous exaltation, have
something feminine in them.

(ibid.: 90)

I have discussed this problem of the 'femininity' of the Celts else-
where, and shall not repeat that discussion here,[19] other than to note
that this had nothing to do with effeminacy. It is, rather, the product
of the similar structural positions which men occupy in relation to

women, and which the centre occupies in relation to the social periphery – in both cases, the relationship is one between 'definer' and 'defined'. This congruence leads to an apparent similarity in the character of 'Celt' and 'woman'. This putative 'femininity' of the Celt has, however, been taken at its face value by many subsequent commentators.[20] It is also worth noting that the rule/disrule axis, as a feature in early human social evolution, has been closely associated with the male/female axis, by a prominent figure in British anthropology, Meyer Fortes.[21] There is a suggestion, therefore, that the rule/disrule series of metaphors, so obviously attractive to the human imagination, may have had a sexual element for a very long period. The Anglo-Saxon/Celtic recension is, perhaps, only a footnote to a much longer and more fundamental story.

The metaphors used by Arnold and Renan still serve, in many different forms, to characterise the Celtic fringe. The overtly 'racial' aspects of their discourse might now be generally disavowed, but there is no doubt of the continued relevance, for many writers, social theorists, tourists and urban escapees, of the images discussed above. Since Arnold's work, eulogies of Celtic art, Celtic life and Celtic character have been a consistent feature of Anglophone literature. One might notice, however, two high points in these trends: one, in the Celtic Twilight; and a second, in 'the sixties'.

THE 'CELTIC TWILIGHT'

The movement known as the 'Celtic Twilight' flourished around the turn of the century, in the productions of poets like the young Yeats, Norah Hopper, William Sharp (alias 'Fiona MacLeod'), and George Russell (alias 'A. E.'). It was prefigured in the works of Tennyson,[22] and of Lady Charlotte Guest.[23] The anthology *Lyra Celtica*, edited by E. Sharp gives a fair idea of the genre. William Sharp's introduction to this volume acknowledges Arnold's influence, as 'the most sympathetic and penetrating critic of the Celtic imagination' (Sharp, 1896: xliii), and says:

> The Celtic Renascence, of which so much has been written of late – that is, the re-birth of the Celtic genius in the brain of Anglo-Celtic poets and the brotherhood of dreamers – is, fundamentally, the outcome of 'Ossian', and, immediately, of the rising of the sap in the Irish nation.
>
> (Sharp, 1896: xxxv)

The 'Celtic Twilight' was a primarily literary movement, in pursuit of dreams and irreality. Sharp's reference to the 'rising sap in the Irish nation', however, gives some indication of the relationship between the literary phenomena, and the contemporary political and moral sympathies and commitments which led to the foundation of 'Celtic' Ireland, with Gaelic as its first official language.[24] The works of the 'Celtic Twilight' were mostly wistful renunciations of action and vigour, and their key into political life is not obvious. The young Yeats was a member of Sharp's 'brotherhood of dreamers', and his early poems might be regarded as exemplary (although unusually skilful) 'Celtic Twilight' productions:

> I must be gone: there is a grave
> Where daffodil and lily wave,
> And I would please the hapless faun,
> Buried under the sleepy ground,
> With mirthful songs before the dawn.
> His shouting days with mirth were crowned;
> And still I dream he treads the lawn,
> Walking ghostly in the dew,
> Pierced by my glad singing through,
> My songs of old earth's dreamy youth:
> But ah! she dreams not now; dream thou!
> For fair are poppies on the brow:
> Dream, dream, for this is also sooth.
>   (from 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd', *Crossways*, 1889[25])

Yeats, like his colleagues, found the present sadly wanting; all beauty, mirth, truth, valour and poetry had left the world, their absence to be lamented in tender grief. It was only a step from this, however, to looking around for somebody to blame for this condition. All the metaphors of Celthood, all the romantic indictments of modernity and reality, were there to serve this end. Yeats's work is a fascinating progressive chronicle of this process, with its ghastly consequences. In 'Meditations in Time of Civil War', he came to another and more mature conclusion about the promiscuous summoning of Celtic irrealities into political debate:

> We had fed the heart on fantasies,
> The heart's grown brutal from the fare;
> More substance in our enmities
> Than in our love;
>   (from 'The Stare's Nest by My Window', *The Tower*, 1928[26])

The link between fantasy and brutality is not one that most observ-
ers are forced to learn. The fragile beauties of the 'Celtic Twilight'
are, by contrast, highly memorable, and have contributed much to
the propagation of ideas of the Celts in the modern world. How
many children have gone, with Yeats, to the Lake Isle of Innisfree?

'THE SIXTIES' AND AFTER

The Celts have had 'alternative' metaphors poured into them
throughout their conceptual life. The 1960s was a period in which
ambitions to the 'alternative life' assumed a central place in many
intellectual and social circles, especially among the young – the post-
war baby boom in guileless, arrogant adolescence, untempered by
any experience save prosperity. It is no surprise, therefore, that the
1960s should have seen a great flowering of 'Celtic' themes – in art,
crafts, literature, politics, language-learning, academic study, escap-
ist urban–rural migration, and so on. There is no need to go into
details, for period monuments are still all around, and many of them
are cited elsewhere in this text. They are not limited to the 1960s, of
course, although many participants feel that a certain kind of high-
tide was reached in this period, which has since slowly ebbed.

The characteristic postures of the age were a rejection of material-
ism, industry and capitalism, in favour of spirituality, communal
life, rural self-sufficiency and 'mind-expanding' drugs. We can note,
in passing, that all these anti-industrial postures were adopted by
people who enjoyed the fruits of industrial prosperity; who took
them for granted, indeed, to such an extent that they stopped notic-
ing where they came from. This is not an irrelevant point, for it bears
upon the essential inauthenticity and self-indulgence of most of the
enthusiasms of the period, 'Celtic' included. One ultimate caricature
of this was the unemployed, drug-taking, English-suburban-escapee
Welsh-mountain-valley-dwelling member of the alternative society,
insisting vociferously on its rights to adequate social security ben-
efits; such figures truly came into existence in this period.

The previous generation of British adults had more difficult and
more real problems to cope with, and it is no accident that their
enthusiasms for Celtic themes were more muted. With lives dis-
rupted by war, and economic prosperity hard to achieve, 'alterna-
tive' enthusiasms had no place. It may well be worth noting a paral-
lel between the 'Celtic Twilight' and 'the sixties'. Both were periods
of stability and peace. Both were periods of secure prosperity, and as
such were apt to 'Celtic' celebration. As I have argued above (see

p. 133), in periods of uncertainty and want, you do not find yourself celebrating the insecure, or indulging in alternative rationalities. There is a difference between the secure prosperity of the two periods, of course: in the 'Celtic Twilight', there was prosperity for the middle classes; in 'the sixties' for most of the British population. The much broader dispersal of 'Celtic' enthusiasms in the population in the latter period must be understood in this light.

'The sixties', indeed, hardly merit mention outside romanticism, for they were a characteristic manifestation of this greater phenomenon, as was the 'Celtic Twilight'. 'Modernity', in this sense as in many others, was an early nineteenth-century British invention. The Celts, in their modern form, are the product of a period of high formalisation in many social and symbolic realms – a period that is commonly called, for convenience, 'Victorian'. The constant reference today to 'Victorian values' is a reminder of this sense of hyper-ordering for which the period is remembered. The 'Celts', in this period, were a moral toy, a game in the mirror. The Arthurian vogue of the Middle Ages[27] was powerfully re-expressed in the nineteenth century, and its 'irrational but irresistible' appeal[28] was once again strongly felt in 'the sixties'. The most relevant testimony to this is not, perhaps, the great bulk of overtly Arthurian literature, but the extraordinary vogue for J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. This was published two decades earlier, but it achieved the height of its international sales in the 1960s and 1970s (and see p. 244). Contemporary re-publications of *The Mabinogion* also sold widely. Many 'look alikes' followed, quasi-'Celtic' epics of one kind and another; scarcely a week goes by, it seems, without a new paperback version appearing in the popular selections offered by railway station newsagents.[29]

'Celtic' mysticism and paganism gathered many votaries in the period, and, again, many publications have been engendered – Druids, standing stones, ancient symbols and the rest, spun into esoteric fancies.[30] Naddair says, characteristically, and for all I know correctly: 'To the man who has no magic in his blood, the cavern of Keltic profundity is for ever sealed' (Naddair, 1987a: 7). Publishers have responded to these tastes with exuberant popular works on the Celts, from earliest times to the present. Little subtlety or scepticism of interpretation is allowed to disturb the apparent security of our knowledge of this 'people', paraded before us in glossy format. The *National Geographic* produced its version,[31] along with *The Family of Man* (published by Marshall Cavendish[32] and Time-Life Books).[33] A

near-definitive literary collection has been produced by Robert O'Driscoll, called *The Celtic Consciousness*, which contains works by many of the authorities that I have cited; section six of this work

> examines the way in which the Celtic imagination is being expressed again in contemporary action and thought, and how artists and visionaries are attempting to counter the dehumanization of modern technology and industrialization with Celtic mysticism, meditation, and new humanism.
>
> (O'Driscoll, n.d.)

Many sources would tell the same tale,[34] and I shall give here some quotations from Severy's *National Geographic* version of the Celtic story:

> The Celts, a proud, inventive, battle-loving people.
>
> (Severy, 1977: 581)

> Yet there was something about the Celts – some poetry of mind, fey, superstitious, melancholy, ribald – that enabled the culture to endure. The last century saw a Celtic revival sweep Europe, and now once again there is lively interest in Celtic arts, in Celtic languages, even in demands for separatism.
>
> (ibid.)

We are then plunged straight into a Cornish midsummer festival – a fanciful re-creation taken entirely seriously by Severy:

> Children link hands and circle right, in the ritual direction of the sun, making dancing shadows against the wall of flame. Voices sing in the ancient tongue of Cornwall.
>
> Comely in a Cornish kilt, Janet Fennell pours out her passion for the Celtic past – and her vision of its future.
>
> 'I have learned to speak Cornish because I am Celtic. I taught my daughter to speak it, so she will feel Celtic too. We are Celts – not English, not Anglo-Saxons. We must make our heritage live, as must the Irish, the Welsh, the Bretons, the Scots, and the Manx. We possess something sacred and beautiful that must not die.'
>
> I had found fires of 'Celtic' nationalism fueled by political, economic and social discontent. . . . All seek a sense of identity. Once scorned as backward peasants, often punished for speaking

languages learned at their mother's knee, many today take pride
in their difference.

'We have a different culture', Janet went on – 'different tradi-
tions and values. We are more intuitive, mystic, melancholy, im-
pulsive. We are more attuned to nature, less materialistic.'

On that fiery Midsummer Eve in Cornwall, as pinpoints of
yellow light flickered into flame from hilltop to hilltop, one could
feel the magic of that timeless land steeped in legends of King
Arthur, where the wizard Merlin seems to cloak in myth each
stone circle, each Celtic cross, each ancient field, hamlet and
headland. From one end of Cornwall to the other, and in Brittany
across the narrow sea, a chain of beacons set the night on fire, as
in those dark distant days when the Celts spanned the Continent.

(ibid.: 584–5)

Art for the Celts was not on the fringe, but central to life.

(ibid.: 603)

'Celtic art bridges two ages, mixes east and west, the natural and
the supernatural. Little wonder it is ambivalent' Dr Miklos Szabo
continued. 'Celtic art – like Celtic sagas and folklore – transcends
the bounds between reality and fantasy'.

(ibid.: 606)

Making a swing round the Celtic fringe of Eurasia, I had arrived
in Galway, in Western Ireland. . . . Etienne Rynne joined me for a
drop in the King's Head after lecturing on Celtic archaeology at
the university – a small, quick man with a rush of words on him,
and ideas battling for place of honor on his tongue. . . . 'Anything
you recognize as Celtic in 20th century Ireland?' I asked: . . . 'A lot.
The folklore. The pagan survivals. The fairies, or good people.
. . . We're still often considered drunk with words. We love to
exaggerate, to boast, to argue, to show off, much as did the an-
cient Celts. . . . No English understatement for us. Our turn of
phrase, sense of humour, attitude to law and order are quite
different. We won't wait at a red light if no car is coming. We'll
cross – something an Englishman rarely does, a German never.
To them, the law is the law, sacrosanct. To us, the law is there –
but. The mentality is different'.

(ibid.: 619–26)

To do full justice to the above, the illustrations and captions should be included as part of the experience, for words cannot replace them. They include photographs of Iron-Age metalwork, imaginative illustrations of 'the headstrong, headlong heroism of long-haired Gaul against the cold methodical butchery of the clean-shaven legions of Rome' (ibid.: 616), photographs of a Welshman in a coracle, the Atlantic beating on the shores of the Aran islands, and an illustration of Cuchulainn flying through the air clutching two women and a pot of gold. There is also a map, characteristic of such publication, with over-optimistic cross-hatching of areas where 'Celtic languages' are spoken.

Severy brings together, quite explicitly, as Celtic themes following one from the other, disturbance to the rational order, and disturbance to the political order. These two *do* have a similar configuration, but both are perceptions from *outside* the 'Celts' themselves, and both are celebrated and tolerated in times of security for central moral and political order. They are not indigenous themes, and it would be interesting to know what the ordinary local people were doing on the Midsummer's Eve festival in Cornwall that Severy describes. The essentially *external* appeal of these features is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the extraordinary predominance of non-'Celtic' people in the organisations of Celtic cultural and linguistic militantism, often disguised under 'Celticised' names.[35]

The *external* nature of many interventions into Celtic debate is sometimes used by Celtic intellectuals to deny its relevance to 'authentic' discussion. The issue is not so easily ducked, however. Careers, publicity, self-presentation, book-sales and all the rest, have only been offered within conditions and structures established from the outside.[36] Derick Thomson, perhaps the most prominent personality in the public face of Scottish Gaeldom, professor of Celtic studies at the University of Glasgow, has written of 'recurrent phases in the history of Gaelic Scotland, during which renewed emphasis is given to the strengthening of the Gaelic ethos or identity' (Thomson, 1981: 19). Among those who speak Gaelic, however, the decline of Gaelic has been unambiguous and relentless, without any periodic phases of strengthening. The phases which Thomson describes are those same phases of Celtic celebration that I have described above. They are phases in the life of the Scottish and British intellect, and have little to do with the domestic history of quotidian Gaeldom.

The 'Gaelic ethos or identity' which has been created and promulgated over the last 200 years has had little to do with what ordinary Gaels have said, and a great deal to do with what the Scottish and British reading and thinking public wanted to hear.

The 1960s and 1970s were a high-point not only for moral aspects of Celt-celebration, but for political, politico-linguistic and artistic aspects. Many organisations, separatist political parties, militant language preservation and revival groups, and so on, were formed at this time, and have since struggled to maintain their original level of enthusiasm and commitment.[37] The trajectory of self-styled 'Celtic music' has been similar; the career of the Breton 'folk-rock' harpist Alan Stivell is a good illustration of this.[38] The ever-deepening recession of the 1970s was not, as might have been expected, conducive to continued Celtic growth. The hard-nosed 1980s did not, for similar reasons, produce any novelty in this area. There is no reason to suppose, however, that the next wave is not round the corner.

I shall end this section with Frank Delaney's recent work, *The Celts*, which had a six-programme BBC-2 series associated with it. The television series and book are a spirited attempt to put life into the subject, and inevitably the effort of imagination often over-reaches the sources. Delaney's work, however, has a saving humour and scepticism, which puts it into a rather unusual class of its own; he says:

> In truth there can be no accuracy in discussing Celtic political or national identity as a living form. . . . The division between the genuine, ancient Celtic peoples and their modern, diluted namesakes remains clear and can no longer be relevantly bridged.
>
> (Delaney, 1986: 59)

Many of the problems of this book are contained therein. The bridge is not there, but people continue to cross it, as indeed Delaney does himself elsewhere in his work. There is no reason to suppose that the process will ever come to an end.

NATURE AND CULTURE

The perception that other societies live in a state of nature, or fail to differentiate adequately between nature and culture, is, as we have seen, ancient, and vouched for by genuine observation. The simple

shift of a category boundary can provoke such a conclusion. Since discrimination of any kind is commonly regarded, by those who practise it, as properly human, then any infractions of this discrimination can readily provoke a sense of animal-like lack of discrimination, or a sense of non-human naturality.

In the case of the peripheral societies of Europe, throughout the last two millennia, the continuous stream of technological, demographic and social development has provided endless material for the sense that culture was at the centre, and nature at the fringe. The perception still endures, ever-reconstructed from new materials. It is essentially a misperception, however – an imposition of a central vision upon the periphery. Those from the periphery who seek self-presentation upon a larger stage might glory in the vision, but their script is written by others.

For it is no exaggeration to say that the peripheral societies, far from living close to nature, or being indifferent to the nature/culture boundary, were, and are, engaged in a constant struggle to maintain the boundary. The boundary between man and animal, order and disorder, domestic space and the wild, cultivation and desolation, has continually to be striven for, in the Celtic periphery as everywhere. The geological and climatic hostility of some aspects of the modern Celtic fringe (mountains, poor soils, high rainfall, high winds) may well have made the battle to hold the conceptual line between nature and culture difficult, in crudely physical aspects (the rain *will* find its way through the roof) as well as in more interestingly moral matters (is it worth struggling to try to grow flowers in the garden when the wind and rain will flatten them? Or labouring to maintain the fences so that the rabbits and sheep can be kept apart from the cabbages?). Certain social aspects, also, like extensive emigration of the young, and the ageing of the resident population, may have increased the general social vulnerability to 'the forces of nature'. The effects of these difficulties are commonly perceived, by visitors from outside, as an indifference to the nature/culture boundary – a willingness, that is, to live in nature. They are not, however; on the contrary, they are evidence of a continuous struggle (in difficult social and physical circumstances, historically often conditions of poverty and want) to achieve clarity of social definition.

Travellers in the Celtic fringe have long confirmed images of this kind, with stories of men and livestock wonderfully confused, and primaeval habits in eating, drinking and the preparation of food – grass growing on the thatch, chickens feeding on the roof, cattle

crossing the house threshold. Flann O'Brien's wonderful account of
the Gaelic-speaking piglets in a poor house in the west of Ireland is
an outstanding literary expression of this problem.[39]

In the plastic arts, there is a long and strong tradition of regarding
'Celtic' art as 'natural'. The curvilinear assymetries of La Tène deco-
ration are invariably interpreted in this way.[40] I do not wish to deny
the beauty of this artistic tradition, other than to suggest that the title
'Celtic' is seriously misleading, and to observe that on some occasions
what is merely crude in conception and achievement has been lauded
as 'natural' on that account – there are many parallels in modern art,
of course. Many of the high-flown metaphysical and moral conclu-
sions drawn from 'Celtic' art by its admiring critics are suspiciously
like an elaboration of the idea that curves are more natural than
corners. With a curve, like with a Celt, you might be anywhere, and
one thing flows into another; with a corner, like with an Anglo-
Saxon, you know where you are: nature makes curves, humanity
makes corners. This is a caricature of the debate, but a great deal of
nonsense of this kind has been produced.

At a more literary level, it has long been considered that Celtic
poetry has an intrinsic naturalism, an affinity with the beauties of the
natural world. Renan claimed that 'chaque fois que le vieil esprit
celtique apparaît dans notre histoire, on voit renaître avec lui la foi à
la nature et à ses magiques influences' (1947–64: 271), and 'leur
mythologie n'est qu'un naturalisme transparent' (1947–64: 269); many
subsequent writers have echoed this sentiment.[41] The definitive dis-
cussion of this is Kenneth Jacksons's *Early Celtic Nature Poetry* (1935),
in which the author dispels many misconceptions. The major prob-
lem preventing clarity of discussion in this area is that 'nature', as it
now exists in our conceptual structure, has been transformed by
romanticism. In reading pre-romantic Celtic poetry, it is difficult for
us to look there for 'nature' of a kind independent of the romantic
definition.

It is necessarily true, however, that nature varies as much as
culture. To say that 'every society defines nature in its own way' is
not conceptual nihilism or a retreat into relativism, but rather the
result of comparative ethnography. If we look at what seems to us,
in other conceptual systems, to be 'nature', and call it 'nature' ac-
cording to our own, we will introduce permanent misrepresenta-
tion. Misrepresentation of this kind lies behind the notion that the
Celts overlap so promiscuously into nature. It is, indeed, often the
very extent of humanisation of natural features, their subjection to

linguistic and social arbitrariness, within the Celtic fringe, which observers from outside see as an 'affinity to nature'.[42] Further consideration of Jackson's Celtic nature poetry is illuminating here.

Jackson divides early Celtic nature poetry (all Irish or Welsh) into four kinds: hermit poetry, elegiac and fenian poetry, gnomic poetry, and seasonal poetry. Much of the Celtic specificity of these is lost since, as Jackson notes, they exist in very similar forms in other poetic traditions, notably the Anglo-Saxon. Apart from this, however, it is worth noting that of these four varieties of poetry, only the first, hermit poetry, expresses a desire to be close to nature, and to feel an affinity with it. And this closeness and affinity are of a very special kind. This poetry was produced in the eighth and ninth centuries by hermits of an ascetic and anchorite Christian monastic tradition, introduced to Ireland during the period of the Anglo-Saxon invasions and the collapse of Roman authority. The hermits' retreat into wild and solitary places was an explicit renunciation of the world of men and their affairs; the celebration of natural beauty in such poems is an exploitation of a nature/culture boundary, where nature figures as an antithesis to humanity, and so as a figure for closeness to God, the creator of all natural things. This is far from revelling in wildness, and it was, in any case, very much a minority religious pursuit.

