



Modernism and the
Celtic Revival

GREGORY CASTLE

This page intentionally left blank

MODERNISM AND THE CELTIC REVIVAL

In *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*, Gregory Castle examines the impact of anthropology on the work of Irish Revivalists such as W. B. Yeats, John M. Synge, and James Joyce. Castle argues that anthropology enabled Irish Revivalists to confront and combat British imperialism, even as these Irish writers remained ambivalently dependent on the cultural and political discourses they sought to undermine. Castle shows how Irish modernists employed textual and rhetorical strategies first developed in anthropology to translate, reassemble, and edit oral and folk-cultural material. In doing so, he claims, they confronted and undermined inherited notions of identity which Ireland, often a site of ethnographic curiosity throughout the nineteenth century, had been subject to. Drawing on a wide range of post-colonial theory, this book should be of interest to scholars in Irish studies, post-colonial studies, and modernism.

GREGORY CASTLE is Professor of British and Irish Literature at Arizona State University. He is the editor of *Post-colonial Discourses: A Reader*. He has published articles in *James Joyce Quarterly*, *Genre*, *Twentieth-century Literature*, *European Joyce Studies*, and *Theatre Journal*. He was awarded the Gerald Kahan Scholar's Prize in 1998 by the American Society for Theater Research for an essay on John M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*.

MODERNISM AND THE CELTIC REVIVAL

GREGORY CASTLE



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521793193

© Gregory Castle 2001

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provision of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published in print format 2001

ISBN-13 978-0-511-05679-6 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-10 0-511-05679-6 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-13 978-0-521-79319-3 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-79319-x hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this book, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page vi
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	viii
1 The Celtic muse: anthropology, modernism, and the Celtic Revival	i
2 “Fair equivalents”: Yeats, Revivalism, and the redemption of culture	40
3 “Synge-On-Aran”: <i>The Aran Islands</i> and the subject of Revivalist ethnography	98
4 Staging ethnography: Synge’s <i>The Playboy of the Western World</i>	134
5 “A renegade from the ranks”: Joyce’s critique of Revivalism in the early fiction	172
6 Joyce’s modernism: anthropological fictions in <i>Ulysses</i>	208
Conclusion. After the Revival: “Not even Main Street is Safe”	248
<i>Notes</i>	261
<i>Select bibliography</i>	292
<i>Index</i>	306

Acknowledgments

This book has taken several years and gone through many refinements. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the criticism and support I have received while working on it. I am grateful to have worked with two extraordinary editors at Cambridge University Press, Ray Ryan and Rachel De Wachter, who guided this project throughout with patience, respect, good humor and genuine concern that it shape up to its potential. Equally supportive and helpful was my copyeditor, Gillian Maude. Many colleagues and friends were, wittingly or not, helpful contributors in the process of writing this book. I thank especially my mentor and good friend John Paul Riquelme, whose support for this project has been generous and unstinting. I owe to him whatever clarity and felicity my style may possess. I thank Joseph Valente, who read an early draft of *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* and whose comments guided me in an early stage of revision. In the same vein, I thank the readers at Cambridge University Press whose reports proved helpful in final revisions. Several people have read parts of this book and I acknowledge their role in making it better than it might have been. Nicholas Grene was generous with his time and knowledge about Synge, and Richard Finneran's remarks on an embryonic conference paper on Yeats and ethnography proved singularly important. Peter Costello patiently helped me in my search for information on Irish Catholicism and introduced me to Anthony Roche, whose delightful remarks about Irish drama helped me understand the tangle of reactions to Synge's plays. Conversations with Patrick McGee, Colleen Lamos, Bill Mottolose and other Joyceans have, over the years, helped to shape my attitudes toward Joyce and his relationship to colonialism, anthropology and the Revival. In a similar fashion, my graduate students at Arizona State University tolerated me patiently as I began to make the arguments for this book and in the

process gave me opportunities to revise or expand on my own views. Amanda Yeates' efforts as a research assistant were indispensable and she was, in many ways, my first reader. I thank my parents, Ralph and Donna Castle, who gave me unconditional support and encouragement, and my dear friend Kristi Van Stechelman, who made my life better as I worked on this project. Finally, to my daughter, Camille, whose love has inspired and sustained me, I dedicate this book:

M'iníon, aon searc is grá mo chléibh

Abbreviations

<i>A</i>	<i>Autobiographies</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>The Cutting of an Agate</i>
<i>CT</i>	<i>The Celtic Twilight</i> (1902 edn)
<i>E</i>	<i>Explorations</i>
<i>EI</i>	<i>Essays and Introductions</i>
<i>FFT</i>	<i>Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland</i>
<i>L</i>	<i>Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats</i> , vol. 1
<i>OB</i>	<i>On the Boiler</i>
<i>Plays</i>	<i>The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats</i>
<i>Poems</i>	<i>The Poems of W. B. Yeats: A New Edition</i>
<i>SR</i>	<i>The Secret Rose</i> (1897)
<i>SRH</i>	<i>Stories of Red Hanrahan / The Secret Rose / Rosa Alchemica</i> (1914)
<i>TL</i>	<i>The Tables of the Law; and The Adoration of the Magi</i> (1914)
<i>UP1</i>	<i>Uncollected Prose</i> , vol. 1
<i>AI</i>	<i>The Aran Islands</i> in J. M. Synge, <i>Collected Works</i> , vol. II
<i>MS</i>	<i>Synge Manuscript Collection</i> , Trinity College, Dublin
<i>Playboy</i>	<i>The Playboy of the Western World</i> , J. M. Synge, <i>Collected Works</i> , vol. IV
<i>SH</i>	<i>Stephen Hero</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>Dubliners</i>
<i>P</i>	<i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>
<i>U</i>	<i>Ulysses</i>

CHAPTER I

The Celtic muse: anthropology, modernism, and the Celtic Revival

ETHNOLOGY, n. The science that treats of the various tribes of Man, as robbers, thieves, swindlers, dunces, lunatics, idiots and ethnologists.

Ambrose Bierce¹

Modernism and the Celtic Revival emerged out of the necessity of finding a way to teach W. B. Yeats's *Mythologies*. In pursuing the implications of Yeats's role as a folklorist, I was led to anthropology and its influence on the Celtic Revival as well as to the conclusion that very little critical work had been done in this area. To be sure, critics like Philip Marcus, Mary Helen Thuente, Edward Hirsch, and Deborah Fleming have explored the aesthetic and political implications of folklore, legend, and myth in the production of Revivalist texts; but no one has explored in any extensive way the influence of anthropology on the way Revivalists represented Irish culture and the Irish people. This study attempts just such an exploration, beginning with a consideration of the work of two prominent Anglo-Irish Revivalists, Yeats and John M. Synge, before moving on to consider the Catholic-Irish writer, James Joyce, whose work can be read as a critique of the anthropological assumptions of the Celtic Revival. My contention is that for each of these writers the desire to revive an authentic, indigenous Irish folk culture is the effect of an ethnographic imagination that emerges in the interplay of native cultural aspirations and an array of practices associated with the disciplines of anthropology, ethnography, archaeology, folklore, comparative mythology, and travel writing.

It is my chief contention that the relationship between anthropology and the Celtic Revival is an important feature of modernism as it developed in the Irish context. As Terry Eagleton has recently argued, Ireland is unique among European nations in that "as a whole [it] had not leapt at a bound from tradition to modernity.

Instead, it presented an exemplary case of what Marxism has dubbed combined and uneven development.”² On the one hand, this uneven development led to a situation in which modernization occurred in some spheres (parliamentary politics, colonial administration, the arts) but was retarded in others (industry, agriculture, education); but, on the other hand, it also created the conditions for a dynamic modernist artistic culture, especially among Anglo-Irish Revivalists who, because of their own ambiguous social position as members of a dominant ruling class *and* as proponents of nationalist self-determination, were perhaps better able to appreciate the contradictions inherent in a society mutually determined by the tension between what Eagleton calls the archaic and the modern. This may explain the conservative – indeed, at times anti-modern – tenor of much of Revivalist discourse.

Following Perry Anderson’s analysis of the relationship between modernity and revolution, Eagleton notes that there are three preconditions for a flourishing modernism:

The existence of an artistic *ancien régime*, often in societies still under the sway of an aristocracy; the impact upon this traditional culture of breathtakingly new technologies; and the imaginative closeness of social revolution. Modernism springs from the estranging impact of modernizing forces on a still deeply traditionalist order, in a politically unstable context which opens up social hope as well as spiritual anxiety. Traditional culture provides modernism with an adversary, but also lends it some of the terms in which to inflect itself.³