Elegiac and fenian poetry, as discussed by Jackson, often mention wildness and natural things, but commonly as a means of describing desolation – of isolation from the happy normal world of human comfort, from which the writer is exiled by misfortune; the elegiac poet might be living in nature, but his use of natural metaphors makes it plain that he does not want to be.

Gnomic poetry and seasonal poetry are both the result, not of the celebration of natural disorder, but of the very contrary – of the attempt to impose human order, classification, upon the natural world. Jackson says of the Celtic gnomic poetry:

> A probable explanation of these is that they are expressions of a desire for classification, for having the world with its chaotic variety formulated in an intelligible way. . . . It is, in fact, the beginning of science.
>
> (Jackson, 1935: 135–6)

The seasonal poems are, likewise, part of that ancient problem of human dealing with the natural world – the search for real and

classifiable time, and for predictable seasons, with proper begin-
nings and ends.[43] They also are an attempt to impose human order
upon natural flux.

    These genres of poetry are commonly interpreted as a channel
through which nature, with its abundant chaos, flows into the Celtic
imagination and into Celtic society. It is clear, however, that they are
no such thing. They are, indeed, evidence of the contrary – of a
sustained attempt to force order upon the natural world.

ANY OPPOSITION WILL DO

We have seen that the Celts have been variously constructed as a
figure of otherness, containing disorder and disturbance of order –
irrational, magical, non-scientific, emotional and given to metaphor,
in opposition to the rationality of the modern Western World. Many
commentators view these presumed characteristics of the Celt with
genuine complacency, regarding them as healthy alternatives to a
Western rationality that is too narrow, a Western economy that is too
individualistic and selfish, a Western science that is inhumane and
tyrannical, and so on. The adjective 'alternative', in the post-1960s
period, has a very broad sense – in 'alternative' politics, 'alternative'
food, 'alternative' music, 'alternative' medicine (and so on); all of
this is in opposition to, criticism of, or retreat from the (perceived)
Western urban industrial scientific positivist capitalist *status quo*, and
it is all therefore metaphorically apt for elision with the Celtic/non-
Celtic duality. I could cite many experiences and many publications
in demonstration of this. Instead, however, I will describe a book-
shop. In Brittany, every town of importance has a bookshop which
specialises in 'Celtic' books – there are one or several such book-
shops in Rennes, Nantes, Brest, Quimper, St Brieuc, Lorient, and so
on. It is typical of the nature of 'Celtic' enthusiasm that it is an urban
phenomenon, and there are no such bookshops in the villages in
areas where people still speak Breton. The appearance, indeed, of
such a bookshop, is a marker of the presence of upwardly-mobile
young French-speakers with alternative enthusiasms, and time and
money to indulge them. These shops sell, among other things, litera-
ture in the Breton language, which is bought and, to a lesser extent,
read, by learners of the language and their teachers (again, not by
ordinary speakers of the language, who read in French alone).

    There is such a shop in Morlaix, in northern Finistère. In Easter
1989, I wrote down the names of all the books on display in the

window of this bookshop, for the combination of subjects perfectly illustrated the point that I am making here. Below, I give a representative sample, in rough English translation; for the record, and lest credulity be strained, I include the full list as an appendix (see p. 266):

The Question of Prophets Today, J.-P. and R. Cartier
Breton Resistance to Napoleon Bonaparte – 1799–1815, D. Albatros
The Power of the Shapes around Us, B. Baudouin
Breton Pirates and Adventurers, A. de Wismes
Experiences of Survival After Death, I. Wilson
Astrology and the Bringing-up of Children, S. Frydman
Tales of Old Brittany, A. Le Braz
Marks of Destiny – revealed by your body, J. Huon
Death – my best experience, S. von Jankovich
History at the Street-Corner – Morlaix and its region, D. Appriou
Cosmic Power, J. Murphy
A Dialogue with Nature, M. Roads
The Lindisfarne Gospels, J. Backhouse
Telepsychy – your power is prodigious, J. Murphy
The Gold of the Celts, C. Eleure
Opening of the Spirit – Keys to Energy and Relaxation, T. Tulkou
The Standing Stones of Brittany, J. Briard and N. Fediaevsky
Tantra, Yoga and Meditation – the Tibetan Path to Enlightenment,
   E. Bruijn
Arthur and the Grail, H. Lampo and P. Koster

The full list includes some works in the Breton language, and further excellent works in regional and local history and affairs. There is also, however, an extraordinary penumbra of 'alternative' works. We have seen that wayward metaphor appears, from the outside, to inhabit Celtic areas; many of the books from that shop window might be regarded as metaphor run mad, where anything can be a metaphor for anything else, and reality dances when you whistle. Much of this could be dismissed as a collection of half-baked alternative trendiness, but the association of these alternative themes with Celtic and Breton subjects is no accident. Nearly all the 'Celtic' bookshops in Brittany possess an analogous collection (varying, of course, with the tastes of the proprietor, but often strikingly similar). One major theme absent from the Morlaix window collection (although it was represented inside) is pro-IRA propaganda, which many young idealistic French intellectuals consume with the same

earnest moral purpose as they do bean-sprouts and herb-tea.[44]

Few centre/periphery metaphors cannot be creatively built into the non-Celtic/Celtic image. If we caricature the 'centre' as embodied in the scientific industrial urban male Anglo-Saxon middle class, then any of the plethora of contrary images that this can provoke can be taken to characterise the Celts – can be invested in them, or drawn out of them.

We have already seen the congruence of the male/female and Anglo-Saxon/Celtic oppositions in the work of Renan and Arnold (and elaborations in the work of Markale, Carrer and Audibert). I have discussed this collusion of images at some length elsewhere, and raise the matter again for those who may doubt the *gravity* of the issues. Few intellectuals would now demur if it were suggested that the imagery surrounding women and their role in our society, influences reality itself – that the imagery is evidence of a kind of impotence, a kind of subordination, and that the position of women is both cause and effect of this imagery – the image and actuality are a 'simultaneity', inseparable as idea and reality, and jointly embodied.[45] The importance of concerns of this kind, in understanding the position of women in society, can scarcely be doubted. I make this point because it applies in many respects to the Celts.[46]

Other images have been calqued upon the Celts. Two American historians, Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, have argued that the north/south divide in the United States (as between the two sides of the American civil war), and all the moral issues that this opposition invokes, are derived from the fact that the north was settled by the English, and the south by the Celts. Lest this seem too improbable, I quote them verbatim:

> The leisurely life style of the Southern plain folk . . . was a classical example of what some cultural geographers have called cultural preadaptation or preselection. We have not yet completed our massive investigation of the ethnic origins of white Southerners, but our preliminary data indicate that upwards of 70 percent of those whose ethnic background can be ascertained were of Celtic extraction – mainly Welsh, Scots, Irish, and Scotch-Irish – or had originated in the 'Celtic frontier', the extreme southwestern, western, and northern parts of England. . . . By contrast, the Northern United States . . . were peopled mainly by English and Germans.
>
> (McDonald, and McWhiney, 1980: 1107–9)

They 'clarify' their use of the term 'Celtic' in a footnote:

> In using the term 'Celtic', we do not mean to suggest a common genetic pool, for the peoples under discussion were clearly of different genetic mixtures. . . . Rather, we are speaking of peoples who shared a common cultural heritage – customary lifestyles, attitudes, and ways of doing things. . . . after a great deal of study we have concluded that it is legitimate to consider them as a single general cultural group, different from the English. . . . A more accurate phraseology than Celtic, in the sense we are using the term, would be 'people from the British Isles who were historically and culturally non-English' – but somehow that phrase seems less catchy.
>
> (ibid.: 1108, note 11[47])

> As J. G. A. Pocock has put it, the Celtic peoples are 'no more English than Britain is European'.
>
> (ibid.: 1109[48])

> In sum, the opulently easy society of the Southern plain folk on the eve of the Civil War represented the culmination of many centuries of Celtic traditions. And these same Celtic traditions might explain why so many slaveowners did not push their slaves to work harder: maximization of profits and of one's labor supply was alien to the culture and, in fact, had never been common in the Celtic areas of the British Isles.
>
> (ibid.: 1111)

With so large-minded a view of the Celts, people from Somerset or Durham will do just as well as Scots and Welshmen; indeed, the image of friendly Celtic slaveowners from Somerset or Durham kindly not overworking their slaves is endearing, and it is almost a shame to spoil it. Extravagant forms of goofiness are far from unusual when American scholars turn to Celtic subjects.[49] Distance doubtless lends not only enchantment, but also coherence to the category 'Celtic': Britain looks so small from the other side of the Atlantic, that it seems entirely plausible that it could not be cut into pieces any smaller than halves. This 'stretching' of vernacular categories in other geographical environments, coupled with an indifference to any local sense of variation, has been noted by Ardener,[50] and this piece by McDonald and McWhiney exemplifies the prob-

lem. My general presentation should have given ample grounds for dissatisfaction with their presentation, although we might notice in particular the sloppy use of terms like 'ethnic origins', 'Celtic frontier' and 'genetic pool', and the undiscussed confusion of names and ethnicities people would claim for themselves, and names and ethnicities forced upon them by the analysts ('Celts' from northern England, for example). The authors admit that a better definition of 'Celtic' would be 'people from the British Isles who were historically and culturally non-English' and this would be disarming, from my point of view at least, if they gave any indication of understanding that this was, indeed, the minimal definition of 'Celtic', whatever the category then turned out to contain. There is no sense of this in their presentation, however; for them, Celts are Celts, defined by continuity of location, culture and reproduction, faithful to their traditions, and 'amazingly resistant to changing their ways' (McDonald and McWhiney, 1980: 1110).

I do not, of course, wish to argue that there were not cultural continuities carried by immigrants from the old world, and planted in the new; some of the cultural continuities discerned by McDonald and McWhiney were doubtless real. The embodiment of the difference in the Celtic/English opposition, however, is quite unsatisfactory. What they are observing is a reconstruction of an industrial/rural opposition in a new environment, overlain with the metaphors of power and impotence which came to the north/south duality in the USA during and after the civil war.

My second example of creative recycling of the English/Celtic opposition comes from a book by Bud B. Khleif (1980), called *Language, Ethnicity and Education in Wales*. For social scientific academia in the 1960s and since, images of revolution, capitalism, the working class, struggle, oppression (and so on) have assumed an extraordinary importance in thought and expression. It is not surprising, in view of this, that the English/Celtic duality should have been built into these fashionable structures. Khleif leaps in, telling us that:

> the Welsh – together with the Scots, the Irish, the Cornish, and the Manx – are part of the original Celtic inhabitants of Britain. They are the real British in the same sense that American Indians are the real Americans.
>
> (1980: 24)

He speaks of 'the Welsh, the Bretons, and other Third World people

within the First World' (ibid.: 267), and informs us that 'the "poor" of nineteenth century Britain were also considerably non-English, i.e. Celts' (ibid.: 226).

The cultural, historical and linguistic idiocy of this kind of thing is flagrant, and it might be felt that to offer it serious criticism was already too great a gift of credibility. I trust that the equation of 'Celt' and 'poor' will be seen for the nonsense it is. It does, however, have a certain interest in a more general political context. I have already noted the discrepancy between the views of self-appointed Celtic enthusiasts, swathed in vicarious oppression, and the views of those for whom they claim to speak. Khleif's terminologies are revealing in this respect. He distinguishes between what he calls the 'pro-Welsh Welsh', and the 'anti-Welsh Welsh'. He has taken almost all his information from the former, as well as the sense of his own virtue, and has taken over their views and terminology. He writes with adopted scorn of the latter. The 'pro-Welsh Welsh' are those Welsh (speakers of Welsh or not) who think that effort should be made to get everybody in Wales to speak Welsh; the 'anti-Welsh Welsh' are all those Welsh (speakers of Welsh or not) who do not think this, for whatever reason. These last, who are in very substantial numbers, have a right to their opinion, we might think, and a book entitled *Language, Ethnicity and Education in Wales* ought, at the least, to present a sensitive description of their views, and of their reasons for holding them. No such thing is offered, however. Instead, Khleif calls them 'betrayers', and cites with approval Thomas's characterisation of them as 'cultural scabs'.[51] His absurd 'glossary' gives a fair smell of the presentation overall (the examples are typical: the entire glossary has only sixty-six terms):

> *Anghyfiaith* – Foreigner. Literally, 'not of the same language'. See *Cyfiaith*.
> *Blydi Sais* – English trash, e.g. with reference to mixed marriages, said at times to damn the cultural folks of the non-Welsh-speaking spouse, whether English or Anglo-Welsh. Literally, 'bloody Englishmen', i.e. 'dam [*sic*] foreigners'.
> *Cydymunedaeth* – Gemeinschaftliness.
> *Cyfiaith* – Compatriot, countryman. Literally, 'of the same language'. See *Anghyfiaith*.
> *Cymro-Cymraeg* (plural: *Cymry-Cymraeg*) – Welsh-Welshman, Welsh-speaking Welshman, i.e. connoting true Welshness, a sense of authenticity.

> *Cymro-heb-Cymraeg*, or *Cymro-di-Cymraeg* – A Welshman without
> the Welsh language, a Welshman stripped of his Welshness.
> Indicative of a cultural deserter or renegade. Equivalent in
> connotation to 'Un-American' and 'Meshummed'.
> *Cymro ronc* – True Welshman, Welsh-speaking Welshman.
> *Dic-Sion-Dafydd* – Uncle Tom, i.e. a culturally subservient Welsh-
> man. Literally, 'Dick-Johnny-Dave', connoting a slippery iden-
> tity.
> *Gwerin* – Ordinary folks, common people.
> *Imperialaeth* – Nineteenth century imperialism, a later stage of
> colonialism.
> *Sais-o-Gymro* – An English-speaking Welshman, an Englishman of
> a Welshman, i.e. part of 'Englishry' in Wales.
> *Trefedigaeth/Trefedigaethau* – Colony, colonies.
> *Twll tyn pob saes* – 'Screw the English', or 'to hell with the English'.
> (Khleif, 1980: 282–5)

Clearly only one half of a story is being told here, and these entries
show the manner of the telling. The entire group characterised as
'anti-Welsh-Welshmen', and in various other derogatory ways, is of
course named by another interest group. It is in the discourse in the
third-person only, and would strongly resent being so character-
ised.[52] Khleif's glossary is a skeleton text of Greenwich Village Marx-
ism – ordinary folks, gemeinschaftliness, love of locality, common
people, imperialism, empire, colony. As such, it represents a modish
and fundamentally inauthentic collusion of fashionable images,
whose relationship to real Welsh matters is arguable, to say the
least.[53]

There are many texts of this kind. Few of them are so openly
contemptuous of great swathes of ordinary people as Khleif con-
trives to be. Nevertheless, the use of categories and moral arguments
which tacitly exclude or condemn these great swathes of people is
very common in the context. It is indeed a major problem in the
study of minority 'ethnicity', that most of those potentially involved
do not appear in the argument, because they have no interest in it;
the majority of the 'Celtic peoples', those, that is, who are giving up
or have given up use of their 'Celtic language', have very little
interest in minority debate, and find themselves thereby conceptu-
ally disenfranchised: they are talked about, with terms used to de-
scribe them that they would not use, expressing opinions that they
would not express. Much work on the subject of Celtic minorities is

based upon library citation, and recitation, of unrepresentative works which have categories of ethnic ascription in their title, and so can be found in catalogues and bibliographies. All these points are very plainly demonstrated by a work edited by H. Giles (1977), called *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations.*[54] Detailed criticism would only involve reiteration of the points already made in discussion of Khleif's work, for the same selectivity of perspective is evident. It is paralleled, moreover, by an extreme selectivity of citation. One article in the collection (see Bourhis and Giles, 1977) uses experimental evidence derived from language learners. The bibliography is big with works, but the only ones that concern Wales, and from which the authors derive their assessment of its historical, linguistic and political reality, are Corrado (1975), Hearne (1975) and Thomas (1973). These are all militant, minority and highly partisan publications. In the article by Chapman et al., all the 'general' history of Wales is drawn from one of these works, that by Corrado, which does not in fact contain the points made, and has in any case a different title from that cited (see references). In the final and lengthy theoretical statement by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor, there are only two quotations of any length from what might be called 'primary' ethnographic sources: one of these is an article from the *Guardian* (2 July 1965), reporting an interview with a Welsh-language militant and publisher;[55] the other is about Gaelic in Scotland, and is from the magazine *Carn* (May 1976), which is the organ of the 'Celtic League'. If you know how to assess these things, then using them is no harm. It is, however, no exaggeration to say that giving an assessment of Wales based on information from the Talybont Press, or on Scotland from an editorial in *Carn*, is like characterising western European opinion on the basis of a university-campus anarchist-group newsletter. The authors of these works in social psychology give no indication that they appreciate this. Their works nevertheless have magisterial status, in respected series, as definitive statements. Those for whom their works are destined can have no option but to take what they read at its face value. And so the balloons which they have made, and called Scottish, Welsh and Breton ethnicity, are blown up with international hot-air, and floated round the world.

It will by now be no surprise that the fashionable anti-colonialism of 1960s academia should have sought confirmation of its virtue in the Celtic example. Michael Hechter's *Internal Colonialism: the Celtic Fringe in British National Development – 1536–1966* (1975) had a facile inevitability in the context. Reece (1979) has written an article on

Brittany calqued upon this, called 'Internal colonialism: the case of Brittany' in a major journal devoted to such problems, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. These works display many of the features already men-tioned – tacit contempt for masses of people, conceptual disenfran-chisement of these same people, extreme selectivity of citation, ex-propriation of other people's apparent moral problems for self-flat-tery in campus debate, and so on. Reece's imitation of Hechter carries all the militant stigmata, bearing the signs of having been written on the basis of a few weeks spent in the Celtic department of the University of Rennes, and a reading of a few militant journals and publications. As such, it is part of a recognisable genre, and interesting on its own account, but it is certainly not a reliable source for the generality of Breton experience.[56] Reece's contribution, in-deed, reads very like MacNicoll's history of the Gaidhealtachd (see p. 100), with a skeleton of events put in a context of opposition and outrage, and providing an analysis that the great majority of those apparently analysed would not recognise as having anything to do with them.

My warmth on this subject is not personal, except in the sense that I have lived for long periods in areas where Celtic languages are spoken, among speakers of them, and am constantly annoyed by such facile academic misappropriations of the genuine experience of ordinary people. Nor should it be thought that the works I have cited are untypical or trivial – they are written by professional aca-demics, for the illumination of students and colleagues throughout the world.

In summary, then, we can draw out the following features of such academic handling of the Celtic/non-Celtic duality:

1. Any fashionable opposition is capable of creative elision with the Celtic/non-Celtic duality.
2. In the glow of the romantic reappraisal of the Celts, any fashion-able opposition will find its virtuous delightful half appropri-ated to the Celtic image, and its ugly wicked half appropriated to the English or Anglo-Saxon (as it were 'the poor' and 'the exploiters').
3. Fashionable oppositions within intellectual life and academia are as prone to elision with the Celtic/non-Celtic duality as are any others. Academics are as prone as everybody else to seek self-reward; if they can make themselves feel good, and admired

within the moral world that they inhabit, then they will often
do so, irrespective of whether their positions represent reality:
feeling good at somebody else's expense is particularly con-
venient.
4. Because understanding and analysis of the Celtic position is
    predominantly imposed from without rather than generated
    from within, the rules of the external discussion determine what
    can be said; the views and opinions of those who genuinely
    inhabit the Celtic fringe, as residents or native speakers of a
    Celtic language, are ignored or dismissed with remarkable in-
    souciance.
5. This is all aggravated by the application of fashionable left-
    wingery. It finally became notorious, in the 1980s, that analyses
    of class interest, as conducted by Marxist theorists, can be hos-
    tile, often brutally so, to the real interests and ambitions of those
    analysed. Marxism has been, for the twentieth century, *par excel-
    lence* the external and self-serving appropriation of other peo-
    ple's problems, with a core of politicians, bureaucrats and intel-
    lectuals operating the discourse to their own benefit. There is, in
    this sense, a genuine congruence of the discourse of oppression
    and the discourse of the Celt. In Britain, fashionable campus
    Marxism, riding upon a tacit Celtic romanticism, has produced
    some interesting results here.

I close this section with two quotations, one from the Welsh
context, and one from the Breton. D. Hearne, in *The ABC of the Welsh
Revolution* (1982[57]), says:

> The Welsh people think of themselves as free, but are slaves to
> their own poor self-esteem. Seven hundred years after the brutal
> conquest of their country, they had so little pride in them, that
> they cheerfully rejected a national assembly.
>
> (Hearne, 1982: 9)

> The common people of any nation are rarely able to judge what is
> to their advantage. That is why they remain the 'common people'.
>
> (ibid.: 20)

It is a chill wind, is it not? And when it was pointed out to Breton
militants that their analysis did not fully represent the views of
ordinary Breton people, the militants were quick to condemn the

Breton people, and not themselves. Popular opinion was worthless, for: 'Les militants bretonnants n'ont plus à justifier leur démarche au risque de s'envaser dans des discussions d'amphithéatre ou d'arrière-salles de bistros' (Kerfravel, 1983: 20).