For Eagleton, the agonistic relationship between the archaic and the modern creates ideal conditions for the emergence of modernism; and these conditions exist most dramatically not in the metropolitan center, which lacks the key criteria of “breathtakingly new technologies” and social revolution, but on the colonial and decolonial margins: “the ‘no-time’ and ‘no-place’ of the disregarded colony, with its fractured history and marginalized space, can become suddenly symbolic of a condition of disinheritance which now seems universal.”⁴ Irish modernism, then, while it seeks to accommodate new technologies and revolutionary energies, is at the same time very conservative: “If there is a high modernism, there is little or no avant-garde,” and this is so because the Anglo-Irish monopolized modernism by translating political dispossession into cultural production. The deracinating effects of land legislation and an increasingly cynical Liberal party that seemed willing to abandon its client ruling

class to its own ineffectuality left the Anglo-Irish feeling acutely their ambivalent position between colonizer and colonized. Eagleton notes that this “in-betweenness” was “a version of the hybrid spirit of the European modernist, caught between diverse cultural codes” and that the Anglo-Irish Revivalists’ recourse to “the celebrated formalism and aestheticism of the modernists” was an effective and defiant “rationalization of their own rootless condition.”⁵

Eagleton’s argument that Irish modernism emerged in the estranging contact of modernity with a traditional or archaic culture finds support in a consideration of the role anthropology played in the development of the Celtic Revival’s modernist aesthetic of cultural redemption. This aesthetic is one of the most controversial elements of the Celtic Revival, in part because the anthropological authority behind it renders it internally contradictory, at once complicit with and hostile toward a tradition of representation that sought to redeem Irish peasant culture by idealizing or essentializing its “primitive” social conditions. This is true especially for writers like Yeats and Synge, whose meditations on Irish culture employ theories of cultural difference and discursive techniques and strategies borrowed from, or analogous to those found in, anthropology. Whereas the English or European modernist might regard anthropology as a way of integrating non-Western sensibilities and perspectives into an essentially Western frame of reference, the Revivalist must contend with the possibility of colluding with a discipline that in significant ways has furthered the interests of imperialism by producing a body of authoritative knowledge about colonized peoples. It is an abiding assumption of this study that an analysis of the role played by anthropology in the Revival may help us to understand the rhetorical and imaginative force of a specifically Irish form of anthropological modernism that seeks to transform indigenous materials into new cultural texts. However, given the uneasy relation of tradition to modernity in colonial Ireland, this task is complicated by the ever-present potential of complicity with the very discourses of nationalism, colonialism, and anthropology that invoke a binomial distinction between the primitive and the civilized in order to argue for the cultural and racial inferiority, political impotence and historical irrelevance of the native Irish people.

At the *fin de siècle*, the Revival was a complex and multifaceted movement, comprising a variety of approaches to the representation of Irish cultural. As Mary Helen Thuente argues, in *The Harp*

Re-strung: The United Irishmen and the Rise of Irish Literary Nationalism, the origins of Revivalism lie in the late-eighteenth-century United Irishmen movement. Another line of development, originating in the Young Irelanders of the 1840s, produced a form of Revivalism associated with the Gaelic League and Irish–Ireland nationalism. This development reaches a culmination in the 1890s with men like Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, Dr. George Sigerson, and Douglas Hyde, whose essays and speeches disseminated an ideology of “racial” self-improvement and national education and whose vision of Revivalism had a strong reformist orientation and sought principally to restore a belief in the essential piety and nobility of the Irish people. In a 1892 speech to the Irish Literary Society, Duffy held up the generation of the 1840s as a model for the present:

A group of young men, among the most generous and disinterested in our annals, were busy digging up the buried relics of our history, to enlighten the present by a knowledge of the past, setting up on their pedestals anew the overthrown statues of Irish worthies, assailing wrongs which under long impunity had become unquestioned and even venerable, and warming as with strong wine the heart of the people, by songs of valour and hope; and happily not standing isolated in their pious work, but encouraged and sustained by just such an army of students and sympathizers as I see here to-day.⁶

Hyde and Duffy were quick to point out just how far the Irish people had come from this “golden age,” which the famine and penal laws had obscured from the people’s memory. “What writers ought to aim at, who hope to benefit the people,” Duffy asserts, “is to fill up the blanks which an imperfect education, and the fever of a tempestuous time, have left in their knowledge, so that their lives might become contented and fruitful.”⁷ It is the “native” artist’s responsibility to rediscover the “natural” harmony of Ireland: “to be wise and successful,” writes Duffy, “the proper development of Ireland . . . must harmonize with the nature of the people, and correct it where correction is needful.”⁸ The belief in cultural or racial essence, together with a belief in moral and cultural reform, led Hyde, echoing Duffy and Sigerson, to complain that “[w]e have at last broken the continuity of Irish life” and that “the present art products of one of the quickest, most sensitive, and most artistic races on earth are now only distinguished for their hideousness.”⁹ These complaints and the general goal of racial self-improvement underscore the extent to which Irish–Ireland nationalists had inter-

nalized anthropological and colonialist assumptions about the Irish "race."