THE CELTIC NATIONS

There is much naive terminological confusion behind the idea of the 'Celtic nations'. From what has already been said, it will be clear that the notion that there is something that Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall and Man have in common, because they are 'Celtic', and the notion that they are all thus similarly differentiated from England, which is not Celtic but rather 'Anglo-Saxon', are the product of lazy thinking or half-educated silliness. One only has to look carefully at the internal political and cultural history of any of these areas to recognise this.

It *has*, however, become conventional that the non-English countries of the British Isles are called 'Celtic'. For most users of this term, this means 'British (including Irish) but not English' (or 'Welsh, Scottish and Irish'; the more erudite might include Breton, Cornish and Manx). There seems to be a lexical requirement in modern English for such a meaning, and this is yet another expression of the dominant defining power of England in the British context. The adjective 'Celtic' is often thought to express a rediscovery of an ancient solidarity; it is nothing of the sort, however. Rather, it is a categorical necessity imposed upon the British Isles by the presence of England; from within England, everyone who is not English is, in a sense, the same: it does not matter if they are Scots, Welsh or Irish, they are all 'not English'. 'Celtic' serves as a synonym for this, and the echoes of ancient terminological usage are clear. It is a genuine irony, therefore, that the term 'Celtic' should be used by those in pursuit of authentic *self*-definition.

Usage of the term is harmless enough, as long as its limitations are realised. It is, however, easy to slip from the merely casual oppositional employment of 'Celtic', to a more englobing cultural, linguistic and racial usage. This is merely wrong, for many reasons; not least of these is the potential for thereby obscuring most of the important things that have happened to Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Brittany, Cornwall and the Isle of Man in the last 2000 years. I stress this rather obvious point, because the mistake is commonly made. Many intellectual foreign observers, and in particular (and in my

own experience) educated French people, tend to use the adjective 'Celtic' to imply genuine solidarity of various kinds, and genuine political and cultural opposition to 'England'. This leads to some deplorable misrepresentation of the terrorist problems of Ulster in educated French opinion. And as we have seen, minority language enthusiasts and theorists of minority ethnicity are often far from scrupulous about this problem. In Scotland, for example, such repression and suppression as the Gaelic Highlands suffered was in great part carried out either by other parts of the Gaelic Highlands, or by the Scottish Lowlands and their inhabitants. It remains true, however, in modern English, that the adjectival pair Celtic/Anglo-Saxon, is congruent with the linguistic pair Gaelic/English, and also congruent with the national pair Scottish/English. It is very easy, then, for the rhetoric of Gaelic-language or Welsh-language militantism to masquerade as the language of Scottish or Welsh nationalism, and for both of these to masquerade jointly as the voice of the Scottish and Welsh people. England and its inhabitants then become a kind of racial target of accusation, a focus of blame for everything that a modern generation of self-styled 'Celts' might find wrong with history. I have made this point earlier, arguing that:

> The suppression of Gaelic is often judged, popularly if not always in considered judgement, to have been due, in some sense, to 'English' oppression and influence. The easy association of the English language, by which Gaelic was replaced, with the kingdom of England and its institutions, makes it possible to deny Scottish political and moral responsibility for the suppression of Gaelic culture and language.
>
> (Chapman, 1978a: 12)

Simple terminological mechanisms like this, in all the 'Celtic' nations, offer a gratuitous sense of oppression without any of the tedium of the substance. Those who truly *lived* the linguistic changes involved would not, for the most part, fall into this vulgar error. Those who view the events, in retrospect, however, particularly the young, naive and enthusiastic, are offered thereby a motor of resentment and a means of belonging.

In Lorient, a naval port in southern Brittany, the *Fête Inter-Celtique* happens every year. Lorient is full of Bretons – the ordinary people of Brittany, that is. The language of Lorient is French, and always has been (the port was founded as an instrument of French foreign and mercantile policy in the seventeenth century, hence its name). Many

Breton speakers have, of course, been attracted to the town, and to the jobs, prosperity and naval pensions that it offered. There *are* Breton-speakers in Lorient, immigrants from rural Brittany, but the language of Lorient is overwhelmingly French. It is, nevertheless, a Breton town. The people in it are Bretons; they *know* that they are Bretons.

The *Fête Inter-Celtique* gathers 'Celts' from all the 'Celtic nations'.[58] Self-styled, highly-educated, intellectual and youthful 'Celts' (many of them studious language-learners) come to share their identity, to drink, dance, play music, listen to music, deplore oppression, fight nuclear power, oppose colonialism, lament militarism, buy craftwork, and so on. The people of Lorient sell them what they want, but otherwise have no more to do with them than any trader with passing customers of an alien kind. It would be easy, from a super-ficial, temporary and enthusiastic view of an event like this 'Fête' (a view such as a journalist might readily get, for example), to repre-sent what was going on as a genuine popular festival of transnational solidarity, embedded in its Celtic location. It is important, therefore, in order to come to a true appreciation of the problems of 'Celtic ethnicity', to have a proper appreciation of events like this 'Inter-Celtic Festival'.

LITERALITY AND METAPHOR

I have already argued (p. 178) that the difference between classifica-tory systems provides both a linguistic and an experiential basis for the observation, from within one system, that the other is excessively endowed with metaphor, figurative speech, colourful language, im-pulsive behaviour and the like. The simple and ubiquitous fact that words and categories are differently bounded from one system to another, is itself sufficient to provoke cross-cultural judgements of this kind.

The failure of academic social science to generate a plausible objective language for the description and analysis of social phe-nomena, has led in recent decades to a serious questioning of the *possibility* of creating such a language. Many social scientists might claim to have such a language (within sociology, social psychology and economics, for example); within British social anthropology, however, the project of Radcliffe-Brown, with its claim to science, proved to be still-born, for all its apparent vitality at the time. The main advances of understanding in this area were made some time

ago, in the early 1960s.[59] If the language for description and understanding were not objective, however, what were its claims to truth? Summarising discussion of this problem, I said in 1976: 'it is tempting to say that *all* language is metaphorical; this is an appealing way out of some of our problems' (Chapman, 1978b).[60]

Salmond has provided an interesting discussion of this problem in the Maori context.[61] The interpretation of Maori thought by Western observers has, as might be expected, a Celtic flavour; Western thought has characterised itself as rational, literal and scientific, and has rendered Maori thought, by contrast, as irrational and so forth. Salmond is keen to rebut the slur, and employs the two obvious ways of doing this: one, to argue that Maori thought and expression is, in its own terms, normal and rational; and two, to argue that Western scientific thought is, like Maori thought, metaphorical, which is undoubtedly is. We are left to conclude, perhaps, as others have also suggested, that the epistemological oppositions themselves are wanting. We are no nearer any judgement of relative worth, since the thrust of the argument is that no independent language to express such judgement exists.[62]

There is a danger, in stressing the metaphorical nature of the language of others, that this will become merely a glamorisation of an old error – that of assuming their irrationality. So, the stupid irrational Irishman of the jokes becomes, in the eyes of the tolerant well-intentioned observer, the cosmological Irishman instead – rather than being kept in a madhouse, he is given the keys to an alternative metaphysics.[63] There are many manifestations of this kind of error in attempted reappraisal of non-Western thought-systems, with the Hopi, the prime target of the pop campus version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, particularly prominent.[64]

A prominent source of problems of this kind, for English speakers, is to be found in French. English has borrowed, as sophisticated or highly charged terms, many words from French. Some of these act as superlatives in English, whereas in French they are quite normal. For example, *bizarre* in French approximates in force to English 'strange' or 'odd', not to the much more forceful English 'bizarre'; *ravi* in French approximates to English 'pleased', not to 'ravished'; *formidable* approximates to English 'great', or perhaps 'splendid', rather than to 'formidable'. When an English-speaker discovers that the French commonly say things like 'comme c'est bizarre', 'je suis ravi de vous voir', or 'c'est formidable', it comes very easily to conclude that they are therefore a people given to strong emotion and overstatement – to accord, that is, an English sense of 'bizarre'

and 'ravished' to French usage. It is, however, precisely the *English* conventions for expressions of emotion and overstatement which lead to this conclusion, and these are inapplicable to French usage.

The problem presented in the next section, which I call 'the enchantment of language', has much in common with the problem of 'literality and metaphor'. It has, however, some intriguing features of its own, which require independent consideration.

THE ENCHANTMENT OF LANGUAGE

Emerson, discussing the racial background of the English in 1856, said:

> The sources from which tradition derives their stock are mainly three. And, first, they are of the oldest blood of the world, – the Celtic. Some peoples are deciduous or transitory. Where are the Greeks? where the Etrurians? where the Romans? But the Celts or Sidonides are an old family, of whose beginning there is no memory, and their end is likely to be still more remote in the future; for they have endurance and productiveness. They planted Britain, and gave to the seas and mountains names which are poems, and imitate the pure voices of nature. They are favourably remembered in the oldest records of Europe. They had no violent feudal tenure, but the husbandman owned the land. They had an alphabet, astronomy, priestly culture, and a sublime creed. They have a hidden and precarious genius. They made the best popular literature of the Middle Ages in the songs of Merlin, and the tender and delicious mythology of Arthur.
>
> (Emerson, 1902: 31–2)

I cite this at length partly for the general relevance of his remarks to my overall presentation. My immediate interest here, however, is in the names for the seas and mountains 'which are poems, and imitate the pure voices of nature'. As a walker and climber I have spent a good deal of time in the Lake District, the Scottish Highlands and Snowdonia, and this interest predates any attempts to understand Celts and their languages. Like many others, I felt that a mysterious glamour attached to the Celtic names of the mountains. In the Scottish Highlands and in Wales, most of the mountains are given Celtic names (sometimes rather clumsily anglicised) on the Ordnance Survey maps. The Lake District, however, has a complex linguistic mix

in its place-names, with p- and q-Celtic co-existing with Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian. Most of the mountains have names from the Germanic linguistic tradition – Scafell, Skiddaw, Langdale Pikes, and so on – while a few have names from the Celtic – Mellbreak, Blencathra, Helvellyn. Blencathra, from p-Celtic elements meaning approximately 'chair-shaped hill', has an alternative name, 'Saddleback'. Wainwright, who has codified and organised the pleasures of walking in these hills for millions of visitors, has written of this pair of names 'I never refer to Blencathra by its better-known modern name of Saddleback. It's a matter of personal choice. I like Blencathra. I don't like Saddleback' (Wainwright, 1960, closing notes). He is, I am sure, echoing a popular sentiment here; for, of course, most people have no idea that behind the term 'Blencathra' lies a meaning quite as prosaic as 'Saddleback', and almost identical with it (the mountain in question is, from most perspectives, saddle- or chair-shaped). The glamour of 'Blencathra' derives from its very strangeness and obscurity, as if climbing it under this title invited initiation into old mysteries; this, indeed, is very much how the practice and revelations of the etymological study of place-names are popularly interpreted.

When I began to learn Gaelic, names of mountains in the Scottish Highlands which had previously indeed been 'poems' for me, began to assume another, and indeed rather disappointing aspect. The innumerable mountains which I had known, in obscure and unpronouncable glamour, as 'Ben Ruadh', 'Ben Dubh', 'Ben Gorm' and 'Ben Fhada' turned out to be no more than 'red mountain', 'black mountain', 'green mountain' and 'long mountain'; mighty 'Liathaich' (which we pronounced [liəθak]) was no more than 'Grey mountain'; 'Sgurr nan Gillean' was only 'young men's pike'; even 'Schiehallion', although its rendering as 'fairy hill' was not without supernatural charm, seemed to decline in stature. The peak on the Cuillin ridge in Skye called 'Sgurr Mhic Choinnich', was only 'Kenneth's Pike'; moreover, the Kenneth in question turned out to be an English climber who had named it after himself in the 1890s, during the early days of rock-climbing when obscure peaks first started to require names.

J. R. R. Tolkien has discussed similar perceptions, beginning with a general assessment of philological and moral use of Celtic examples:

We each have our own personal linguistic potential: we each have a *native language*. But that is not the language that we speak, our

cradle-tongue, the first-learned. Linguistically we all wear ready-made clothes, and our native language comes seldom to expression, save perhaps by pulling at the ready-made till it sits a little easier. But though it may be buried, it is never wholly extinguished, and contact with other languages may stir it deeply.

My chief point here is to emphasize the difference between the first-learned language, the language of custom, and an individual's native language, his inherent linguistic predilections: not to deny that he will share many of these with others of his community. He will share them, no doubt, in proportion as he shares other elements in his make-up.

(Tolkien, 1963: 36)

The idea of a 'native' language which one has never learnt is an odd one, although many Celtic-language activists are prepared to accede to something like this idea, in order to propagate a moral obligation to use the relevant Celtic language, be it Welsh, Breton or Gaelic, among those who have never known it. We can put this problem aside for the moment, however, and follow Tolkien as he describes his feelings for the languages that he has learnt. What he calls his cradle-tongue (what might conventionally be called his 'native tongue' or 'mother-tongue'), was 'English (with a dash of Afrikaans)' (ibid.: 37). He was then exposed, at school, to French and Latin, disliking the first and indifferent to the second. On the way to becoming a gifted academic philologist, he passed through Greek and Spanish, both of which, in different ways, he liked. Then he came to Gothic – this was, he says, 'the first to take me by storm, to move my heart. It was the first of the old Germanic languages that I ever met' (ibid.: 38).[65] After Gothic, he had a violent affair with Finnish (which, he says, he never quite got over), before he came to his last and greatest love:

But all the time there had been another call – bound to win in the end, though long-baulked by sheer lack of opportunity. I heard it coming out of the west. It struck at me in the names on coal-trucks; and drawing nearer, it flickered past on station-signs, a flash of strange spelling and a hint of a language old and yet alive; even in an *adeiladwyd 1887*, ill-cut on a stone-slab, it pierced my linguistic heart.

(ibid.: 38)

Tolkien tries to analyse this pleasure in particular kinds of words, and in Welsh in particular:

The nature of this *pleasure* is difficult, perhaps impossible, to ana-
lyse; [it] is possibly felt most strongly in the study of a 'foreign' or
second-learned language; but if so that may be attributed to two
things: the learner meets in the other language *desirable* features that
his own or first-learned speech has denied to him; and in any case
he escapes from the dulling of usage, especially inattentive usage.

(ibid.: 37)

I turned at last to Medieval Welsh. It would not be of much use if
I tried to illustrate by examples the pleasure that I got there. . . . to
those who know Welsh at all a selection of words would seem
random and absurd; to those who do not it would be inadequate
under the lecturer's limitations, and if printed unnecessary.

(ibid.: 39)

[W]hat can one do? For a passage of good Welsh, even if read by
a Welshman, is for this purpose useless. Those who understand
him must already have experienced this pleasure, or have missed
it for ever. Those who do not cannot yet receive it. A translation is
of no avail.

(ibid.: 39)

Tolkien is clearly hard-pressed to find words to describe the nature
of the emotion, or to locate its source. In the above, he seems to
suggest that conventional understanding is necessary, while else-
where he ties the pleasure to phonetic features alone:

If I were pressed to give any example of a feature of this style, not
only as an observable feature but as a source of pleasure to myself,
I should mention the fondness for nasal consonants, especially the
much-favoured *n*, and the frequency with which word-patterns
are made with the soft and less sonorous *w* and the voiced spirants
f and *dd* contrasted with the nasals: *nant, meddiant, afon, llawenydd,
cenfigen, gwanwyn, gwenyn, crafanc*, to set down a few at random.
A very characteristic word is *gogoniant* 'glory'.

(ibid.: 39)

He concludes:

As I have said, these tastes and predilections which are revealed
to us in contact with languages not learned in infancy – *O felix
peccatum Babel!* – are certainly significant: an aspect in linguistic

terms of our individual natures. And since these are largely his-
torical products, the predilections must be so too. My pleasure in
the Welsh linguistic style, though it may have an individual col-
ouring, would not, therefore, be expected to be peculiar to myself
among the English. It is not. It is present in many of them. It lies
dormant, I believe, in many more of those who today live in
Lloegr and speak Saesneg. It may be shown only in uneasy jokes
about Welsh spelling and placenames; it may be stirred by contacts
no nearer than the names in Arthurian romance that echo faintly
the Celtic patterns of their origin; or it may with more opportu-
nity become vividly aware.

   Modern Welsh, is not, of course, identical with the predilec-
tions of such people. It is not identical with mine. But it remains
probably closer to them than any other living language. For many
of us it rings a bell, or rather it stirs deep harp-strings in our
linguistic nature. In other words: for satisfaction and therefore for
delight – and not for imperial policy – we are still 'British' at heart.
It is the native language to which in unexplored desire we would
still go home.

                                                    (ibid.: 40–1)

There are some contradictions in Tolkien's account, although I do
not want to pursue these at length. As I have said, the distinction
between 'cradle-tongue' and 'native tongue' is obscure; Tolkien more
or less says that his 'cradle-tongue' is English, but his 'native tongue'
is Welsh, even though he came to Welsh only in adulthood. He
provides no satisfactory answer to the question of where the 'native
tongue' was lodged in the meantime. He is not prepared to allow it,
as a previous generation of scholars would happily have done, to be
a function of 'race'; on the contrary, he dismisses race as a silly and
much abused notion. He is uncertain whether the pleasure is one of
understanding, or of hearing alone (semantic, say, or phonetic),
although most of his examples are in fact primarily phonetic. his
argument must, therefore, be regarded as deficient; it is, however,
powerfully expressed, and obviously deeply felt. I take Tolkien here
as solid witness to a very real linguistic phenomenon, and one which
helps to structure much Anglophone appreciation of the Celts – 'the
enchantment of language'.

   Tolkien was a distinguished philologist, from a generation of
philologists among whom great profundity and breadth of linguistic
knowledge were normal (he specialised particularly in Anglo-Saxon):
the academic background and achievements entitle his views to

serious consideration. He was, however, also the author of some of
the most popular English-language fiction of the twentieth century –
The Hobbit, and the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*. *The Lord of the Rings*
is not explicitly about Celts and Anglo-Saxons, or about Celtic, Anglo-
Saxon and Arthurian mythology. Nevertheless, Tolkien made great
use of these, in veiled form, in his fictional work; many readers will
have half-recognised this, and responded unconsciously or half-
consciously to the themes and symbolic elements. Those that have
read the book, even if they have not already noticed, will probably
by now be ready to accept that the Elves are, in a sense, p-Celts of a
British (perhaps Welsh or Cumbrian) type, while the Men (or at least
all the good men) are mostly Anglo-Saxons or Scandinavians. The
Elves, like 'the Celts', have great supernatural powers, and wonder-
ful skills in music and poetry; they are, nevertheless, doomed to
dwindle in the world of Men, and to take ship from the far west, into
the other world. The Men, like 'the Anglo-Saxons', do not have the
beauty or finesse of the Elves, but they are, with their clumsy vitality,
the inheritors of the world. The greatest of Men, those of the ancient
ruling race, have close affinities with the Elves, and they too belong
in the north and west. The entire world of Middle Earth is a fallen
empire, with the vestiges of greatness crumbling over the ages, as
men fail to inherit the spirit and prowess of their fathers. Out of the
north, like one of the Gododdin, comes a man to restore the great-
ness of former years, a descendant of the king – the Roman Empire
in Britain recreated in its pride, the lost northern kingdoms of Strath-
clyde, Manau Guotodin and Rheged restored to unity with Wales
and all of western Britain, Arthur returning from his temporary
tomb with a sword that none can withstand. The possibilities for
metaphorical cross-reference are boundless.

Tolkien, in describing the pleasure that he gets from sounds,
begins with what is, at first sight, a rather obscure example, 'cellar
door':

> Most English-speaking people, for instance, will admit that cellar
> door is 'beautiful', especially if dissociated from its sense (and
> from its spelling). More beautiful than, say, sky, and far more
> beautiful than beautiful. Well then, in Welsh for me cellar doors
> are extraordinarily frequent.
>
> (ibid.: 36)

Those familiar with the place-names and the elf-names in *The Lord of
the Rings* will recognise the general phonetic allusion behind the

prosaic 'cellar door' [sɛlədɔ:], for Tolkien is talking about sounds, not meanings as commonly understood. The ghostly p-Celtic word forms in *The Lord of the Rings* were a major feature of the popular appeal of the books, as Tolkien notes:

> If I may once more refer to my work, The Lord of the Rings, in evidence: the names of persons and places in this story were mainly composed on patterns deliberately modelled on those of Welsh (closely similar but not identical). This element in the tale has given perhaps more pleasure to more readers than anything else in it.
>
> (ibid.: 41, footnote)

Tolkien is, I am sure, right about this. Indeed, his crypto-Welsh names for places and people provided the alternative society of the 1906s and 1970s with an entire vocabulary for self-description.[66]

If Tolkien's idea of 'native language' is unsatisfactory, however (and I think it is), what is the nature of the appeal? He comes close to an answer, perhaps, when he says that a learner meets: 'in the other language desirable features that his own or first-learned speech has denied to him; and in any case he escapes from the dulling of usage, especially inattentive usage' (ibid.: 37). What he finds in the Celtic languages are, that is to say, *difference* and *unfamiliarity*. The substance of these does not matter, as long as they are there. It is, as always, Celtic 'otherness' that is significant.