One of the chief concerns of *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* is to examine the issues raised above from the perspective of Anglo-Irish Revivalists like Yeats and Synge, as well as from the perspective of Joyce, whose critique of Revivalism effectively guaranteed its continued relevance as a context for Irish artistic production. There has been a great deal of work on the Revival in the last thirty years or so, beginning with Phillip Marcus's *Yeats and the Beginning of the Irish Renaissance* and, a little later, Richard Fallis's *The Irish Renaissance*. These texts are important for establishing the main lines of literary and historical descent and, in Marcus's case, for placing Yeats at the center of Revivalist theory and practice. However, as with any attempt to construct a genealogy, there are dangers of mystification and misrepresentation. Robert O'Driscoll's characterization of Revivalism, rooted in Yeats's conception of a "war of spiritual with natural order" (*SR*, vii), exemplifies a tendency to regard the Revival as absolutely resistant to Empire. He argues that the "imposition of an imperialist ideal was rejected by the writers of the Celtic Revival long before the political and military leaders created a physical body for the spiritual principles." Further, he maintains that "[t]he Celtic Revival was deliberately created as a counter-movement to the materialism of the post-Darwinian age" and that the Revivalists did not believe "that literature was a criticism of visible life, but that it was a revelation of an invisible world."¹⁰

Now, it may be true that the Celtic Revival was anti-imperial in its general orientation. But the claim that it rejected an imperial ideal is not always supported by Revivalist practice, especially when that practice is influenced by anthropology. This is not to say that Revivalists acted in willful collusion with imperial authorities, though some nationalists, like D. P. Moran, were fond of making such accusations. In recent years, books like Seamus Deane's *Celtic Revivals* and Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* have taken a more critical approach to Revivalism and its nationalist aspirations, paying careful attention to the problematic position of the Anglo-Irish Revivalist in a nationalist movement that often demanded racial as well as ideological authenticity.¹¹ Kiberd poses the problem in terms that underscore its anthropological dimensions:

The plaque which now stands on Shaw's cottage in Dalkey may well in its inscription speak also for Yeats: "The men of Ireland are mortal and

temporal, but her hills are eternal.” Behind such an aphorism lies a familiar strategy of the Irish Protestant imagination, estranged from the community, yet anxious to identify itself with the new national sentiment. While Roman Catholic writers of the revival period seemed obsessed with the history of their land, to Protestant artists that history could only be, as Lady Gregory insisted, a painful accusation against their own people; and so they turned to geography in the attempt at patriotization.¹²

The condition of estrangement from a community that issues a “painful accusation” against them forced many Anglo-Irish Revivalists into ambivalent positions suggestive of those taken by ethnographers who stand both inside and outside the culture they investigate, striving for a balance between participation and observation. The “turn to geography” that Kiberd notes is an attempt to shift the grounds of Irish identity from race to locality and to make a virtue of ambivalence. As Leopold Bloom tells the citizen, in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, “A nation is the same people living in the same place” (*U*, 331).

Of course, Bloom’s notion of national identity does not appease the citizen, and Bloom is left feeling as ambivalent as ever. The same is frequently true of the Anglo-Irish Revivalists who turn to geography – and, I might add, to the folk culture of a people for whom the land is of signal importance – in order to find a ground for national identity or, to use Kiberd’s term, “patriotization.” Unlike Bloom, however, their considerable social authority makes them vulnerable to the charge of perpetuating certain forms of discursive violence against the Celtic (i.e., Catholic) Irish. This was certainly the charge leveled at Synge during the controversy over *The Playboy of the Western World*, and it was leveled at Yeats as well, whose lack of Irish was often pointed out as evidence of his inability to say anything meaningful about Irish folk culture. The importance of a book like Kiberd’s is that it examines this ambivalent position from a perspective informed by postcolonial theory (especially the work of Frantz Fanon) which allows us to understand, at least in part, how it might be understood as a form of resistance. It is my belief that the charge of complicity can properly be weighed and evaluated only when we recognize that the authority of the Revivalists who established the Abbey Theatre, and worked legend and folklore into the fabric of a modern Irish literature, was essentially anthropological. Moreover, I believe it is important to recognize the extent to which this authority governs an ethnographic imagination capable

of transforming complicity with primitivist discourses into more or less critical revisions of the concepts of "tradition" and the "peasant."¹³