The English language is a hybrid of Anglo-Saxon and French (with substantial input from neo-classical Latin and Greek). There are remarkably few Celtic words in it (see p. 84), certainly not enough to give a normal English speaker any sense of familiarity with Celtic morphology or phonology. The French and Anglo-Saxon elements within English serve broadly different functions: crudely put, words of French origin tend to be polite, sophisticated, technical and intellectual; words of Anglo-Saxon origin tend to be common-place, direct, ordinary or crude. The problem is complex, but this broad trend cuts right through modern English, and has been a major feature of the English language since it emerged from sociolinguistic obscurity in the Middle Ages; the language is constantly on the move, with yesterday's sophistications being replaced, or vulgarised in their turn; nevertheless, the pattern as described remains a constant feature. Claims to technical, professional and intellectual prestige –

among academics, lawyers, businessmen, and so on – often amount
to little more than a translation of common knowledge and common
expression into a new series of quasi-French borrowings.[67] The social
sciences of today are full of the manifestations of this, paraded as
profundity and insight.[68]

The endurance and self-renewal of this structure is perhaps sur-
prising, but its origins are clear enough – the Norman Conquest,
with the subjugation of Anglo-Saxon; the long period when French
was the language of the court and fashion and Anglo-Saxon was the
language of the poor and the subject; the eventual complete disap-
pearance of French as a spoken language from Britain; the great
transformation of Anglo-Saxon, exposed to massive borrowing from
French, which created the English of the Middle Ages. Gerald of
Wales, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, said:

> The English people [are] . . . the most worthless of all peoples
> under heaven. . . . In their own land the English are slaves of the
> Normans, the most abject slaves. In our land there are none but
> Englishmen in the jobs of ploughman, shepherd, cobbler, skinner,
> artisan and cleaner of the sewers too.
> (cited by Bartlett, 1982: 14; from Gerald's *Invectiones*, p. 93)

This social duality built itself into the language as a diglossia which
persists today. It has the consequence that English in its Anglo-
Saxon guise is often perceived as vulgar, coarse and direct (or, in
more approving terms, as straightforward, honest and rugged), while
English in its French guise is perceived as sophisticated, eloquent
and prestigious (or, in less approving terms, as false, flashy, pre-
tentious and snobbish). Tolkien himself very much disliked the flashy
and promiscuous borrowing of French words into English; in *The Lord
of the Rings*, he gave a home in 'Bag End' to two of the central
characters, the hobbits Bilbo and Frodo, covertly condemning those
English suburbanites who had been prepared to accept 'cul-de-sac'
into their vocabulary of English place-names.

The character of language, and the character of a people, are often
talked of in similar ways, using similar metaphors. Jespersen, in one
of the most widely-read works on the English language, said:

> [T]here is one expression that continually comes to my mind
> whenever I think of the English language and compare it with

others; it seems to me positively and expressly *masculine*, it is the language of a grown-up man and has very little childish or feminine about it.

(Jespersen, 1945: 2)

He contrasted English with Hawaiian, in which:

no single word ends in a consonant, and a group of two or more consonants is never found . . . the total impression is childlike and effeminate . . . In a lesser degree we find the same phonetic structure in such languages as Italian and Spanish; but how different are our Northern tongues.

(ibid.: 3)

He gives many other interesting judgements of this kind, and concludes:

[T]he English language is a methodical, energetic, business-like and sober language, that does not care much for finery and elegance, but does care for logical consistency and is opposed to any attempt to narrow-in life by police regulation and strict rules either of grammar or of lexicon.

(ibid.: 16)

This strikes an unfashionable note, but again the reputation of the author entitles the argument to consideration; we do not need to accede to the argument of substance, or even to the use of metaphor, but we must probably accept that some sort of real and strongly-felt perception is being expressed. I am again inclined to think that we have here a view from the centre, with rule government and apparent masculinity built in on that account. Any systematic phonetic differences between two languages are capable of having metaphorical structures built upon them in this way (and Jespersen is very skilful in the matter); I have several times heard it expressed that the initial consonant mutation of the Celtic languages is evidence of the fleeting, wayward, insubstantial imagination of the Celtic people, opposed to the dull obviousness of immutable English, and the argument works, in a facile way, and from an English point of view.

The obvious socio-linguistic dimensions of English are laid out on a French/Anglo-Saxon axis: superiority and inferiority, prestige

and vulgarity, pretension and homeliness. There is no native space in English socio-linguistics for the Celtic languages. They enter as mystery, as the unknown; they enter today, moreover, in an imaginative world where two centuries of writers have been working at constructing a Celtic image of mystery, irrationality, magic, beauty lost and veiled, poignant romance, and so on, reaching into many media and many dimensions of the imagination.[69] The perception of strange beauty, mysterious glamour, hidden secret, and so on, is all real enough; but it is nothing intrinsic to the Celtic languages. On the contrary, it is all a view from English, a construction from outside.

Intellectuals, Celtic or otherwise, who have absorbed this external, English-centred view of the Celtic languages (and who may often have helped to elaborate it), find the desire of speakers of the Celtic languages to learn English almost completely incomprehensible; why should speakers of beautiful secret languages of imagination and genius wish to consort with the vulgarity of English? The answer is a simple one, of course: from within the monolingual Celtic world, the Celtic language is banal, vulgar, ordinary – English provides the Celtic languages not only with their sophistication, glamour, worldly ambition and snobbery (as French does for English), but also with their mystery and wish-fulfilment (as the Celtic languages do for English). The streets of London once were paved with gold. Or, if the Celtic languages, in the hands of their own intellectuals, have begun to look to themselves for mystery and glamour, they have truly become a prop in somebody else's play.[70]

DOES IT MATTER?

It is likely that my argument will be seen as an attempt to prove that there is no such thing as Celt. The formula is not necessarily one that I would disavow. On the other hand, many people now think that Celts exist. Not only are there large groups of people thought to be Celts by others (as has happened before), but there are also large groups of people that think they are Celts themselves. This is a very modern phenomenon, but it is nevertheless real: if people think they are Celts, who is to gainsay them? I have argued at length that the only useful and reputable categories for the analysis of people are those that they construct for themselves. 'Celt' now exists in this respect in a full sense: it is a name for others, and a name for self. As

such, it merits anthropological and analytical respect, however bogus its supposed antecedents.

It might also be asked whether much of the writing about Celts matters anyway. If people think silly, fanciful, unjustified things about the Celts, if they use the Celts in moral and political projects where they have no proper place, who suffers? Many of the works that I have cited (and the much greater number that I have not) are self-flattery of a fairly harmless kind; they can be picturesque, beguiling, even beautiful. The metaphors and enthusiasms employed generate art, crafts, literature and cultural activity, much of them of high quality. The more overtly political projects at least make their authors feel good, and there is no necessary harm in that.

One good reason for taking the issues seriously, of course, is for the intellectual satisfaction of seeing straight. It is that satisfaction which has driven my own interest in the subject. Nevertheless, even that can be regarded as a casual kind of hedonism, if the issues themselves are not of any great importance. There are, however, other reasons for taking the issues seriously. History as it is remembered is a powerful influence upon life as it is lived.[71] If life is to be modelled upon the past, or influenced by partial and tendentious recollection (which it often is, in the Celtic context as elsewhere), then the nature of the modelling, the structure of recollection, is clearly of the greatest importance. Competing claims to historical virtue, historical legitimacy, purity of oppression, ancient beauty, priority of occupation, and so on, become important factors in the modern world. If these are to be used in modern power-play, either between ethnic groups or individuals, then they invite critical treatment.

The loveliness of the Celtic image, as constructed since the romantic period, has as its literary testimonies many thousands of works, many of them with great popular appeal; this literary appeal has its ordinary counterparts in the lives and opinions of people who, while not necessarily being of a literary habit, nevertheless are moved by the same metaphors and images, translated perhaps into other media, other realisations. If we remember the Celtic/Anglo-Saxon opposition as one between:

(Celtic) pure rural magic
and
(Anglo-Saxon) polluted urban industry

then it is easy to see which figure the untutored observer would most readily fall in love with.[72] It is no exaggeration to say that the Anglo-Saxon, viewed in this kind of metaphorical light, appears a brutal soulless figure, disfigured by every wart and sore that industry, cities, pollution, capitalism and greed can cast upon the countenance. The Celt, by contrast, is a magical figure, bard, warrior and enchanter, beyond the reach of this world, and an object of love and yearning for those doomed to wander among material things in the cold light of reason.

From a strictly ethnic point of view, all the previous paragraph might seem like an irrelevant dance of metaphors, with no key into reality. So it would be, but that people *are* influenced by ideas of this kind. There can be few native English-speakers of British, Irish, North-American or Australasian origin (without looking further), who cannot be tugged into attitudes of approval and disapproval on their basis. For some, such ideas form a moral framework for life entire. Those that search for Celtic beauty may find it elusive, and they may be moved to resentment against those forces or peoples that they can find to blame for its absence. The people of Ireland have killed one another in large numbers over issues of this kind, which are not without relevance to the modern affairs of the IRA. I believe that the metaphorical structures that I have discussed, with their invocation of lovable Celtic disorderliness, are behind the often remarkable insouciance with which many left-wing English middle-class intellectuals view the bloody murders carried out by the IRA. I believe that the same structures provide a place in world opinion for the IRA and the Protestant paramilitary groups, casting a curious glamour upon the former, and vulgarising and debasing the latter in contrast.[73] Moreover, the general Celtic miasma, filtered through Hollywood, ignorance and fantastical nostalgia, makes an Irishman of every North American on St Patrick's Day, and sets them dancing, drinking and singing; it draws contributions from their pockets for the brave, rumbustious, irrepressible freedom-fighters back home – the feeling is good, and the blood is shed elsewhere, an utter irresponsibility of virtue at somebody else's bitter expense. I have already referred to my own adolescent experiences of 'folk-singing', in the industrial West Riding, where we half-wittingly warbled our way into the good graces of the folk-singing regulars with odes of murder and violence – murder and violence that we committed in poetry, song and boozily shouted chorus upon those that did not

agree with our adoptive Irish Republican views; it is only a step from these trivial acts and attitudes to a lifetime of moral distortion.

So I do not believe that the fantasies are entirely without a force that is real and that needs to be countered. As Yeats recognised, the heart fed on fantasies grows brutal from the fare (see p. 219). There are enough real animosities in the world, without manufacturing fakes. This problem is not confined to the Celtic fringe, of course, but the incongruity between the potential for violence and the prettiness of the cause in which difference is vaunted, is perhaps more than usually pointed. The Breton example, in the period immediately before the War, and during it, provides some similarly ugly possibilities.[74]

The potential for evil cannot be dismissed, therefore, however alluring its disguise. I have already cited the professor of Celtic studies in the University of Oxford, D. Ellis Evans, to this effect:

> Both Celts and Germans were in turn expanding, marauding, and conquering peoples, markedly different from each other and for ever, it seems, consciously or unconsciously rejecting each other because of a deep-seated and pernicious incompatibility. They came from different cradles and mercifully, I believe, are a very long way from being indissolubly fused together.
>
> (Evans, 1980–2: 255)

I do not wish to make too much of this, for I feel sure that Professor Evans would not wish to defend this position in quite such positive terms, if specifically requested to do so. There are, however, plenty of people who advance similar views without any of the subtlety of linguistic or scholarly background which Professor Evans brings to the problem. The publications of the Celtic League are full of their writings.[75] A typical highly-selective prejudiced misinformed self-congratulatory historiography and history of the Scottish Highlands, bulging with vicarious grievance, was recently constructed for Channel 4 by Angus Campbell; he called it *The Blood is Strong*. Try translating that into German, and then reflect upon the actions of those that find a deep-seated and pernicious incompatibility between themselves and their neighbours: this is not a joking matter.

Campbell's project serves, within the Scottish Gaelic context, as a summary of every undesirable and bogus historiographical and moral feature in the interpretation of the Celt. I could cite it entire, and unpick all its metaphorical and moral stitchwork, but this would

take an entire book, differently structured to the one that I have written, perhaps, but dealing with the same problems. So I will not cite Campbell as he merits; rather, I shall use him for one of my closing points.

The moral dualities which can be built into the centre/periphery, Anglo-Saxon/Celtic, French/Celtic (and so on) series of ethnic metaphors comprehend in potential every major issue of the history and actuality of modern Europe; every momentous political and moral problem can be breathed into the ethnic dualisms, and given apparent life thereby. It is easy to conclude from this that these problems were actually produced and acted out by the 'ethnic groups' in question, in spite of the absurdity of this position. It is also easy, for those who have given themselves over to particular kinds of historiographical and moral self-limitation, to feel that these aspects of European history did not happen to anybody else; or at least, that their primary and most heartfelt location was in Celt and Anglo-Saxon, and that, once this is pointed out, it is the duty of everybody else merely to sit back and review the historical pageant. The posture induces peculiar conceits of achievement and oppresssion:

> More than twenty five million people worldwide now claim Scots descent. Few races have exercised such influence on the new worlds. Yet it could be argued that few have received less credit.
> (Campbell, 1988: 13)

The Scots, and the Scottish Gaels, had a deep and fruitful involvement in British imperialism, for which they are to be congratulated or deplored according to what one thinks of that phenomenon. Imperialism, however, is not something that fits well into the Celtic ethos. In this context, as in many others relating to modernity, when a Celt disappears into the wrong half of the metaphoric, he stops, so it seems, being a Celt – a kind of recruitment and disaffection according to occupation. Or, as it might be, it turns out that he was made to do it, and so can keep his Celtic hat on:

> Despite the abject poverty and inhumane brutality out of which thousands of Highlanders were drilled into exile, many of them achieved remarkable success in the New World, helping to form the backbone and the heart of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.
> (ibid.: 13)

The author pauses to deplore 'white imperialism', and then neatly sweeps the Gaels back on to its receiving end:

> Since Culloden Gaels have often been cannon-fodder for the British Army. It's said, for instance, that during the ten years of the Napoleonic Wars, Skye alone provided the British Army with 1 governor-general, 21 generals, 48 lieutenant-colonels, 600 commissioned officers, and 10,000 foot soldiers.
>
> (ibid.: 16)

The implication is, of course, that the Lowland Scots and English sent the Gaels in first, protesting loudly. Similar stuff is written within Breton militant historiography, of the 'French' use of 'Breton' soldiers (along with tales of cannon-fodder, of first use in potentially fatal situations, and so on.[76]). The plain truth was that in both these contexts, young men were anxious for military service, for travel and for wider experience. The tradition of military service that they established was one of which they, and their relatives and homelands, were and are proud; the tradition, moreover, still endures. They were no more *made* to participate in these things than anybody else, or than anybody else was *made* to participate in the twentieth century.

The retreat from reality which the Celtic metaphoric permits, and the self-indulgence of this retreat, are excellently illustrated by Campbell, describing a poem by Sorley MacLean:

> In a remarkable, prophetic poem written fifty years ago the great Gaelic poet Sorley MacLean, who now lives on Skye, questioned (as Fascism swept Europe) whether love and truth and beauty and freedom and history had anything to say in the face of hatred and depravity, evil and poverty. In a specific love poem, which is also an allegory, he examined whether the ravishing beauty of Celtic history and life had any value in the nihilistic face of the twentieth century.
>
> (ibid.: 17)

The reply to the question of the first sentence was not made by writing Gaelic poems, however excellent. It was made by the nations, for a time by Britain alone, that fought the war against facism and won it – Gaels and Galls, Scots, English, Welsh and Irish, indifferently (however 'feeble' and 'dismal' the people involved might

have been; the adjectives are MacLean's, from the poem in question, used to describe his fellow Scots). MacLean's poem is a reflection, from the intellectual left, about the joys of fighting on the 'right' side in the Spanish civil war – a sort of 'wish I was there'. No doubt it felt well at the time. Its retrospective use, however, by Campbell, to appropriate all right-thinking, all truth, beauty, freedom and history to the Celtic banner, is an offence both to good taste and good sense, in the light of subsequent events. It is, as well, a use which seems to be sanctioned by MacLean himself, who contributes the foreword to Campbell's book. Campbell, in typical style, says:

> The international wanderings, and the cosmopolitan success, of the Gael hides much tragedy and insecurity, shrouds many fears and anxieties which have haunted him in the deep psychosis of exile, whether that exile be abroad or at home.
>
> (ibid.: 15)

If the oppressions suffered by the Celt were truly superlative, then the great achievements of the Celt are, of course, all the more superhuman in their light. Campbell expresses this common boast very clearly. The oppressions need to be properly understood, however.

I have argued above that there are good reasons why the Celtic fringe should be a place where cultural change (the common condition of everybody) might be closely monitored, and its origin ascribed to external agencies. There is a long history of reflection and recollection in the Celtic fringe testifying to this. The persistent discourse of change, however, the piling of example upon example, is made possible by the extraordinary stability of the over-arching structures. The relationship of Great Britain to the Celtic fringe has been enduringly peaceful and stable for most of the last few centuries. It is these very features which have provided the stable frame within which a consistent discourse of externally imposed change and oppression could develop; it is because of that stability that the Celtic fringe can imagine a history of continuous and unidirectional oppression going back centuries – to George II, Cromwell, Edward I or Henry II. This is a paradox, but it is readily explained. If, as has been the fate of many European peoples, major international wars are fought across your territory every thirty years or so, then the latest series of appalling tragedies has a tendency to efface those that went before. When Hitler and Stalin have been using your country to quarrel in, you

don't need to remember Bismarck, never mind Napoleon. Add to this the kaleidoscopic movement of national boundaries, with their consequent and constant creation of dispossessed and unwanted people, and you have the typical historiographical structure of European life, with its short and very pointed memory for popular suffering. By contrast, the Celtic fringe has been stable, protected and peaceful. It is that very stability (a stable structure of change, we might say) that allows externally imposed change to be constructed so monumentally and systematically as a determining feature of an otherwise untroubled indigenous state. We are dealing here with a kind of unrecognised geo-political privilege, unrecognised because every feature of its constitution militates against self-recognition.

What, then, about the Clearances, Culloden, the potato famine? There is no need to minimise these, but there is a genuine moral and intellectual need to put them into a realistic comparative framework. This need is, moreover, generalised throughout the British thinking class, who are over-ready to accept Celtic priorities in such matters. An effort of imagination is needed to overcome structures of thought already in place. If there is to be talk of the sufferings and oppressions of the Scottish Gael and the Irish, then it is very necessary to remember what life was like for the people of industrial and urban England (and Scotland and Wales as well, of course) in the nineteenth century; if there is to be talk of intrusive English incomers, undesirable settlers in Wales or the west coast of Scotland, then it is necessary to remember the people of Kent and Surrey, who had adventurers and immigrants all around (Scots among them) as London sprawled incontinently over their fields and villages (and so on for the people of Warwickshire watching Birmingham grow, the people of the Clyde valley watching the motley collection of people that became Glasgow); again, it is not the Celtic experience that is peculiar, but the structure of its recollection and celebration.[77]

These are, in a sense, questions for the future for those that can appreciate their gravity. They are a suggestion towards the necessary moral feature of 'equality of oppression'.[78]

It is no part of my ambition to belittle or cheapen the sense of loyalty and attachment that Celts, in whatever guise, might feel for their own native customs and language. It is important, however, to distinguish between those who are in love, as most of us are, with their own youthful experience (their primary commitment to language and the world, truly a 'first fine careless rapture'), and those who are in love with an idea that they have got out of books. John

Macinnes, a shrewd and far from romantic observer of his fellow Gaels, is reported by Angus Campbell, in *The Blood is Strong*, as having said the following:

> Language defines us, Gaelic defines me. It's the core of our be-
> ings, it's the core of my being. A language expresses the whole
> universe, and my whole universe is expressed by and through my
> specifically Gaelic language. Without my Gaelic language I cannot
> be a whole human being.
>
> (cited by Campbell, 1988: 20)

Macinnes is a native Gaelic speaker, and this is true for him; so is it true for all native-speakers, in relation to their native language. It is not true, however, for the generation of Gaels after Macinnes, whose native language, whose primary experience of the world, is English. Macinnes makes no suggestion that this would be so. Campbell interprets him differently, saying 'the prospect of a cultural desert, which some might call linguistic peace, still confronts the Gael' (ibid.). Will it be a desert for those whose native language is English? The short answer is 'no'; it will be as linguistically and emotionally vivid, in another native tongue, as the Gaelic world is for Macinnes. If there is a sense of lack and loss, it will not be one felt in the soul, but one learnt in higher education. Even the best commentators on the Scottish Gaelic scene are prone to allow their real experience to elide with bookish fantasies. When Derick Thomson speaks of the 'goodness going out of the music', for example, and the coming of Presbyterianism, he is talking about events generations before his own consciousness (see Thomson's poem 'The Scarecrow', in Macaulay, 1976: 164–5). He is in love not only with life, but with a historical interpretation learned as an adult. The difference is an important one. The former has the fundamental discipline of truth to experience built into it; the latter does not.

Truth to experience is, perhaps, what matters most, when the question is asked 'does it matter?'. In Brittany, I spent several years living and working alongside the people of Plouhinec, a fishing and farming village in south-west Finistère. There, Breton is, as much as anywhere, still spoken in strength: this means that there are still a few old people whose Breton is better than their French, and that while all the other Breton speakers (mostly over 40) are perfectly bilingual in Breton and French, Breton is often a preferred language of communication between them (especially among men and in

informal contexts). Plouhinec is, for what it is worth, strongly 'Celtic' in this sense. The addict of 'Celtic' folklore, place-name study, archaeology, and so on, can find plenty here of interest. Yet many of the older Breton-speakers do not know what 'Celtic' means, or what kinds of ethnic solidarity it might imply; some know that it has something to do with Britain, on the other side of the channel, but may well infer that this means that Breton (their own language) is spoken widely in Great Britain (why else would Brittany and Britain share a name?). These people, in search of others like themselves, look to their fellow Bretons and their fellow Frenchmen. Their life-experience has had in it one particularly devastating period when the question of national and ethnic labels assumed the greatest importance – the Second World War. In this war, the people of Plouhinec were French, and they were fighting the Germans. They were occupied by the Germans, suffered forced labour, and fought in the resistance.[79] It was in the very real fire of this experience that the generation of surviving Breton-speakers learnt their categories of international experience. They fought, and ultimately won, a war; their enemy was Germany; their allies were, primarily, the British (or, as they tend to know them, the 'English') and the Americans.[80]

The cause was one worth fighting for, and the friendships and solidarities borne out of it are real ones, and worthy of care and respect. In the graveyard of the Plouhinec parish church there is the grave of an allied airman whose plane was shot down over the sea, and whose body eventually found its way onto the beach in Plouhinec. Every year, the 'Union of Old Soldiers' of the commune visits the grave, and lays a wreath there, on the anniversary of General de Gaulle's appeal to the Free French – 18 June 1940. Most of the men involved are Breton-speakers, who remember well. There is no place in these formative experiences of their lives for Celts, or for putative kinship with the Welsh, Irish or Scots.

The younger people of Plouhinec do not speak Breton. Most of them have no interest in the idea of Celts either. Among the better educated and more sophisticated young, however, the idea has taken a certain hold. It has, as we have seen throughout, many appealing features. It is a splendid vehicle for 'alternative' political, social and economic views of all kinds. The kind of young people for whom these ideas have resonance tend to be, by education and background, socially and linguistically distant from the Breton-speakers of the area. They have the option of thinking of themselves as Celts; they know who the other 'Celts' are; they may go on holiday to Ireland or

Wales. They can use their Celtic solidarity to vaunt themselves above both the French and the English.

Which is the more authentic, the more true to self – the Breton-speakers who think that they are French, or the French-speakers who think that they are Celts? It is an entirely typical irony of such situations that the devaluation of the real experience, that of the older Breton-speakers, is carried out in the name of 'Celticness' by well-educated young people who do not speak Breton.

I believe, therefore, that truth to experience is necessary and desirable. The casual forgetting of the Second World War would be a deplorable thing: to reject its memory and relevance for the sake of 'Celtic' solidarity is in very truth a rejection of substance in favour of shadow.

It is commonly feared, by commentators on the Celtic fringe, that true local 'identity' is dying out, under threat, or in need of maintenance. This is a characteristic theme of 'minority' literature, and it is often referred to in purportedly academic studies. I have argued, however, that cultural content, the substance of 'identity', is in continual movement over the social space, in ways that are not determined by the 'ethnic' structure. An 'ethnic identity', then, at any moment, can never be more than a snapshot, a freezing of the frame of a continuously moving process. To take such a two-dimensional and time-bound image as the true 'identity', is as false and limiting for a culture as it would be for an individual. This is, however, the implicit practice of those who labour for the preservation of identity: wherever they may have 'frozen the frame' of 'identity' – in the Iron Age, the Middle Ages, or their own childhood – the mistake is the same. Nor is it surprising that those who take such an image for the 'true', 'real' or 'original' identity, should find that this identity is, indeed, continually changing from its original state. If moral virtue is invested in this original state, however arbitrarily, then a permanent fund of anguish is established. Ardener, on this point, has written: 'The Gaels and the Bretons . . . want to know, "who then are we, *really*?" They behave as if they were indeed privileged enough to know something that no one can ever know' (1987: 44). Elsewhere, I have tried to relate this logically unassailable view to the general problem of minority/majority relations:

> We have come to recognize that groups 'identify' other groups, as a logical means of asserting or constructing 'self'–identity (for whatever moral, economic, cognitive, or political purpose).

> Majority groups use the minorities around them in this way,
> attributing identities to them (not always desirable ones). The
> minorities are therefore relentlessly involved in a discourse that
> expects them to have 'an identity'. It is notorious that minority
> groups are seen both to have particularly coherent identities,
> and to find that their real identities are nevertheless curiously
> threatened and elusive. These are both different sides of the same
> coin, however, for it seems that the assumption of a true identity,
> the search for it, and the discovery that it is difficult to find, are all
> the consequences of competitive pressure. It is surely in relation
> to this that we can understand the sometimes eery silence that is
> found at the heart of majority self-presentation. The discourse of
> identity does not require the majority to ask itself the question,
> 'Who then are we, *really*?', and it is thus that identity (like eth-
> nicity) seems characteristically to be something that is found, and
> found problematic, in minority areas.
>
> (Chapman, 1989a: 17–18)

I have argued throughout this work that the Celts, as we know
and remember them, have been constructed to serve the interests of
a discourse external to them. In 1978 I called this process 'symbolic
appropriation'.[81] This work has been a further attempt to give sub-
stance to the idea; I hope, at least, that I have made it clear that by
using the term 'symbolic', I intend no suggestion that the phenom-
enon in question is literary, ephemeral or unreal. On the contrary,
the evidence is clear that those who live in an appropriated (or
expropriated!) world face a continuous struggle of experience and
accommodation. If you are faced with a large and powerful body of
opinion that ascribes character to you, it is difficult to remember
what you thought you were before you met them: the context of *your
own characterisation of yourself* has changed, and changed irrevocably.
That is why I plead, in the context, for truth to experience, knowing
at the same time how difficult it is to achieve.

I will give the last word to two experienced commentators on
different aspects of the Celtic and minority scene – Per Jakez Helias
and James Shaw Grant. Both of these have a lifetime of real experi-
ence, Helias of Brittany and Grant of Scotland, and both have written
of this without allowing their commentary to become distorted by
externally imposed visions. It is striking that both have, for their
pains, become the objects of considerable criticism from the archi-
tects of such external impositions, who now include a large body of

minority activist intellectuals. I have treated of these already, and must refer back for details of the moral problem here. I have argued that the romantic appropriation of the fringe leads to a usurpation of fringe cultural elements by the definers of fashion. Helias, too, has noticed this, and he concludes his remarkable autobiography of Breton village life by drawing a logical conclusion. In the vision of the future with which he concludes, privileged urban intellectuals have bought up all the property in the fringe, while all the erstwhile occupants of the fringe have gone off to live in towns and work in factories. The privileged neo-fringe dwellers are all busy learning regional languages, while the one-time rural peasants have all switched to French. When this has happened, the privileged dwellers in the neo-fringe put barbed wire round the towns to stop the common people getting out; and finally:

> Quand ils furent seuls entre eux, protégés du vulgaire, ces aristocrates fondèrent des clubs régionaux tres fermes où il était interdit aux membres de parler autre chose que l'occitan, le basque ou le breton. . . . Je vous salue bien.
>
> (Helias, 1975: 552)

> When they were alone together, protected from common people, these aristocrats founded exclusive regional clubs, where members were forbidden to speak anything but Occitan, Basque or Breton . . . I wish you well.

I have argued that the romantic appropriation is characteristically an imposition upon the Celtic fringe from the outside. There is now a body of intellectual opinion that would be prepared to agree with this position, although the romantic appropriation is still the dominant form. I have also argued, however, that there are many other aspects of intellectual intervention in the Celtic fringe which are equally exploitative – which use the Celtic fringe, that is, for moral and political purposes that have their logic in an alien discourse. I have cited, particularly, certain aspects of left-wing social-scientific and minority activist discourse. This is much more controversial, of course, since such discourse makes an impassioned claim to authentic representation of popular opinion. It is a claim which frequently fails to stand up to examination, however. I will end with James Shaw Grant, who makes a genuinely unusual attempt to fight off misrepresentation on both sides:

It is time for us to discourage the exploitation of Highland history
merely to fuel current controversies. It is also time to discourage
the romanticists whose view is equally partial and distorted.

(Grant, 1983: 478)

He goes on, offering advice which I find entirely apt, not only for the
Highlands, but for the Celtic fringe entire: 'The people of the High-
lands must take control of their past as well as their future' (ibid.:
479).

POST-SCRIPT

I have addressed my argument to a rather broad range of represen-
tations, in which there is an overlap of folk-ideas, coffee-table books,
popularising academic works, and academic works proper. The points
that I make are not all addressed equally to the different parts of this
range. Naive ideas about the sustained linguistic, cultural and racial
integrity of the Celts, for example, which might be uncritically
maintained in the more popular works, may well be more subtly
argued, or denied in certain aspects, in more sophisticated academic
works. Most works on the Celts, however, are written from a more
or less partisan position, in the sense that all are written from within
a discourse which makes sense of the category – within which Celts,
so to speak, exist. They are also mostly written by enthusiasts – by
people who like, even love, the Celts. Minor revisions and amend-
ments to one particular aspect of the Celtic picture do not, therefore,
change its overall structure. And its overall structure has a life
spanning many generations of intellectuals, and stretching over far
more fields of expertise and erudition than any one individual could
hope to control. Martyn Jope, in reviewing the life of Paul Jacobsthal,
one of the most famous scholars of Celtic art (see Jacobsthal, 1944),
noted with surprise Jacobsthal's lack of interest in the Celtic literatures
and languages, and concluded 'Perhaps he wisely sensed that no
man's capacity and time-span are endless' (Jope, 1986: 18). In a
sense, the consubstantial lineage of language, culture and people is
brought about by a tacit collusion between different academic aspects
of Celtic studies – linguistics, ethnology, archaeology and others – all
of them allowing the power of imagery outside their competence to
pull them along when their own knowledge fails. Doubts which may
appear at one level, within one subdiscipline, are swept away by the

discourse itself, through the uncritical acceptance of particular kinds of categories of analysis and interpretation.

I have, therefore, tried to suggest that the picture we are commonly offered could be completely redrawn. The suggestion is perhaps not equally pertinent to all the different aspects of Celtic studies, and of course its implications extend far beyond this field. I do not mean to appear to have carried out the redrawing, and can do no more than suggest its possibility. Furthermore, in the questioning to which I have subjected the discipline and categories of Celtic studies, I do not mean to impugn the results, the integrity or the scholarship of the generations of brilliant philologists, linguists, archaeologists and ethnologists who have been engaged in the search for the Celts. It would be ridiculous to do so, if only for the very basic reason that my own discussion is to a great degree dependent on their achievements. It will be clear, however, that there are aspects of the definition and use of the noun and adjective 'Celt' and 'Celtic' which are, to say the least, more problematic than is commonly supposed.

One does not, of course, put a stop to a fertile and ancient discourse simply by pointing out its constitutive features. The themes that I have discussed will continue to play themselves out in life and thought, and I have no illusions about my own power to influence this. It is with no conventional modesty of ambition, therefore, that I say that if this book succeeds in opening debate, that will be success enough. I offer no conclusion here, but rather an invitation to argument. For my own part, any attempt at conclusion would only lead me back into the paths that I have already trodden, or into the many still unexplored avenues of research and speculation which (so it seemed) opened off from these, and to which I hope one day to return.

Appendix 1: *Ker Ys*

This is a complete list of the books in the windows of the *Ker Ys* bookshop, 20 Place Cornic, Morlaix, Brittany, on 26 March 1989. It is intended as an illustration of 'Celtic' themes, and not as a reference section; I have made no effort, therefore, to provide bibliographical details beyond author and title.

Introduction à la psychologie de Jung, F. Fordham
Des origines aquatiques de l'homme, E. Morgan
Question de prophètes d'aujourd'hui, J.-P. and R. Cartier
Les visions de saint Nicholas de Flue, M.-L. von Franz
Vierges noires – la réponse vient de la terre, J. Bouvin
Le Guerrier pacifique – un chemin vers la lumière, Dan Millman
Santé et habitat selon les traditions chinoises du Feng Shui, G. Edde
Le pouvoir des formes qui nous entourent, B. Baudouin
Comment pratiquer la radiésthenie – découvrez vos pouvoirs,
     B. Baudouin
Pierres et traditions, C. Nimons
La Danse de l'ésprit, ou le sens déployé/Unfolding meaning, D. Bohm
L'Ouverture de l'homme, A. Carrel
Karate Do: l'Esprit guerrier, F. Didier
Expériences vécues de la survie apres la mort, I. Wilson
Mieux guider vos enfants grace à l'astrologie, S. Frydman
Autoguérison – ma vie, ma vision, M. Schneider
Les morts nous parlent, F. Bruce
Les marques du destin – revelées par votre corps, J. M. Huon de Kermadec
Les reines noires – Didon, Salomé, la Reine de Saba, J. Kelen
Les retours d'Edgar Cayce – l'histoire de ses reincarnations, W. Church
La mort – ma plus belle experience, S. von Jankovich
Devas, ou les mondes angéliques, M. Coquet
La métamorphose – le massage métamorphique, G. St Pierre and
     D. Boater
La nouvelle clé – enseignements, paraboles et maximes, G. Barbarin
Guide de mieux-vivre après 60 ans, H. Barrere
Les femmes dans la tourmente, N. Vray
Les bourgeois et le pouvoir, C. Nieres
Le clergé dechiré: fidéle ou rebelle?, J. Queniart

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(the previous three volumes all in the series *Gens de l'Ouest sous la Révolution*, published by the local newspaper and publishing house, *Ouest France*)

La révolution française dans la conscience intellectuelle bretonne du XIXème siècle, Cahiers de Bretagne Occidentale no. 8

La résistance bretonne à Napoleon Bonaparte – 1799–1815, D. Albatros

Va petit mousse, P. Alix

Corsaires et aventuriers bretons, A. de Wismes

Mythologie – légendes et histoire des boissons en Bretagne et ailleurs, Gildas Jaffrennou

Vieilles histoires du pays breton, A. Le Braz

L'Odysee du vaisseau 'Droits de l'Homme', J. Cornou and B. Jorien

L'Histoire au coin de la rue – Morlaix et sa région, tome 2, D. Appriou

Per, Jakez, Yann hag ar re all, L. Tangi

La grande-pêche de terre-neuve et d'Islande, Abbé Grossetête

Récits mythiques et symbolisme de la navigation, R. Christinger, P. Solier, F. Siegenthaler

Ile-Grande – un episode de la vie ordinaire de Joseph Conrad, J.-P. Le Dantec

Sources – l'Avenir (journal)

Autrement: l'Ere des médiums – Enquête sur une croyance: le paranormal (journal)

Plus jamais fatigué – ou comment retrouver sa vitalité, P. Fluchaire et al.

Les miracles de la pensée positive – ou comment la pensée positive devient source d'épanouissement personnel, M. Streuer

Joseph Murphy se raconte à Bernard Cantin, J. Murphy

La puissance cosmique, J. Murphy

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Appendix 2: The Heroic Age

The reference is to H. M. Chadwick's *The Heroic Age* (1912), a re-markable work of imagination and scholarship which, in spite of its age (or even perhaps because of it), has a great deal to offer modern European anthropology: it was said of this work in 1962 that its full implications had 'not yet been worked out' (Loyn, 1962: 390), and I believe this still to be true. Consideration of the implications of his work for my own would be another book, now only a speculative entity, which is why I treat of the subject in an appendix.

I have explored a variety of avenues by which perceptions of the kind that I have discussed might be confirmed in experience, through the meeting of two disparate social systems. Chadwick offers an interesting variant on this. *The Heroic Age* is about those societies, on the fringes of the classical world, or antecedent to it, which have left as their main testimonies literature, in the first place presumably oral literature, concerning the deeds of heroes. Chadwick discusses a great range of material, in a remarkable display of linguistic and historical erudition – he deals primarily with the Teutonic and Homeric epics, but touches also on Celtic and Slavonic examples for comparative purposes. His argument, briefly summarised, is as follows: the Heroic Age is an age when the characteristic social unit is a hero – as it were Achilles or Beowulf – and his followers; the achievements of this unit, in the form of the personal prowess of the hero, and the loyalty of the followers, are the substance of heroic literature. The Heroic Age happens for different people at different times: for Homer's Greeks at the end of the second millennium BC; for the Gauls in the second half of the first millennium BC; for the Cumbrian Welsh in the sixth or seventh centuries AD, and so on. It may be brief or comparatively long-lasting, but it is a temporary phase. It is not a stable and self-sustaining social order, but is the product of the meeting of two types of social system – a 'high' civilisation of widespread influence, prosperity and organisation, and a tribal and local civilisation on the frontiers of the former. 'Heroic' society is the temporary effect of the process through which civilisation incorporates tribal society.

The appeal of this argument in the present context will be clear: I have argued that the record we have of the Celts is, from first to last,

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not a record of substance, but a record of a particular kind of culture-meeting – the meeting of a centre and a periphery. Chadwick's argument is similar to this, but he considers the product of the culture-meeting to be, however, temporarily, truly embodied in social organisation – to be, that is, substance, rather than the product of multiple layers of misperception. Chadwick argues that the Heroic Age is caused as follows: tribal society, in whatever original form it had, was built around the kindred, and upon the complex of moral, economic and political rules and obligations which bound an individual to the kindred. With exposure to the influence of a powerful, neighbouring and encroaching civilisation, this kindred-based organisation is disturbed in rather particular ways: increased opportunities for trade, travel and the gathering of wealth, along with an enlargement of social horizon, free the more privileged members of tribal society from the obligations of that society – 'briefly expressed, the characteristic feature . . . is emancipation, social, political and religious, from the bonds of tribal law' (Chadwick, 1912: 443).

These emancipated and privileged members of the erstwhile tribal society are 'the heroes'. Freed from the rules and obligations of kindred-based social organisation, they have not yet been overborne by the rules and obligations of the encroaching civilisation. They gather about them a body of followers, often called in the literature a 'comitatus', whose personal loyalty is to their chief – 'the man who possesses a comitatus becomes largely free from the control of his kindred, while the chief similarly becomes free from control within his community' (ibid.) The achievements and morality of this society, 'free from control', are those of the Heroic Age. There developed a 'military type of kingship which rests on no national basis' (ibid.: 446); this warlike nature of 'heroic society' was encouraged by the opportunities for mercenary service and military experience that the armies of the greater civilisation offered to the young men of tribal society: 'The characteristics of the Heroic Age owe their origin not so much to the national movements which brought about the destruction of the Western Empire as to the long-standing relations between two peoples' (ibid.[1]).

In summary, then, the main aspects of the Heroic Age were: 'the weakening of the ties of kindred and the growth of the bond of allegiance'; 'the development of an irresponsible type of kingship resting upon military prestige'; and 'the subordination of chthonic and tribal cults to the worship of a number of universally recognised and highly anthropomorphic deities' (ibid.: 442). Chadwick relates

these various aspects to one another in subtle ways, showing their shared structure in thought and realisation.

Much of Chadwick's imagery has since become rather unfashionable; indeed, the very concepts of 'tribal society' and 'civilisation' might now raise a smile: nevertheless, it would be facile to dismiss the entire argument for merely fashionable and cosmetic reasons. Chadwick compounds the offence against modern sensibilities by making his argument evolutionary, and by using the ages of man as a metaphor for the ages of society:

> The qualities exhibited by these societies, virtues and defects alike, are clearly those of adolescence'.
>
> (ibid.)

> We have seen . . . that the characteristics of Heroic Ages in general are those neither of infancy nor of maturity – that the typical man of the Heroic Age is to be compared rather with a youth. The characteristics which we are now discussing are by no means inconsistent with such a view, though clearly they will not hold good for adolescence in general. For a true analogy we must turn to the case of a youth who has outgrown both the ideas and the control of his parents – such a case as may be found among the sons of unsophisticated parents, who through outside influence, at school or elsewhere, have acquired knowledge which places them in a position of superiority to their surroundings.
>
> (ibid.: 444)

> If we examine the history of the Teutonic Heroic Age we shall see that this analogy holds good both for individual princes and for the class as a whole. From the first century to the fifth – we may take the cases of Italicus the son of Flavus and of Theodric the Ostrogoth – it was customary for the Romans to demand the youthful sons of Teutonic kings as hostages. That the accession of such persons to power in later life would open up a channel for the introduction of foreign ideas needs probably no demonstration.
>
> (ibid.)

Again, there is no need to allow unfashionable aspects of expression to obscure the substance of the argument. The metaphor of adolescence is used to suggest a ready expression of passion, sudden emotion, irresponsible action, high and perilous ambition, pride,

enthusiasm, lack of fixed purpose, and so on. These are characteristics of an age of man, but they are, according to Chadwick, given a general social expression by the forms of social organisation of the Heroic Age – neither tribal nor civilised, escaping from the first, aspiring towards the second, and constrained by neither. Many of those directly involved were young, which can only add to the plausibility of the argument.