It is equally important to recognize that this work of revision was conducted by intellectuals who were not, strictly speaking, "native." Thus the problematic status of the Revivalist as a "native intellectual" makes the Irish situation a difficult one to analyze, for it lies outside the limits of a Manichean opposition that pits native against colonialist and "primitive" peasant against "civilized" participant-observer.¹⁴ Two important facts need to be acknowledged. The first is geographical. Ireland is an "internal" colony, which means it is situated in close proximity to the metropolitan center. This proximity creates problems of administration and social control that are not to be found in other colonies of the Empire. As a result, the standard model of core-periphery interaction, in which the core (i.e., London and the Home Counties) "dominates the periphery politically and . . . exploits it materially,"¹⁵ applies to Ireland in ways that are significantly different from its application in South Asia or Africa. The term "metropolitan colony" best describes the unique position of Ireland in the Empire, since both Ireland and England shared the same language, legal code, urban culture and geopolitical location.

But this proximity ought not to lead us to believe that Ireland somehow suffered less profoundly the violence of imperialism. Indeed, the very lack of discernible racial difference led to an especially pernicious, because discursive, form of violence. Matthew Arnold's *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, in an effort to resolve the problem of racial similarity, posits a Celtic "element" that, though part of the British national character, is nevertheless inferior to a stronger Teutonic one. The burden of assimilation was therefore greater on the Irish than elsewhere in the Empire, in part because assimilation was perceived as natural and inevitable. "Let the Celtic members of this empire consider that they too have to transform themselves," Arnold admonished. "Let them consider that they are inextricably bound up with us."¹⁶ The anthropological modernism of the Revival seeks both to counter and to rewrite a discourse in which, as David Cairns and Shaun Richards argue, "the Irish were racially and culturally located to a subordinate position in the Imperial community through, amongst other elements, [Matthew] Arnold's typifications of 'Celtic' personality as feminine, irrational,

impractical and childlike, and social-darwinist stereotyping of the Irish as inferior racially to the Aryan Anglo Saxons.”¹⁷

The second important fact is historical. The proximity to the metropolitan center produced two distinct, and distinctly dominant, socio-political groups: the English imperialists and the Anglo-Irish. Historically, the Anglo-Irish, in addition to holding most of the land, served also as regional governors, parliamentary representatives, and managers of major businesses and industries; as a ruling class (and here we might speak of the “Protestant Ascendancy”), the Anglo-Irish had long provided the political and economic links to England and its representatives in Ireland.¹⁸ A singular situation thus developed in which a relatively small group of non-Irish settlers, over a considerable period of time, transformed itself into something like a native Anglo-Irish class quite different from, say, the Anglo-Indian enclaves of the sub-continental colonies. Herein lies the crux of the problem for the student of the Revival, for, despite their political and economic affiliation, the English and the Anglo-Irish were not always allies; the curious sense of nativity that developed among the Anglo-Irish from the time of the Old English settlements in the early seventeenth century, while frequently manifesting itself in colonialist terms, just as frequently resulted in the fervent adoption of Ireland as a homeland and source of patriotic pride. But the pride and fervor, and most of all the confidence of the men and women who rallied around the United Irishmen in 1798 and later around the Young Irelanders, foundered on sectarianism, which for some revisionist historians was artificially fomented in order to drive a wedge between the Catholic Irish and their Anglo-Irish sympathizers.¹⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century, many of the Anglo-Irish began to feel isolated and marginalized, a condition that Roy Foster attributes to land reform, the inevitability of Home Rule and the rise of both Catholic nationalism and an increasingly powerful and vocal Catholic middle class.²⁰ It is easy to see why an Anglo-Irish intellectual, isolated equally from the Ascendancy ruling class and from an emergent Catholic nationalism, might feel his or her position as ambivalent. Acutely self-conscious of their marginal status as intellectuals in a colony moving inexorably toward some form of Catholic self-determination, Revivalists like Yeats and Synge were burdened by questions of political and cultural authenticity. And, while Joyce, raised and educated in Catholic institutions, may be less burdened by these questions, he nevertheless faced some of

the same problems of isolation and marginalization, the same sense of being both inside and outside culture, that led Yeats to Sligo and Galway and Synge to the Aran Islands. In part because he lacked the characteristic ambivalence of the *déclassé* Anglo-Irish intellectuals and in part because he wrote at an exilic remove (both literally and figuratively) from the culture that nevertheless occupied his imagination, Joyce remained aloof from the Revival; he was critical of it but did not repudiate it, and precisely in this way he succeeded in redefining it.