My primary interest in the 'Heroic Age' is its 'lack of control', 'freedom from constraint', 'emancipation from rules', and so on – characteristics, as we have seen, regularly attributed to the Celtic fringe by those outside it. Can we generalise Chadwick's expression of the meeting of two societies, to the entirety of the confrontation of the 'Celtic' periphery, with central Britain? Chadwick's description of the characteristic 'hero' is somebody who has escaped kindred loyalties to spend some time in a wider and apparently attractive world, of material wealth and freedom from constraint. Scottish Gaelic poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has as a common theme the praise, or blame, of clan chiefs, according to whether they stayed at home and honoured their clan obligations, or, conversely, spent and gambled away their money in Edinburgh and London, ignored their clan, and came back with foreign ways and a disdain for local habits.[2]

Beyond these aristocratic examples, however, the confrontation of periphery and centre has had no more characteristic feature than the economic migrant from the Celtic fringe meeting the people of the cities of industrial England; the economic migrant in this case is, like Chadwick's heroes, often young; like them also, he (or she) has often left with the quite explicit intention of escaping from the constraints of the native social order; like them again, his (or her) position in the receiving society is often an irresponsible one – there may be sudden access to money and material wealth, along with an only modest appreciation of, or subjection to, the social constraints and obligations of the receiving society. These characteristics will not necessarily embody themselves in a social form, as in the 'Heroic Age', but they will be real and visible (and, indeed, quite possibly perceived as a kind of heroic age by those living through them, or observing them sympathetically).[3] Any such social confrontation arising out of labour migration can be expected to have these qualities, of course. The economic dominance of the south-east of Britain must have meant, however, that much labour migration has had a centre–periphery quality, apt for building into all the other layers of meta-

phor and perception which have already been discussed. Again, the 'Celts' arise here out of a culture-meeting, not from any inherent quality in the pre-contact situation.

Chadwick's argument also provokes the reflection that the Celtic fringe, because of its peculiar geo-political irrelevance, might have been in an almost continuous 'temporary' heroic state almost from the first. In other areas, 'civilisation' and incorporation came impera- tively from more than one quarter, with rapid results: in the Celtic fringe, there was only one relevant conceptual and geographical frontier; on the other was the sea. The idea of 'traditional' Scottish Highland society not as a tribal society, but as a tribal society in an indefinitely prolonged state of social breakdown of a 'heroic' kind, has much to recommend it. It incorporates what I have stressed, the aspiration of the Celtic fringe to central sophistication, along with the constant frustration and renewal of that aspiration; it would generate the constantly renewable sense of archaism that the fringe seems to offer.

Edwin Ardener, in his essay 'Remote areas', has expressed con- cerns which I take to be similar to Chadwick's; as in Chadwick's presentation, we are given an idea of the *lived* experiential reality of a certain kind of freedom from structure (or, as it might also be, *exclusion* from structure), arising from the meeting of highly codified central experience, and the social and geographical periphery. He discusses the double-definition of certain areas, which are both constructed in their own image, and at the same time aware of their construction in the minds of others:

> The double specification of remote areas, or double-markedness, produces that note of eccentricity and overdefinition of individu- ality, if you like an overdetermination – or to exaggerate slightly, a structure of strangers. In the large stable systems of dominant central areas, in contrast, there are equally large regularities, with more automatisms, in which only in periodic 'prophetic situations' do major singularities occur. They are event-poor. It is evident that the event quality is not a direction function of numbers or population for, in contrast, it is remote areas as we have defined them that are 'event-rich'. Event-richness is like a small-scale, simmering, continuously generated set of singularities, which are not just the artefact of observer bias . . . – but due to some materiality, that I interpret to be related to the enhanced defining power of individuals. Event-richness is the result of the weaken-

ing of, or probably the continuous threat to, the maintenance of a
self-generated set of overriding social definitions (including those
that control people's own physical world), thus rendering possi-
ble the 'disenchainment' of individuals, and that overdetermination
of individuality, to which I referred. . . . [I]n so far as a 'remote'
area is (as it always is) part of a much wider definitional space
(shall we say the dominant State) it will be perceived, itself, *in toto*,
as a singularity in that space.

(Ardener, 1989a: 222–3).

The 'Celtic' aspect of 'remoteness', in Ardener's usage, will be clear
enough, I hope. The general conceptual structure of Ardener's thought
is not apt to brief summary, and I will make no attempt at this here,
aiming only to bring together concerns that might be fruitful for
further debate.

Notes

PREFACE

1. For example, see, for the Latins, Macaulay (1849: 33), Gehring (1908); for the Slavs, Bain (1909), Bartlett (1982), Cavanna (1979), Inkeles et al. (1967).

1   WHO ARE THE CELTS?

1. See McCone (1986); Zeuss (1853).
2. See, for example, Arensberg (1937); Frankenberg (1957); Fox (1978).
3. See, for example, Norton-Taylor (1975); Delaney (1986).
4. See, for example, Evans (1980–2); McCone (1986).
5. See Price (1984: 134–45); Brown (1987).
6. 'The Picts' merit their inverted commas for the multiple problems of definition that they pose; they are, even more conspicuously than the Celts, a product of external definition. Our information on them is so meagre that argument about the content of the category is for the most part fruitless; there is little reason to suppose that they were culturally or linguistically uniform. It is now widely held that some, at least, of those whom we call 'Picts' probably spoke a 'p-Celtic' language (see Wainwright, 1955).
7. See Withers (1984).
8. See Durkacz (1983).
9. See Fleuriot (1980); for a still cogent alternative view, see Falc'hun (1951, 1981).

2   'A BRANCH OF INDO-EUROPEAN'

1. See Lockwood (1969: 11ff), discussing the Roman linguist Varro.
2. See Freeman (1876: 579); Coulter and Magoun (1926: i).
3. See, in general, Lockwood (1969); for a few major works among many thousands, see Bopp (1833); Rask (1818); Grimm (1822); Schleicher (1861); Müller (1861); Saussure (1879); Brugmann and Delbruck (1886–1916); Meillet (1964).
4. One could go into greater detail still here, particularly for the earlier period, for Continental Celtic must be supposed to have covered a great range of linguistic forms. Only Gaulish, however, has left any traces other than those of place-names, and even these are very fragmentary; see Evans (1967); Whatmough (1970); Schmidt (1986: 206ff). It is still a

matter for argument whether the p/q division is a Continental feature
or an insular innovation. And it must be stressed that the divisions
between the different end-products did not, as the model might seem to
imply, occur once and for all, at one particular time; there were long
periods of dialectal differentiation, both within and between the different
languages of the bottom line, and a varying and still available degree of
mutual intelligibility.

5. See, for example, Kedourie (1960); Seton-Watson (1977); Gellner (1983);
   Smith (1986).
6. See, for example, Kedourie (1960).
7. See, for example, Burnet (1773); Home (1774).
8. See Rosseau (1961); Ferguson (1767); Burke (1961); Whitney (1934);
   Smith (1986).
9. See Tacitus; Boece (1527); Buchanan (1582); Hodgen (1964).
10. See Stukeley (1740, 1743); Piggott (1967, 1977).
11. See Spencer (1876–96); many other famous figures, however, took more
    restricted aspects of society, and traced their apparent 'evolution' (see
    Tylor, 1871; Frazer, 1890; Durkheim, 1912; and Robertson-Smith, 1889
    on religion and magic; Maine 1870 on law; Morgan, 1877 on kinship).
12. See Lienhardt (1966: ch. 1).
13. For both of these tendencies, from the early work of a major figure in
    twentieth-century linguistics, see Jespersen (1945: 342ff).
14. See Thomas (1984).
15. See for example, Poliakov (1974); Banton (1967).
16. For example, Dillon and Chadwick (1972: 3).
17. For example, Powell (1958: 17).

3   CALLING PEOPLE NAMES

1. See Chapman (1989a: 18).
2. See Ayling (1970: 63).
3. See Rankin (1987: 2); Stokes (1894); Whatmough (1970).
4. See D'Arbois de Jubainville (1904: 171); Dillon and Chadwick (1972: 2);
   also Evans (1967).
5. Eighteenth-century scholars tended to group Basque together with the
   Celtic languages, on the basis that all the oddities belong together;
   however wrong this seems compared to the usage of 'Celtic' in modern
   linguistic terms, it was probably a more faithful linguistic rendition of
   the early category *keltoi*. Modern Basque is almost certainly descended
   from a language spoken by people included in Herodotus' category
   keltoi (as, perhaps, is modern Albanian). It is strange how little these
   languages, of ancient European lineage, figure in discussion of the
   European barbarians (they do not figure in discussions of 'the Celts' at
   all).
6. See, for example, Kruta (1976: 4–5).
7. See Thomson (1948).

8. From Thomson (1961: 1), summarising the Ionian map; see also: ibid.: 1, for the map according to Hecataeus of Miletus, 500 BC; ibid.: 2, for the world according to Herodotus, 430 BC; ibid.: 3, for the world according to Eratosthenes, *c.* 220 BC; for more detail, see Thomson (1948).
9. See, for example, Propertius IV (10), lines 43–4.
10. For more detail, see Chapman (1989a).
11. See also Just (1989a).
12. See Just (1989a).
13. See Strabo, iv. 4.2; vii. 1.2; Anderson (1938: xxxviii).

4   'A WAVE OF BARBARIANS . . .'

1. See Crawford (1986: 397); Ogilvie (1965: 699–752).
2. See Drinkwater (1983).
3. See Chadwick (1945: 61).
4. See Moore (1981: 41).

5   CELTS INTO WELSHMEN

1. See Sewter (1966).
2. See, e.g., Psellus (1966); Comnena (1969).
3. See Anderson (1938: xxxix).
4. See, e.g. De Burca (1966: 128ff); Dillon and Chadwick (1972: 36).
5. See, in general, Bury (1928).
6. See Ekwall (1960).
7. See Reaney (1976).
8. Although the relationship between these terms has been contested; see Raude (1966).
9. See Collingwood and Myres (1936).
10. For a discussion, see Collingwood and Myres (1936: ch. xx ff).
11. See Jackson (1953).
12. See Collingwood and Myres (1936: 343).
13. The fact that the Welsh call themselves 'people from the same country', and the Saxons call them 'foreigners', is sometimes used as evidence for the fact that the Welsh are warm, friendly, community-loving people, while the Saxons are hostile and exclusive (see, for example, Severy, 1977); ethnic characterisations all show the same symmetry, however, as the Welsh *alltud* – 'person from another country' – shows (Charles-Edwards, 1971: 116).
14. See Charlesworth (1949).
15. See Loomis (1963).
16. See Bartrum (1968).
17. See Sawyer (1978: 50).
18. See Lapidge and Herren (1978: 158).

19. There is a clear conceptual affinity of all those characterised as 'others', from any single viewpoint. This is well-exemplified by the similarity of ethnic characterisation, from what might be called an 'Anglo-Germanic' point of view, of all the immediate neighbours – Celts, Latins and Slavs; all those that Emerson called 'the singing and dancing nations' (1902: 74). It is not important, in order to understand this, to distinguish between fond and sympathetic characterisations, and insulting belittlements, for the same metaphorical structures lie behind both. Some of the most explicit versions were produced in the service of German racial ideology in the first half of this century (see Gehring, 1908; Gunther, 1925; Lenz, 1927; Clauss, 1933; for an excellent discussion, see Efron, 1972; also Poliakov, 1974), but the ideas of which they made use long pre-dated these works, and are still vividly alive in many vernacular forms (see, for example, Cavanna, 1978, 1979, for an entirely convincing account of the experiential basis of such perceptions). I have already drawn attention to the affinity of Celt and Latin, as expressed by Macaulay: 'The Irish . . . alone among the nations of Northern Europe had the susceptibility, the vivacity, the natural turn for acting and rhetoric which are indigenous on the shores of the Mediterranean sea' (1849 : 33); see Chapman, 1982: 142). There is a definite 'hot climate' feel to Celtic characterisation, which offers an undertone of authenticity to the many racial-linguistic attempts to derive the Irish from the Iberians or the Berbers. It might be noted that most of the employment of derivatives of *walχaz, over the centuries, has been directed from the north and east towards the south and west, and more particularly towards the south, towards Rome. It has been, in many ways, a 'hot climate category'. Its north-westerly bias in the British situation is, in these terms, slightly anomalous. It is tempting to think that reflexes of the category *walχaz, under other names and passed through many different media, are responsible for the distribution of attention which Anglophone social anthropology has accorded to Europe. In 1982, I attempted to express the peculiarities of this distribution, concentrated as it was in the north-Atlantic islands and the Mediterranean coast. I also listed some significant omissions, and, as Forsythe later pointed out, Germany was even omitted from my list of omissions (see Forsythe, 1984). The very strong concentration, within British anthropology, on Celtic and Latin subjects is evidence enough that the lineaments of the folk-category *walχaz still survive, whatever name we might now choose for it.

6   CELTIC CONTINUITY: LANGUAGE

1. See Schmidt (1986: 208).
2. See Brugmann and Delbruck (1886–1916); Robins (1971); Ardener (1971d).
3. See Chapman (1989a.)
4. For similar material on Breton, see Pichavant (1978).
5. See, for example, Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985).

6. See, for example, De Burca (1966) on Rhys (1900) and O'Rahilly (1946); Jackson (1967) on Falc'hun (1951).

7 CELTIC CONTINUITY: PEOPLE

1. For various attempts at classification, see Coon (1939); Coon and Hunt (1966); De Gobineau (1853–5); Giepel (1969); Nelson and Jurmain (1979: ch. 17).
2. The capacity for group self-definition may well, as Lévi-Strauss has argued (see 1949), be related to fundamental aspects of the appearance of social humanity and cognition.
3. See Evans-Pritchard (1940); also Radcliffe-Brown and Darryl-Forde (1950).
4. See also Davis (1989).
5. See Ardener (1989b).
6. The process of redefinition of clanship is an interesting example of parameter collapse; see Ardener (1989a: 149–52).
7. See McEvedy and Jones (1978).
8. See Jackson (1969); Williams (1938).
9. See Jackson (1969: 15).
10. Alcock (1971: 336) argues that there is no social justification for Jackson's inflated number.
11. See O'Rahilly (1946). It has been argued, in this context, that those that inhabit the Celtic fringe today are, in fact, from a strictly biological point of view, the *least* Celtic inhabitants of the British Isles or Ireland, pre-serving genetically pre-Celtic features, but having adopted the Celtic languages from subsequent invaders (see, for example, Coon, 1939; Baker, 1974: 269). This argument does not solve the problem of whether the categories 'pre-Celtic' and 'Celtic' make any biological sense at any period, but it is thought-provoking, and argues at least for a necessary independence in analysis of categories concerning three different things – self-named groups, languages, and biological populations.
12. See Ardener (1989a: 68); Charles-Edwards (1971).
13. See Wainwright (1955).
14. For the fair hair of the northern barbarians, see Tibullus, *Elegies* 1(7), line 12; for their blue eyes, Horace, *Epode* XVI, lines 6–7.
15. See Kopec (1970); Mourant et al. (1976).
16. See Chapman, forthcoming.
17. See also Freeman (1888: 68).
18. See Allen (1880: 473).
19. See Windisch (1897).
20. The linguistic evidence is thoroughly surveyed by Jackson (1953); see also Loyn (1962: 5–14).
21. See Leeds (1945).
22. The willingness of the conquered to assume a 'feminine' characterisa-tion was strikingly demonstrated in France after the collapse of French resistance to Germany in 1940, when it became widely suggested in France itself that Germany was a 'masculine' nation, and France 'femi-

nine' – this made it appropriate that the latter should have ceded to the former, and bowed to its strength: actuality and symbolism form a tight knot in problems of this kind, and there is no reason to suppose that this knot has only recently been tied.

23. See, for example, Coon (1939).

24. For discussion of the Otmoor material, see Harrison and Boyce (1972b); Macbeth (1990) discusses the more general background to the study; Professor Harrison's assertion of the primary influence of parish records was made at a one-day conference on 'Ethnicity and Biology' at the Human Sciences Centre, Oxford, 11 May 1990.

25. The Pays Bigouden has also been the focus of a massive multidisciplinary research effort in France sponsored by the Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques; the idea was to choose a population, any population, on which to exercise the entire battery of research techniques in anthropology and social science. Introducing the published results of this work, Burguière (1975) and Morin (1971) both assert that, out of the entire range of possibilities that France offers, the commune of Plozevet in the Pays Bigouden was chosen not for any perceived peculiarity, but rather from a process close to random choice: if so, it was a very fortuitous hazard, and an analogy with the Otmoor studies might be invoked.

26. See Chapman (1986: ch. 5); Creston (1978); Croix (1981).

27. This is not a joke, but a locally popular theory, deriving presumably from some unspecified nineteenth-century anthropological fantasy; there is a local facial type that is adduced as evidence for 'Mongol' origin, although I have heard it argued that the apparently 'mongolian' cast of this face was nothing to do with heredity, but was rather the result of the tight lacings around the face necessary to support the bigouden coiffe.

28. The social anthropological interest in 'difference' frequently leads it to areas that are defined as socially marginal in some way in popular discourse; in this area, as in many others, anthropologists share the pre-judgements of the wider world, for there is usually no good reason for thinking that the apparent social marginality is any guarantee of anthropological interest. It should be possible to see these two features, interest and marginality, as simply unrelated; anthropological practice shows, however, that the two are commonly considered to be nearly co-terminous. Physical anthropologists follow, as we have seen, the same moral directives to apparent singularity with no more justification than the social anthropologists. Harvey, for example, has also published on the Faroe Islands and Lithuania (see Harvey 1982 and Harvey and Suter, 1983), whose claims to singularity are very different. In the case of the Faroes, a claim might be made that the originating population had remained *in situ*, held there by geography, although this would need to be examined closely. In the case of Lithuania, the singularity is a function of a series of political and moral relationships, with the Teutonic knights, the kingdom of Poland, and the Russian and German Empires; like the singularity of Otmoor, it has nothing to do with biology. These reflections do not, of course, damage the biological

analysis, but they do suggest the need for a more self-conscious ap-
praisal of the object of study, in *social* anthropological terms.

29. See Bowen (1977).

30. See Tanguy (1977); McDonald (1982); Jackson (1967).

31. 'Robbie the Pict' has recently launched an admirably independent ap-
peal for the recognition of Pictish rights, declaring 'that the Scots are
"squatters" and that the country should be called Pictland and not
Scotland' (*Daily Telegraph*, April 1989). He has a good case, although the
bent of Scottish historiography is against him, and the traffic fines for
unpaid road-tax on the 'Pictish cultural attaché's ambulance' were still
imposed, in spite of his claim that the court, being Scottish, was in-
competent to judge his case.

32. See Chapman (1978a).

33. See, for example, Carney (1967: 8); De Blacam (1973); Brennan (1969).
Mary Kenny (*Sunday Telegraph*, 15 April 1990, p. xxii) provides a witty,
highly condensed version of the appropriate 'history', from her own
school experience.

34. There are, of course, scholarly works which redress the balance for this
as for the other examples (see, for the Hebrides, Fenton and Palsson,
1984; Crawford, 1987); the argument is, however, about the bent of
scholarly work in general, and of the dominant themes of magazine and
newspaper articles, school-books, radio presentations, etc.

8   CELTIC CONTINUITY: CULTURE

1. See Chadwick (1970: 291); Lamont (1933: 54).

2. See, for example, Ross (1967, 1970, 1974); Severy (1977); Norton-Taylor
(1975).

3. See Tacitus' *Agricola* 21; Gerald of Wales; Munro (1549); Buchanan (1582);
Leslie (1888); Blair (1765); Campbell (1860: xi); Carmichael (1900: xxxvi);
Campbell (1950: 42).

4. I am grateful to Colin McArthur for drawing *The Maggie* to my atten-
tion. McArthur has edited an excellent collection of papers on represen-
tations of Scotland in film and literature, with many detailed illustrations
of themes relevant to my own presentation (see McArthur, 1982a, b;
Craig, 1982).

5. The long-standing nature of these processes is best illustrated by Tacitus'
remarks on the Britons, who, under Agricola, 'instead of loathing the
Latin language, became eager to speak it effectively. In the same way,
our national dress came into favour and the toga was everywhere to be
seen' (*Agricola* 21). Tacitus concludes with a sentiment close to the heart
of the modern language-revivalist: 'The unsuspecting Britons spoke of
such novelties as "civilization", when in fact they were only a feature of
their enslavement' (ibid.). Gwyn Jones, in his selection of Welsh verse,
provides several telling representations of the Welsh vernacular en-
thusiasm for the English language and English fashions, over a long
period; most of these poems lament this enthusiasm, but they are

nevertheless strong evidence for its ubiquity (for poems from the fif-
teenth century to the twentieth, see Jones, 1977: 51; 85; 157). As evidence
of the 'smokescreen' to which I refer, obscuring the continuing process
of Celtic language decline, I can perhaps best cite from a display in the
Paris *Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires*, which I visited in Easter
1987. There, display 210.03 was called 'France linguistique', showing
the distribution of the various languages of France; the last sentence of
the accompanying text blandly asserted 'on assiste à un renouveau des
langues et des cultures régionales'. At the level of the everyday spoken
languages, among those who have traditionally spoken them, this is
simply not true; there is, however, considerable fashionable interest
attached to these languages among intellectuals, who are, as always,
over-willing to take their own activities and sentiments for reality itself.

6. Although see Durkacz (1983); Dorian (1981).
7. For Welsh, see Khleif (1980) and Thomas (1973); for Breton, see, for
    example, Gwegen (1975).
8. All quotations are from *West Highland Free Press*, 24 February 1978, p. 3.
9. Or, as Campbell felt, a counter-propaganda purpose; he regards the
    commonly accepted school histories, particularly those by J. Hume-
    Brown, as tacit 'Whig' propaganda; there is no doubt a measure of
    justice in this accusation (see Campbell, 1950).
10. See Campbell (1950: 68).
11. See MacLean, (1959: 51); Mackinnon (1974); and MacNeacail above.
12. See Mackay (1893: 402–4).
13. He refers here to Mackinnon (1974: 54–61), and MacLeod (1960–63: 306).
14. The reference to 'colonisation' is to Hechter (1975).
15. These references are all published in Withers (1984).
16. See Gwegen (1975).
17. See also Sage (1889); Miller (1843); Macleod (1841).
18. Crofting is an interesting example of a recently created system with a
    reputation for extreme antiquity. It was not an indigenous Highland
    institution, but was rather inflicted upon the Highlands by privileged
    outsiders with a distinctive and powerful view of what Highland life
    ought to be like. It is, in this respect, a genuine successor to the Clear-
    ances themselves, and its purported benefits are quite as dubious. As
    Condry has observed, the institution of crofting was not a victory of the
    common man over the landlords, but rather: 'the socialists and landlords
    failed. It was the Celtic scholars, and the members of the Gaelic and
    Highland societies that won the day' (Condry, 1977: vii).
19. See also Hunter (1976); Atkinson (1986).
20. See Condry (1977, 1980, 1983); Ennew (1980).
21. See Richards (1982, 1984, 1985); cf. also Burnett (1982); Withrington
    (1982); Chapman (1978a: 222–3).
22. See Grant (1982, 1983).
23. See Carter (1974, 1975); Hunter (1976).
24. See, for a literary expression of this, Smith (1976: 47).
25. See Parman (1974: 142–8).
26. For brevity, I make my case a stark one. Of course, not all my criticisms
    apply with full force to every work. And there is an alternative avail-
    able. I exempt totally from my strictures the work of Victor Durkacz

(1983) on language, of Eric Richards (1982, 1985) on emigration, and of James Shaw Grant (1983) on the generality of Gaelic life (I realise that the authors may not necessarily thank me for this exemption). There are also many earlier works one might cite with approval, for the problem as I pose it has reached its worst in recent decades.

27. See Ardener (1989a: 223).
28. See Charles-Edwards (1971); Binchy (1970).
29. See Blair (1954); Bromwich (1954); Williams (1938); Jackson (1969).
30. See Arnold (1891).
31. See, for example, Kenny (1987).
32. See Edwards (1985).
33. For an examination of the category, see Chapman (1978a: ch. 5).
34. *Scottish Studies* is produced by the School of Scottish Studies in the University of Edinburgh, and my comments are not meant in any way to detract from its excellence. For Celtic folklorists in general, see Dorson 1968. The *Folk Roots* magazine reference is to an article entitled 'French Fashion', 1988, no. 61, pp. 21–3.
35. See Collinson (1975).
36. See Brander (1971); I discuss the nature of such romanticisation at length below, and it is sufficient to say here that the romanticisation was externally imposed, and as such somewhat outside the normal run of fashion.
37. I felt obliged to find a place for this quatrain by Duncan Ban Macintyre, the mid-eighteenth century Scottish Gaelic poet; this was composed in a moral world still innocent of the romanticism that was pending:

> Ged as cliùiteach a' Mhachair
> Le cùnnradh 's le fasan,
> B'e ar dùrachd dol dachaigh
> 'S bhith 'n taice r'ar càirdean;
>
> Though the Lowlands are famous
> for trading and fashion,
> our earnest wish is to go home,
> and be close to our friends;

(from 'Oran Duthcha', 'A Song of Homeland', Macintyre, 1952: 230-3).

9   ROMANTICISM

1. For details, see Mackenzie (1805); Smart (1905); Thomson (1963); Chapman (1978a: ch. 2).
2. Macpherson's own pronouncements, coloured as they are by the aesthetic theory of the time, and by the need to defend himself against accusations of forgery and impropriety, are not necessarily any help in understanding this.
3. For Smollet on the 'Ossianic' Highlanders, see Smollett (n.d.: 286–8).
4. See the journal *Scottish Studies*; also *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, and others.

5. See Gourvil (1959), for an extensive discussion.
6. For details of foreign language translations of the *Barzaz Breiz*, see Corbes (1969).
7. See Luzel (1979) for a modern literary Breton version; Francis Gourvil, in 1959 argued a formidable case for forgery, as well as a near-definitive summary of the controversy (see Gourvil, 1959; also 1963). Donatien Laurent, of the University of Brest, has recently returned to the defence.
8. See Whitney (1934); Lovejoy and Boas (1935); Piggott (1977); Hodgen (1964); Bitterli (1989).
9. See Ardener (1989a: 149–52).
10. See Macdonald's 'Elegy on Lord Lovat'; see Campbell (1984: 108).
11. See Macdonald (1751); Macdonald and Macdonald (1924); Campbell (1984: 84).
12. The cannibalism of barbarians, often reported in fascinated horror by self-consciously civilised observers (see Chapter 11), is reported with a new complacency under the romantic dispensation. A leaflet put out by the 'Clan Tartan Centre', entitled 'Have you got a clan to your name?', gives a series of interesting clan facts: the producers of the leaflet meant no libel on the MacDuffs, with the following entry: 'Fact 1. MacDuff clansmen once boiled an unpopular sheriff into soup . . . and drank him' (the 'Clan Tartan Centre' is run by the James Pringle Woollen Mill, Leith, Edinburgh).
13. For a general discussion of this, see Thomas (1984).
14. See Byron (1905).
15. See, for example, Poucher (1954, 1964); Munro (1953).
16. See *Gothic Stories* (1804).
17. See, in general, Loomis (1963); for a few key works among many thousands: Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.
18. Discussed in Chapman (1978a: ch. 4), and in the final chapter of this work.
19. This argument is compatible, I think, with the work of Dumont (1986) on German identity.
20. See, for example, Wordsworth's bringing together of the imagery of French Revolutionary freedom, and Celtic fringe freedom, in the poem 'Rob Roy's Grave'; Wordsworth, p. 231.
21. See Peyre (1974: 62ff).
22. See Chapman (1978a).
23. See Mordrel (1973); Fréville (1985); Deniel (1976); Denis (1977).
24. See Mingay (1968).
25. Figures vary according to definition; in general, see Ariès (1971).
26. See Le Bail (1913: 35); Vandervelde (1903: 1); Souchon (1899); Cadic (1901); Guillou (1905: 234).
27. This led, typically, to a growing ethnographic interest in the French peasantry; see, for example, Lévi-Strauss and Mendras (1981).
28. See Campsie (1980); Trevor-Roper (1983: 15); Chapman (1978a); Black (1979).
29. See Buchan (1932: 240–2).
30. Trevor-Roper (1983: 15).

31. See Paine (1989: 132); I take the formulation 'invention of tradition' to belong to Hobsbawm and Ranger, rather than Trevor-Roper.
32. For discussion of the 'infinite sequence of rememorizations', see Ardener (1989b: 25); Chapman (1989a: 6).
33. The lines quoted are numbers 25–29 and 49–52, from Campbell (1984: 218–25), his translation; see also Macintyre (1768, 1952).
34. From Campbell (1984: 154–63); his translation.
35. From A. Macleod's 1952 edition, pp. 238–43; Macleod's translation.
36. See Macaulay (1982); Mackinnon (1977); Dorian (1981).
37. Notable among these, in the Scottish Gaidhealtachd, being Sabhal Mor Ostaig and Ian Noble's Eilean Iarmain complex, both in Sleat, southern Skye; Wales, Brittany and Ireland all have functional equivalents of these.

10   CLASSIFICATION AND CULTURE-MEETING

1. There has been a great deal of discussion of the nature and validity of this enterprise, but there is no doubt that it has borne significant fruit; see, for example, Parkin (1982); Overing (1985).
2. I do not mean to express any particular theoretical tendency. I am indebted in my discussion to the great body of fieldwork reporting produced in this century. An 'Oxford' tendency towards interest in ideas may well be perceptible, and a debt to the more fruitful aspects of structuralism is clear. In that sense, this book may be said to belong to the 'new anthropology', as characterised by Ardener in 1971 (see 1971c: 1), and to be an attempt to put that anthropology to work. There are many areas of lively discussion within today's social anthropology to which my work is relevant, but I have not, for the most part, addressed these discussions directly, preferring to try to do anthropology rather than talk about doing it; those familiar with the discussion can find such relevance as they wish.
3. The suggested examples of classification are, of course, ethnocentric, with only a varying usefulness in cross-cultural study; their purpose here is primarily expository.
4. The notation developed by anthropologists, as used here, is a shorthand: the letters stand for: F, father; B, brother; S, son; M, mother; Z, sister; D, daughter. All genetic relationships can be expressed through a path of letters succeeding one another. There is always, implicitly, an individual (often called an 'ego') at the centre of the kinship reckoning, and other people are expressed, using this notation, by their relationship to 'ego'. Thus FB means 'father's brother' (of the unmentioned or implicit 'ego'); MB means 'mother's brother'; FZD means 'father's sister's daughter'; MBZDS means 'mother's brother's sister's daughter's son', and so on. In diagrammatic form, which is also used in the chapter, marriages (or their equivalent) are represented by an equals sign, and succession from one generation to the next by movement down the page. Most of this is familiar from general sources.

5. For more detail, see Needham (1971).
6. See, for example, Harré and Reynolds (1984).
7. See Lienhardt (1966: 18).
8. See Chapman (1982); Ardener (1982).
9. For a fine autobiographical expression of this, see Cavanna (1978).
10. My presentation here is not intended as anything more than a crude summary of work available elsewhere (see, for example, Ardener, 1989a; Parkin, 1982; Overing, 1985; Needham, 1973). The conclusions that I reach may seem outrageous in some respects to those new to the ideas; they are, however, within social anthropology, mature conclusions.
11. See, for example, Harris (1969).
12. See Wilson (1970); Horton and Finnegan (1973); Hollis and Lukes (1982); Parkin (1982); Overing (1985).
13. See Ardener (1989a).
14. See Durkheim and Mauss (1963: xlii–xliii).
15. See Needham (1973).
16. Of which one might cite, particularly, Evans-Pritchard (1956); Lienhardt (1961).
17. See Douglas (1966).
18. See Durkheim and Mauss (1963); Hubert and Mauss (1964).
19. Edwin Ardener, who first drew my attention to this phenomenon, used the image of the opening floodgates: if a breach is made in a category boundary, those who attach importance to the boundary perceive a completely free flow between those features which the boundary, in their terms, keeps apart.
20. Ardener has hinted at differences of this kind, arguing that 'societies differ greatly in the degree to which they externalize (into action), or internalize (into language) the processes by which they (i.e. the societies) operate' (Ardener, 1989: 108–9).
21. These suggestions are only tentative, and very briefly rendered; Max Weber's classic work on the Protestant ethic (1948), and its relation to commercial and social modernity, is obviously relevant here.
22. I have discussed elsewhere some poetical and intellectual versions of this, as produced by prominent members of the Scottish Gaelic intellectual community (see Chapman, 1978a: 169–80, citing Carmichael, 1900–71: vol. 1, xxx; MacLean, 1959: 126-7; *Guth na Bliadhna*, 1904: 2; Campbell, 1950: 61; Thomson, 1966: 262–4; MacLean, 1977: 76-7; Macaulay, 1967: 21, 90; 1976: 66, 152–3, 164–5; Campbell, 1860: cxxx; MacLeod, 1969: 91–3). Derick Thomson provides a telling image for the problem, in his poem 'Am Bodach-Rocais', 'The Scarecrow', where the internalisation of conscience is represented as 'a fire swept from the centre of the floor, and set as a searing bonfire in our breasts' (from Macaulay, 1976: 164; I have taken minor liberties with the text).

11   THE CELTS AND THE CLASSICS

1. See d'Arbois de Jubainville (1894); Tierney (1976).

2. Rather than pepper the present text with references to this last work, a general acknowledgement may suffice; I do not always agree with Rankin's interpretation, but his discussion is always useful and informative.

3. One example of the creative scholarly invention of the 'Celts' is to be found in 'the cult of the severed head'; this purported 'cult' is, according to many sources, an archetypical Celtic feature, still alive in the present day: it merits a monograph in itself, and my entire argument in this book could be made around this example; my reason for putting this in a note is to keep the entry within bounds. Strabo (iv. 4.5) refers to the Gaulish warrior habit of taking the heads of slain foes and decorating the saddle or house with them. This was, for classical observers, a shocking breach of good practice, and notable therefore. What we know about this is that it shocked its observers; we are told nothing thereby about how important this was to the people that practised it, nor about how long it endured or how widespread it was, nor about how elaborated it was in the pleasant horror of retelling. These observations, however, have become the basis of the modern notion that there existed, among the Celts, a pagan 'cult of the severed head'. Wherever a disembodied head occurs in representation (graphic or poetic), this is taken as evidence. The idea of such a cult is shockingly different, pagan and superstitious, and as such fits with ease into scholarly wishful thinking about the Celts. The fact that a disembodied head is so obvious and ubiquitous an image in the culture of *Homo sapiens*, has done nothing to prevent the Celticisation of this feature. An Oxford-based Celtic scholar might reflect upon the heads of traitors once spiked on the town ramparts, the heads of saints in the stained glasswork, the heads of philosophers painted round the walls of the Bodleian library, the carved stone heads of giants round the Sheldonian Theatre, and wonder how 'Celtic' this feature is. The avid pursuit of the Celtic exotic, however, has led to the creation of what one might almost call 'the cult of the cult of the severed head', with Celtic folklorists as its votaries. The works of Anne Ross provide good examples (see 1967, 1970; also Chadwick, 1970: 49). In discussion of a recent exhibition of 'Celtic' stone heads, it was asserted

> The cult of the head was very powerful and the head motif survives from before the Celtic Iron Age right up to recent times. In the Pennines heads are occasionally still carved and placed on buildings (for example, over the porch of Old Sun Inn, Haworth, Yorks.) for their apotropaic qualities (their ability to ward off or absorb evil influence, much as gargoyles do on churches) and to promote good luck. As an example of this Celtic continuity, heads have been carved within living memory in the traditional style.
>
> (Manchester University, 1987)

So 'Celtic' has the severed head become, by recent definition, that severed heads in other traditions are treated as signs of 'Celtic' influence (see, e.g. Crawford, 1987: 212).

4. Detail of the sources of quotations in this chapter, and of edition and translator, can be found in the Bibliography under author; in general, I have used Loeb editions and Oxford Classical Texts. Other sources relevant to Celtic drinking are Strabo, IV. v. 5; Tacitus, *The Germania* XXIII; Pliny, XXII.

5. See Piggott (1965: 155, 195, 253); also Forbes (1956); Wheeler (1954: 72–94).

6. See Wells (1981).

7. The Latin for wine mixed with water, as normally drunk, was *vinum*. The adjective *merus*, meaning 'pure, unmixed', was most commonly used in nominal form, as *merum*, meaning 'pure or unmixed wine'. The spread and adoption of wine is a good example of the wave-like movement of cultural innovations. In 50 BC, wine-drinking was an appropriate marker for distinguishing between 'Celts' and civilised Greeks and Romans. It is entirely in line with my earlier discussion of the category 'Celt', that the cultural features ascribed to the Celt were common to all of barbarian Europe, under whatever title. Sometime in the early twentieth century, wine replaced the drinks of barbarian Europe in a geographical outpost of mainland Europe – Brittany. Brittany is now, at a popular level, a wine-drinking area. The same innovation has crossed the channel, but there it still tends to remain, even today, a middle-class habit. Wine-drinking is much more common in the south of England than it is in the northern and western geographical fringes of the British Isles. In those fringes, wine-drinking is commonly perceived as a 'posh', 'southern' or 'English' habit; in Brittany it has become the habit of the common man.

8. See Morgan (1877). One might, perhaps, not wish to deny the relevance of such argument for the evolution of hominid social structure, but any such relevance pre-dates the dynamic of modern social systems, 'primitive' or otherwise, by a very long period indeed.

9. See Just (1989b).

10. See Markale (1975) and others.

11. See Carrer (1983); and, for example, Audibert (1984).

12. Translation obscure, possibly 'with concubines of both sexes'; Athanaeus (13.603a) substantiates the first reading.

13. One might question the authenticity of the translator's register here.

14. See Arens (1979).

15. O'Connor's standard work on phonetics says of comparative work on intonation and gesture: 'This topic is bedevilled by the lack of agreed categories and terms' (O'Connor 1982: 270); see ibid: 248 for the arbitrary and conventional nature of intonation and gesture. For tentative suggestions in this area, see Berting (1987), Levine (1987). Standard works on what is often called 'non-verbal communication' are surprisingly unhelpful on the subject of cross-cultural perception (see, for example, Argyle 1975; Harper et al. 1978).

16. See Hastrup (1990).

17. See Evans-Pritchard (1940, 1956); Johnson (1981).

18. References to the Alexiad give the standard chapter and section references, and page numbers from Sewter's edition; see Comnena (1969).

19. See also Lopez (1978).

12   GERALD OF WALES

1. See Hastrup (1986 and 1990).
2. See Wyatt (1952: lines 101–14); I am grateful to G. Chapman for the translation.
3. See Colgrave (1956: 108–10).
4. See Loyn (1962: 21ff).
5. Reference to the bestial sexual habits of the Welsh mountain shepherd may need explaining to some. In male English company, it is a commonplace of sexual innuendo that a Welsh mountain shepherd (or, for more general purposes of inter-ethnic abuse, any Welshman) is given to sexual relations with sheep, to which end he wears wellington boots, in which the sheep's back legs can be inserted, preventing it from escaping. It is a difficulty in anthropological dealings with one's own culture, that one is obliged to deal in a serious and written form with elements whose place is spoken and vulgar; the bestial Welshman is a crudity of pub, changing room and building site, and there is a genuine dissonance between this and academic propriety. This is true even for social anthropology, at least as it turns its attention to our culture; anthropologists would delight in such a vernacular impropriety if it came from a far away people: faced with the same thing from their own culture, however, they are, like intellectuals in general, unsure of themselves. The sexual vulgarity in question, ribald as it is, contains not only the accusation of bestiality, but also hints of mountain-dwelling, pastoralism and isolation: however unsuitable it is for polite company, its lineage is probably ancient.
6. Jenkins (1981); Campbell (1964); Chapman (1986); Brenan (1957).
7. But see Chapman (1986: ch. 4).
8. Further information on Gerald can be found in a variety of works, including Richter (1972) and Bartlett (1982). I am particularly indebted to the latter, which has a very valuable discussion of the political, personal and moral context of Gerald's work, and makes perceptive use of anthropology in the analysis of Gerald's observations.
9. See Bartlett (1982: 26) for a genealogy.
10. The quotations which follow are taken from Wright's edition of 1905 (see Gerald of Wales, 1905), which is convenient because it contains all four relevant works between single covers. Many other editions exist (see Bartlett, 1982), and all are available in Penguin: Lewis Thorpe's translation and edition of *The Journey Through Wales* and *The Description of Wales* (Penguin, 1978), and John O'Meara' translation and edition of *The History and Topography of Ireland* (Penguin, 1982).
11. See p. 86 for goats similarly involved.
12. For a selection concerning 'honour and shame', see Peristiany (1965); the concepts have been much discussed in the anthropological literature of the Mediterranean, although the *meeting* of northern and southern Europe has not attracted the attention that it might, other than by implication. The best representation of this meeting that I know is Goscinny and Uderzo's *Astérix en Corse* (1973); I am grateful to Rosemary MacKechnie for drawing this to my attention.
13. See Shirley-Price (1968).