I have suggested above that the ambivalence felt by the Anglo-Irish Revivalists is analogous to that which we find in the ethnographic situation, which is not surprising given the remarkably similar investments in strategies of cultural observation and textual production. If Revivalists courted the possibility of duplicating the anthropological project of creating a “total” picture of the Celtic “race,” it is because they could not always effectively escape the disciplinary authority of anthropology when they appropriated its techniques of cultural observation and analysis (e.g., collecting and editing folklore, conducting fieldwork, writing up accounts from fieldnotes, and the like that are taught in universities and practiced on academic- or state-sponsored anthropological missions) or when they adopted the model of a unitary or “sovereign” subjectivity, presupposed as foundational for the ethnographic participant-observer, as a justification for their own experiential authority. We should not be surprised, then, to discover that the danger of collusion with anthropology was not only unavoidable but to some degree constitutive of their various projects of cultural redemption.

However, while the Celtic Revival is historically coeval with the new metropolitan “sciences” of anthropology and ethnography, and though it borrowed some of their characteristic theories and textual practices, it was far less bound up in the institutional structures of power that determined the work of academically trained anthropologists like A. C. Haddon, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, and Bronislaw Malinowski, and it had a different relationship with imperial authority. Thus, Revivalists were in a position to resist anthropology’s foundational theories of culture and some of its more egregious assumptions about primitive peoples. The contradictions inherent in these assumptions and in the emergent methods of scientific ethnography were either deeply repressed – a gesture that accounts for the ontological and epistemological self-assurance of a discipline that

derived cultural universals from the perspective of a superior race – or examined only in unofficial contexts, like Malinowski's posthumously published *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*. In literary texts like Yeats's *Celtic Twilight* and Synge's *Aran Islands*, which make use of anthropological theories of culture and employ ethnographic methods, the contradictions are readily apparent, indeed they constitute a signal feature of Revivalist writing about Irish culture. Because Revivalist writers had no professional stake in the discipline of anthropology, they were free to exploit the contradictions inherent to the discipline (which did not itself recognize the existence of such contradictions); but the absence of a professional stake did not prevent Revivalists from adopting forms of participant observation and modes of cultural translation by which native texts and practices were reproduced for and consumed by a metropolitan audience. The *undisciplined* use of ethnographic methods and anthropological theories of culture led to a style of representation that was at once scientific (or pseudo-scientific) and literary. Thus, conflicting authorities – aesthetic and anthropological – governed a discourse of cultural redemption that strove both to represent *and* to invent Irish culture.

As I suggested above, the argument that the Celtic Revival was complicit in a discourse of primitivism gains some credence when we consider the historical coincidence of the Revival and modern anthropology, both emerging almost simultaneously in the late-nineteenth century in response to quite different imperial pressures. In some important ways, Revivalists were engaged in anthropological work similar to that which was going on in Ireland under the auspices of British universities and learned societies. *The Celtic Twilight* and *The Aran Islands* might be regarded as part of a tradition of anthropological inquiry that had reached a culmination in the same decade (the 1890s) in which A. C. Haddon, the principal investigator of the British Association's Ethnographic Survey of the British Isles, conducted fieldwork in the West of Ireland. For it is undeniable that, just when legendary and folkloric texts were becoming available in translation, when scholars and collectors were beginning to find an audience, when the Royal Academy of Ireland and the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland were turning their attention to the West of Ireland – just at this time, Anglo-Irish Revivalists emerged with their desire to redeem an authentic Irish culture that was deemed incapable of self-

preservation and in need of “civilized” or “advanced” outsiders to represent them and to serve as “custodian[s] of an essence, unimpeachable witness[es] to an authenticity.”²¹ Countering “anthropological fictions” like the “purist notion[] that native cultures resist history, or that they disappear in its presence,”²² the Revivalists strove to relocate Irish folk culture in an Irish context and to create new, affirmative, and liberatory anthropological fictions of their own.