14. For Wales, see Richards (1954); Wade-Evans (1909); for Ireland, Thurneysen et al. (1936).
15. Cited Bartlett (1982: 18); Wright (Gerald of Wales, 1905: 223) has a less trenchant translation.
16. Cited Bartlett (1982: 19–20); from Gerald's *Symbolum Electorum*.
17. This is discussed in Chapter 13. I have treated the meeting of category systems as one which is virtually bound to produce pejorative and excessive characterisations of other people; there is, however, at least a possibility that other peoples will appear to obey your own rules better than you do yourself. On intuitive grounds, one feels this to be less likely, but perhaps something of the sort is going on when Gerald writes of Iceland: 'It is inhabited by a race of people who use very few words, and speak the truth. They seldom converse, and then briefly, and take no oaths, because they do not know what it is to lie; for they detest nothing more than falsehood' (Gerald of Wales, 1905: 74). This passage is pregnant with possibilities for long-term interpretation of the Germanic/Celtic duality, for the modern images of Ireland and Norway, as held by the rest of Europe, bear an uncanny resemblance to those of Ireland and Iceland that Gerald describes eight centuries before. There are undoubtedly effects from category-system meeting involved, but it also seems possible that some real cultural difference (involving mode and frequency of speech, perhaps) attested in the twelfth century still survives, on a continuous European dimension. I suggested as much in a paper given at Copenhagen University in 1988; the problem needs careful handling, however, and lengthier treatment than there is room for here.
18. Gerald describes the Welsh as users of three instruments – the harp, the pipe and the *crwth* (a form of early violin). Remembering the spread and disappearance of cultural fashions, as already described, it is worth noting that the *crwth* (or 'crowd', in English), was of a family of instruments that was widespread throughout Europe. It was gradually replaced by the viol (and later the violin) in England from the late seventeenth century. By 1770, according to Mr D. Barrington (cited by T. Wright in Gerald of Wales, 1905: 496), it was played by only one person in Wales, and so was on the point of disappearance. The other instruments fell out of fashion similarly, although the harp has latterly undergone romantic revival as a typically 'Welsh' instrument.
19. The implied cognitive one-sidedness of the stereotype concept is nowhere more clearly expressed than in typical social psychological 'empirical' studies of stereotypes (see, for example, Callan and Gallois, 1983; Jones and Ashmore, 1973; Jonas and Hewstone, 1986). Typically, a small group of people is given a list of adjectives, and asked to apply them, as appropriate, to a list of 'ethnic groups'. Little attempt is made to ask why the group under investigation thinks as it does; the notion that there may be a complicated and long-enduring culture-meeting behind the adjectives is rarely considered. The 'stereotype' metaphor (for that is all it is) is a clumsy one, and it is regrettable that it should have achieved the status of 'concept' in some areas of the social sciences (Marsland, 1988: 41, makes critical citation of a typical example).

13 THE MODERN CELTS

1. See Dubois (1972: 25).
2. See, for example, Le Maire de Belges (1509); Boece (1527); Bale (1548); Gesner (1555); Du Bellay (1556); Buchanan (1582); Holinshed (1578); Taillepied (1585); Camden (1586); Cluver (1616).
3. See Egenolff (1720–35); Schilter (1728).
4. See Hotman (1573).
5. See Tanguy (1977).
6. See McDonald (1982).
7. See Buchanan (1582).
8. See Dubois (1972); Piggott (1967); Kendrick (1950).
9. See, for example, Chadwick (1912: 430).
10. See, for example, Goscinny and Uderzo (1966); the first book of the series, *Asterix the Gaul*, provides, in its first few pages, a delightful programmatic rendering of the early history of Europe, filtered, entirely self-consciously, through the categories of understanding of modern Europe.
11. Already suggested in the work of Hotman (1573).
12. See Chapman (1978a: 29–30); Campbell and Thomson (1963: xii, xxiii).
13. See Piggott (1977); Delaney (1986: 218).
14. I do not think, however, that an authentic version of this would have a great deal of appeal for those who have invested their enthusiasms in the Celt as he is known today; for an account of 'Celtic centrality' would, in its own terms, be entirely unglamorous – it would be prosaic, matter of fact, dull, like an account of a day at the office: banality is the price you pay for being at the centre of the reckoning.
15. See Thomas (1971).
16. See Favret (1980); Ardener (1970).
17. See Campbell (1860).
18. See Mill (1968); Dickens (1974).
19. See Chapman (1978a); for the theoretical background, see Ardener, E. (1975a, b); Ardener, S (1975).
20. Among them, Markale (1975); Carrer (1983); Audibert (1984).
21. See Fortes (1983).
22. See Tennyson (1859).
23. See Guest (1838–49).
24. See O Tuama (1972a).
25. See Yeats (1950: 8).
26. See Yeats (1950: 230).
27. See Loomis (1963).
28. See Bullock-Davies (1981: 440).
29. For two recent offerings, neither of any great merit compared to their exemplars, see Lawhead (1987) and Tolstoy (1988).
30. Some of them extraordinarily erudite, after their fashion; see, for example, Matthews (1987); Naddair (1985, 1987a, b); Dahl (1989).
31. See Severy (1977).
32. See Ross (1974).

33. See Norton-Taylor (1975); also *Wizards and Witches* (1988).
34. The works of the sports journalist Gerald Davies are a rich and some-times pleasantly ironical source of Celtic/Anglo-Saxon metaphors ap-plied to the Five Nations Championship; the following is from *The Times*, 6 Feb. 1988: 'The Celt is warm and witty in his humour, though he is driven to be fiery and tempestuous in the dark of his despair. The cool Englishman's air of detachment, full of irony, can be interpreted as arrogant superiority. Each beats a discordant rhythm with the other' (Davies, 1988: 36). See also *The Times* 5 February 1988 p. 33, and 12 December 1988, p. 36.
35. The major figure in twentieth-century self-consciously 'Breton' cultural activity was Roparz Hemon, producer and main contributor to the pre-war journal *Gwalarn*, and Breton's leading modern lexicographer – born and brought up in Brest, as a French-speaker, under the name of Louis Nemo. His immediate successor as leader of Breton militantism is Per Denez (see 1983), otherwise the Paris-born Pierre Denis, who, like Hemon, came to Breton in early adulthood. A leading figure in Scottish Gaelic activity is the English-born Frank Thompson (see 1968), who has learnt Gaelic as an adult, and for Gaelic purposes figures as Fraing MacThomais. Many other examples could be cited.
36. There is a professor of Celtic studies in Edinburgh University because of the pioneering efforts of the classicist John Stuart Blackie, who derived his enthusiasm for the Gaelic cause from Macpherson's Ossian and Matthew Arnold's 'Celt'; see MacDonald (1985: 34ff).
37. See, in general, Esman (1977); the Welsh language society Cymdeithas ur Iaith Gymraeg was, for example, founded in 1963; the Cornish lan-guage society, Kesva an Tavas Kernewek, in 1967.
38. See Brekilien (1973).
39. See O'Brien (1977).
40. And see, for example, Lamont (1933); Chadwick (1970); Ross (1967).
41. For a discussion of some representative criticism of Gaelic poetry in this regard, see Chapman (1978a: ch. 3).
42. On this point, but in a different cultural context, Ardener quotes a Yoruba proverb, translated by the Yoruba scholar Ojo, as 'in a forest no-one need fail to fight for the lack of a cudgel' (Ardener, 1989a: 182; Ojo, 1966). He goes on:

> The Yoruba forest is a domain of cultural artefacts, in this instance of potential cudgels, as well as of trees. If a man breaks a branch it may be, or may not be, a cultural act. . . . [I]t is noteworthy also that although he writes in English, there is a slight discrepancy between the boundary of culture, as expressed by the Yoruba Ojo, and our own usage. He is quite explicit on this point. Culture begins, if you like, much deeper in the zone of 'environment'. In many non-West-ern worlds there is more 'meaning' in material, ecological features, because of the high degree of arbitrarization of materiality.
>
> (Ardener, 1989a: 182)

43. See Ardener (1989a: 144–5).

44. The IRA propaganda can easily be found by driving from Morlaix to Quimper, and looking in the bookshop 'Ar Bed Keltiek', 'The Celtic World', opposite the front of the cathedral.
45. See Ardener (1989a).
46. See Ennew (1979).
47. The authors cite Hay (1975) 'on the distinctiveness and Celticness of the English North Country'.
48. Citing Pocock (1974), the authors argue that the most relevant feature of the Celts was 'a long-standing tradition of open-range pastoralism and an accompanying disdain for tillage agriculture, especially for labor-intensive cultivation' (McDonald and McWhiney, 1980: 1109); they cite Gerald of Wales in confirmation here, cf. p. 191.
49. See also, for example, Fell (1976).
50. See Ardener (1989a: 144–5).
51. See Khleif (1980: 100); Thomas (1973: 84).
52. Khleif's very partial terminological approach here would be, one might suppose, unacceptable to social anthropologists. The trap is an easy one to fall into, however. Marianne Heiberg has written of the Spanish Basques, in an article entitled 'Basques, anti-Basques, and the moral community' (Heiberg, 1980). The 'Basques' in this title are those people in the Basque country, Basque-speaking or not, who are in favour of Basque nationalism; the 'anti-Basques' are those people in the Basque country, Basque-speaking or not, who are not in favour of Basque nationalism (cf. Khleif's 'pro-Welsh-Welsh' and 'anti-Welsh-Welsh'). If you are familiar with this kind of problem, then it quickly becomes obvious that the term 'anti-Basque' is a term used by the nationalists for those that do not agree with them: it is manifestly not a self-appellation. The majority of those who think that they are, in one sense or another, 'Basques', are thus excluded from the category; they are 'conceptually disenfranchised'. Heiberg's analysis, however, does not give us the view from inside the 'anti-Basque' position, nor are we given any non-pejorative name for this position. This is a serious omission for a social anthropologist, for if social anthropology is good at anything, it is good at taking native categories seriously: if it abandons or neglects that skill, preferring instead the application of external categories (whether these are modish, magisterial, sociological, or whatever), then, in my view at least, it betrays its main strength and its original contribution.
53. Derick Thomson has made the same criticism in the Scottish Gaelic context, arguing that 'the Gaelic identity . . . shows evidence of class distortion: Gaelic must be equated with folk-culture, and so by a rough approximation with a so-called working class' (Thomson, 1981: 18).
54. Giles's work (1977) is from within social psychology, in a series edited by H. Tajfel, whose own involvement with social psychology is long-standing, and specifically tied to the Jewish experience in the 1939–45 war, and thence to the problems of 'ethnic minorities' in general (see Tajfel, 1981: 1). Although the groups that Tajfel discusses (see 1981: ch. 15) are often defined primarily by their language, he does not discuss language-use at length, and such observations as he makes are not ethnographically profound (see, for example, 1981: 338–9; there is a

routine behaviourist bias in most social psychology which militates against any subtle dealing with language). Giles's work is much influenced by that of Tajfel. There are many reasons for being dissatisfied with these social psychological approaches, beyond their inadequate and self-serving dealings with language and ethnicity. In general, the subject seems to encourage the worst kind of modern technical prose, groaning with polysyllables, and wrapping up simple ideas in thick layers of tautology. For all the theoretical pretensions, the theory on offer, when stripped of its cocoon of intellectual wallpaper, is often remarkably trite. Giles et al. (1977), for example, build a creaking positivist taxonomy of ethnic groups, which is founded upon two 'theories': one of these is 'Tajfel's theory of intergroup relations', and the other is 'Giles's theory of speech accommodation' (see 1977: 308–9; 318–24). These amount to no more than the anthropological truisms that people categorise (or classify) themselves and others, and that they adjust the way they talk according to whom they are addressing. The same volume contains an excellent and responsible article by Edwards (1977), whose general presentation is to be admired (see also Edwards, J., 1985). Even Edwards, however, when he looks to Celtic examples, is misled by deficient sources (relying, for example, on Reece, 1979).

55. The publisher, incidentally, of Hearne (1975) and Thomas (1973).
56. For other similar accounts, see, for example, Khleif (1979a, b); Lee (1981); Gwegen (1975); Thomas (1973).
57. Dutifully cited as general explanatory background by the social psychologists discussed above.
58. Galicia, in northern Spain, is permitted to include itself among the 'Celtic nations' for the purposes of the *Fête Inter-Celtique* in Lorient, on the grounds that there are some Celtic place-names there, and that a Celtic language was probably once spoken there. England could be included on the same grounds, of course, as could Poland and Yugoslavia. Galicia is primly kept out of the Celtic League, however, since a Celtic national language there is regarded as obligatory. This allows in all the Irish, Welsh, Manx, Bretons, Cornish and Scots – even if you are from Peebles or St Malo, you can be a Celt in these terms.
59. I stress this because these advances are still often experienced as novel, and announced as such. Luhrmann, for example, in a recent article reviewing the 1989 ASA conference, said: 'The focus of anthropological interest has shifted profoundly in the last twenty years, from socio-economic structure to meaning' (Luhrmann, 1989: 27). Rapport, on the same subject, calls the same advances 'post-Marcus and Clifford' (Rapport, 1989: 26), referring to a recent fashionable work, itself erroneously persuaded of its own novelty (Clifford and Marcus, 1987; for a trenchant review, see Pedersen, 1987). He refers to a period of 'narrative innocence', as if this period of naivety had ended only in 1987. I find this very unsatisfactory, and in itself exceedingly naive. Anybody that can talk of a previous period of 'narrative innocence' might profitably read Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (written, it should be noted, between 1759 and 1767), and then start on Proust. As noted in the text, the main innovations in understanding these problems within social anthropology were made in the 1960s, and were all the result of careful building upon much earlier work (Leach, 1961; Pocock, 1961; Needham,

1962; Douglas, 1966). Moreover, it should be remembered that Radcliffe-Brown's 'scientific' social anthropology, from which Leach, Needham, Douglas, Pocock and Ardener (to name a few) found a way out, was itself a temporary modernist phase. There had been, before it and co-existing with it, centuries of writing and observation, fictional and otherwise, and centuries of humanistic study of language and society, much of it brilliant and subtle, and not crippled by the premature and naive scientific ambitions of social anthropological modernism. The implicit dismissal of all this, in a claim to recent novelty of thought, looks dangerously like the pert self-satisfaction of the ignorant. Ardener wrote, in 1971, of the 'new anthropology', and it is substantially that novelty which is still being paraded and re-experienced today; he said, however, even then, 'such original novelty as there may have been about it is largely over', 'while philosophically it is as old as the hills' (Ardener, 1971c; see 1989a: 45). Luhrmann's farthest horizon for the first stirrings of the revolution in anthropology which she identifies, from 1989, is 1969, at the start of 'the last twenty years'. This barely overlaps with the *end* of the period in which the crucial advances were made. The 'shift from function to meaning', which Luhrmann has only slightly rephrased, was noted as early as 1961 by David Pocock, and he looked back to Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* of 1937 as a source text for this shift. All that has occurred in Luhrmann's 'last twenty years' has been popularisation, involving both refinement and vulgarisation in more or less equal measure; this period is clearly still going on. It may, however, be inevitable that positivist-educated students (and positivist-educated lecturers) will, in their own life-experience, necessarily encounter these anthropological trends as complete novelty, and experience them as such, in much the same way that adolescents 'discover' sex (the recent discovery of 'symbolism' in the works of the Manchester school may be regarded as testimony to this; see Cohen, 1985, 1986). The thrill of discovery and novelty will be entirely real for those experiencing it; if they write books in this mood, announcing intellectual revolution, these will be entirely convincing to neophyte students, who will not imagine that they might need to look elsewhere. The lengthy period of over-excited running on the spot which Luhrmann calls 'the last twenty years' then becomes comprehensible.

60. See, for other expressions of the same sentiment, Crick (1976); Salmond (1982); and, more generally, Overing (1985). I do not cite myself on this subject with any intention of claiming first use of phrase or sentiment. As in the previous note, however, I am anxious to restore some depth to the chronology of discussion of these issues. My position in 1976 had grown out of a very nearly exhaustive discussion of the relevant issues in the *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, from its inception in 1970 (the first article in the first issue, by Paul Heelas, was entitled 'Meaning for whom?'). This discussion was in turn inspired by Oxford social anthropology at the time, and most particularly by Edwin Ardener, who, as we have seen above, already took the view that the novelty was over. The sentiment 'all language is metaphorical', in 1989, can look as post-modernist as one wishes to make it; if a tyro graduate student could make such a statement, in all seriousness, in 1976, then some

humility about the novelty of currently fashionable issues is indicated. In this context, the curious flurry of excitement about the work of Clifford and Marcus is, in my view, unjustified by any novelty of insight.

61. See Salmond (1982).

62. Expressing, as Ardener has put it, 'the unsolved question of how anthropology can ever be "logically" possible within the vocabulary provided by the present age' (Ardener, 1989a: 210).

63. See Ardener (1975d).

64. Ardener provides a useful detailed example, calling it 'an automatism of language'. He gives a series of creolised English categories from a Cameroon agricultural show, which, building upon common binary symbolism (cf. Hertz, 1960; Needham, 1973), generate sequences which have a logic within themselves, but which cause serious difficulties of translation, looking variously like 'a joke, a riddle, a metaphysics, a poetics, or a paradox', with 'gratuitously poetic effects in standard English – the translation sets up resonances de novo in the second language. We may ask "what in such a case have we 'translated'; what does the translation 'mean'?"' (Ardener, 1989a: 173). It is no accident that the terms Ardener uses here to describe this linguistic problem, 'joke, riddle, metaphysics, poetics, paradox', are a kind of summary of wishful thinking about the Celtic imagination; the poetic effect in translation is, as Ardener notes, often gratuitous.

65. Gothic, the language of the Goths, is principally known to us through Wulfila's Gothic translation of the bible; the Gothic language in this sense is now extinct, having given way in its various southern European locations to Romance or Slavonic languages.

66. For a decade or so, the canal in Oxford was lined with narrow boats, alternative residences *par-excellence*, with names from *The Lord of the Rings*.

67. One of the linguistic games which English people can readily be induced to play, is rephrasing popular songs in pretentious and long-winded forms; when they do so, the rephrasal is commonly found to contain a large number of quasi-French or Latin forms: for example, 'show me the way to go home, I'm tired and I want to go to bed', becomes, in one version that I have often heard, 'indicate the route to my habitual abode, I'm fatigued and I wish to retire'; the trick has not worked for every word (in particular for 'abode' and 'wish'), but the trend is clear enough.

68. Lévi-Strauss's *bricolage* is an excellent example within social anthropology, touted round by English structuralists as a kind of theoretical incantation; there are many others, not least of which is 'structuralism' itself. It is a source of continuing surprise to me that British social anthropologists, who should have the conceptual skills to spot problems like this, seem to be as readily dazzled by the latest Francophone commonplace as all their fellow intellectuals.

69. I do not believe, in spite of Tolkien's arguments, that a Suffolk farmer in the sixteenth century would have responded to the eleven names in *The Lord of the Rings* in the same way as its twentieth century readers.

70. The Breton case must be differently read, of course, with French substituting for English.

71. See Chapman (1989a).
72. I have kept the characterisation down to three adjectives; as we have seen above, many cognate and related forms are possible.
73. I do not mean to say that the latter should, in justice, be equally glamorised; rather, that the former should be accorded its fair international due of contempt and disgust: I know, particularly from experience talking to concerned intellectuals in France, that there is an international bias in reporting in favour of the IRA, and I am sure that the metaphorical structures discussed here are a powerful force towards this.
74. See, for example, the exchange of letters between the Breton militant, author and lexicographer, Roparz Hemon, and the Comte de Guébriant (cited Fréville, 1985: 100–3).
75. See, for example, the *Celtic League Annual*, and the journal *Carn*.
76. See Gwegen (1975).
77. At a social anthropological seminar held in Oxford in January 1988, an English anthropologist who had lived in Wales with her husband recounted the following incident which befell him: he was coming home on the bus, quite late at night, in rural Wales; there was only one other person on the bus, a young man in the seat behind; the husband became aware of vocalisations from the man behind him, and eventually realised that what he was hearing was a constant repetition of the same words, in Welsh – 'English out, English out, English out . . .'. The audience at the seminar – well-educated, intellectual, middle-class, social scientific – smiled at one another in nodding amusement and approval at this pleasant tale of belonging and ethnic loyalty. Put it in another context, however: imagine one of the urban centres of England that is now home to tens of thousands of immigrants from the Indian sub-continent; imagine one of the natives, simmering with resentment at the 'intruders', sitting behind one on a bus, and saying ' . . . out, . . . out'. It takes little effort of imagination to realise that the same audience would have responded to this story very differently. Why?
78. The phrase is Edwin Ardener's.
79. There were, as already noted, a few self-consciously Breton activists disgracing the Breton name by using it as a banner for collaboration, but I have dealt with these above (p. 135); they are not relevant here, and they were only the tiniest of minorities.
80. The area was liberated by the Americans, and there was much coming and going across the Channel during the occupation, smuggling allied airmen out, and bringing help to the resistance in.
81. Chapman (1978a: 28); Ardener cited this in 1987 as 'symbolic expropriation', which will do just as well (Ardener, 1987: 43).

APPENDIX 2: THE HEROIC AGE

1. Chadwick is referring here primarily to the Germanic and Celtic examples; the neighbouring civilisation, for the Homeric and Servian heroic ages, was not the Western Empire, but the same principles apply.
2. See, for example, Roderick Morison's song to his patron, 'Oran do Mhac Leoid Dhun Bheagain', 'Song to John MacLeod of Dunvegan', in

Matheson 1970; Eachann Bacach's 'Iorram do Shir Lachann', 'Iorram to Sir Lachlann', in O Baoill (1979).

3. The great age of the Irish navvy is often spoken of in these terms; girls from the Scottish Gaidhealtachd used to travel to east coast fishing ports for work in the herring season, and Derick Thomson's description of them, 'Clann Nighean an Sgadain', 'The Herring Girls' (see Macaulay, 1976: 150–3) has many aspects that are apt.

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Aldhelm, *see* Lapidge and Herren, 1978.

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Bede, *see* Shirley-Price, 1968.

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Index

The Celts run through the book, and no thorough attempt has been made to catch them in the index; the various other categories of ethnic ascription must be regarded as being, in their different ways, systematically cross-referenced with the Celts. It is indexical bad-form to use adjectives as index entries: for the various ethnic groupings discussed herein, (Scottish, English, Germanic and so on) however, and given the nature of the argument, the adjectives are so clearly substantive that I have let them stand alone.