One of the questions this study will raise is, to what extent does the historical concurrence of anthropology and the Celtic Revival create the conditions in which Anglo-Irish Revivalists could acquire discursive power over the Catholic-Irish whose lives and folkways are the subject of a redemptive anthropological discourse over which they have little or no control? As Malinowski said of the Trobriand Islanders, “[t]he natives are not, of course, capable of a consistent theoretical statement,”²³ a convenient assumption for the ethnographer, whose analytical skill alone can unveil the secret functioning of a culture. But it is equally important to indicate the extent to which this discursive power can be read as a form of resistance both to anthropology and imperialism. In this sense, Revivalist complicity with anthropological theories and practices edges very close to the concept of “mimicry” as it is theorized by Homi Bhabha and other postcolonial theorists. But, no matter how we construe the relationship between Revivalism and anthropology, historical concurrence is not identity. Therefore, I want to insist that Revivalists are *not* ethnographers, at least not in the sense that they are trained in the disciplinary protocols of anthropological theory and ethnographic practice; nor should their texts be understood to have the same form or authority as those produced by university-trained ethnographers. Rather, I contend that the long history of Ireland’s subjection to anthropological inquiry provided the Revival with an historical opportunity to create (through strategies of appropriation and resignification) new representations of Irish culture and to resist the *mis*representations generated by British colonialists and anthropologists and Irish–Ireland nationalists. Though recent critics of the Revival have condemned its ambivalent relationships with these groups, I submit that it was this very ambivalence that enabled Revivalists and their critics to make such varied critical interventions in the debates on Irish national identity and the right to represent it. *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* is an attempt to reevaluate this

ambivalence and the anthropological modernism that crafted it into a progressive mode of cultural critique.

It would be instructive to consider some of the main features of British anthropology as it developed in the period with which I am concerned in this study, from the 1890s to 1922, the period encompassing the major works of Yeats, Synge, and Joyce. I want to emphasize, however, that the Revivalists did not move in a kind of developmental lock-step with anthropology; my argument is simply that in some cases Revivalists adapted anthropological techniques and practices that were available to them at the time they wrote, while in other cases they anticipated anthropology in their strategies of representing Irish peasant culture. Indeed, in at least one case – W. Y. Evans-Wentz's *Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911) – the situation is reversed, and an anthropologist cites Revivalists like Yeats, Lady Gregory, Hyde and AE (George Russell) as authorities on Irish mysticism and fairy-faith. If, as I contend, certain problems in anthropology, especially those which concern the ethnographic participant–observer, are homologous to problems that arise in the work of the Celtic Revivalists, then this homology warrants our attention and can help us better understand how modernity impinges on tradition in Ireland and how this impingement creates a uniquely Irish modernist sensibility.

In recent years, anthropologists and ethnographers have begun exploring the problems of writing about culture, problems which have existed in anthropology since the time of E. B. Tylor, considered by many to be the founder of the discipline. This trend toward revisionism has often taken the form of an exposé in which deconstructive analysis uncovers contradictions in anthropological theory and ethnographic method. In many respects, this has been a salutary trend, but it is not necessarily a new one; for a deconstructive impulse has always motivated the development of anthropology as it moved from one dominant theoretical perspective to another, from evolutionism to diffusionism to functionalism to structuralism and beyond. At each stage of development, new techniques and theories were put into place, and theorists and practitioners alike decried the inadequacy of what came before. Just as Malinowski criticized evolutionists and diffusionists – “the ‘survival’ monger, the ‘origin’ hunter, and the dealer in ‘cultural contacts’”²⁴ – so Lévi-Strauss criticized Malinowski and his followers in the functionalist

school for “find[ing] salvation in their asceticism and, by an unheard-of miracle, do[ing] what every good ethnographer must do and does.”²⁵

But, having said that revisionism in contemporary anthropology is nothing new, that it is coeval with the development of the discipline, I do not mean to imply that contemporary critiques of anthropology can offer us nothing that has not been offered before. Contemporary theories reflect contemporary attitudes toward culture, cultural difference, language, nationalism, race, gender – the whole constellation of problems that concern anthropology and literary studies today. New theories can alert us to problems in the development of anthropology that were not addressed by earlier generations, problems like racism, gender relations, or the relationship between language and national identity. Moreover, intellectuals of emergent postcolonial states have produced discourses that overlap in many ways with those of anthropology, and the rise of “indigenous” ethnographers has reframed many of the problems of anthropology, especially that of the participant–observer. These problems and concerns are new to the extent that they are increasingly self-evident to the anthropologist and ethnographer, and are held up for criticism and revision in monographs and theoretical works; but they are hardly new from the point of view of practice. Malinowski’s *A Diary* is a famous proof of my point, for in that text the ethnographer confronts the limits of his own objectivity, betrays a brutal strain of racism (“On the whole my feelings toward the natives are decidedly tending to ‘*Exterminate the brutes*’”) and of misogyny (he notes “the perennial whorish expression of the Kiriwina women”), and suggests that ethnography’s disinterestedness is a fragile thing indeed: “I get ready; little gray, pinkish huts. Photos. Feeling of ownership: It is I who will describe them and create them.”²⁶

For many contemporary critics of colonialism, anthropology developed as a “human science” within a context of imperial expansion and domination. Edward Said puts it this way: “[I]t is anthropology above all that has been historically constituted and constructed in its point of origin during an ethnographic encounter between a sovereign European observer and a non-European native occupying, so to speak, a lesser status and a distant place.”²⁷ The desire for an ethnographic encounter is bound up with the idea of Empire, as evidenced by the remarks of E. W. Brabrook, president of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland

who, in 1897, argued that “[a]n empire like that of the United Kingdom ought certainly to possess some central establishment [an Ethnographic Bureau] in which a knowledge of the races of the empire might be acquired.”²⁸ A few years earlier, John Beddoe, then president of the Institute, called for the support of all those who believed in the supremacy of the British Empire and its anthropological mission:

The Institute requires the active aid of all its friends, if it is to maintain the position that should be occupied by the only purely Anthropological Society in the greatest empire of this and of all time . . . It needs new men . . . who will not only follow out the old lines, but invade new territories, or rather cultivate those corners of our territory which have been partially neglected, for instance, psychology, if indeed that great domain may be spoken of as a corner.²⁹

At the back of such statements are three governing assumptions about culture: (1) the sovereign belief in the superiority of white Europeans, specifically Britons of a certain class and education; (2) the self-assurance of a positivist science; and (3) the right to possess or “acquire” the cultural knowledge of other races in the name and in the language of Empire.

The imperative to develop an Ethnographic Bureau stems in part from a desire to institutionalize the relationship between amateur collectors of ethnographic data and colonial administrators. “Of all the modern social sciences,” Said writes, “anthropology is the one historically most closely tied to colonialism, since it is often the case that anthropologists and ethnologists advised colonial rulers on the manners and mores of the native people.”³⁰ We get a sense of the importance of such advice in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*. In his Anniversary Address for 1896, Brabrook commended the Reverend Godfrey Dale’s ethnographic work, particularly his “Account of the Principal Customs and Habits of the Natives inhabiting the Bondei Country [E. Africa],” compiled mainly for the use of European missionaries:

[I]t is especially valuable as a record of the researches of a keen and well-equipped observer, who had acquired a remarkable mastery of the language of the natives, and had so secured their confidence as to be able to obtain full details of their practices in regard to male and female initiations, witchcraft, and the like, showing striking resemblances and at the same time marked divergences when compared with similar customs recorded as prevailing in Australia and elsewhere.³¹

The influence of such amateurs, and the missionaries and colonial officials they sometimes advised, on the formation of colonial policy is hard to discern with any confidence. But some revisionist critics of anthropology feel more confident about the role played by amateurs in the development of ethnography as a discipline.

Mary Louise Pratt, for example, argues that ethnography, as it developed into a modern scientific discipline, defined itself by contrasting its theory and praxis to those of “older less specialized genres, such as travel books, personal memoirs, journalism, and accounts by missionaries, settlers, colonial officials, and the like.”³² However, as Pratt argues, ethnography, particularly its “opening narratives” of arrival, “display clear continuities with travel writing.” Significantly, this continuity is repressed once “ethnography blinds itself to the fact that its own discursive practices were often inherited from these other genres and are still shared with them today.”³³

The precise nature of this inheritance – personal experience without any theoretical basis or principles governing practice – meant that ethnography’s origins lay in a subjective and well-nigh literary tradition of “unscientific” reflections on culture. Thus it was imperative for anthropology to develop disciplinary protocols that would distinguish their work from that of amateur travel writers and colonial officials. This imperative was recognized by E. B. Tylor, whose *Primitive Culture*, published in 1871, provided the foundation for a modern scientific anthropology. “It is wonderful,” Tylor writes, “to contrast some missionary journals with Max Müller’s Essays, and to set the unappreciating hatred and ridicule that is lavished by narrow hostile zeal on Brahmanism, Buddhism, Zoroastrism, besides the catholic sympathy with which deep and wide knowledge can survey those ancient and noble phases of man’s religious consciousness.”³⁴ Tylor’s scientific approach to culture was characterized by a method of comparative ethnology with a theoretical grounding in evolutionism. His primary goal was to place on a firm empirical footing a discipline that had hitherto stumbled in the quagmires of historical ignorance and theoretical inconsistency. Refuting the evidence for cultural degradation (that is, the process by which “civilized” cultures revert or fall into a “primitive” state), Tylor insists that, despite isolated instances of degradation, culture develops generally and inexorably toward higher forms of civilization:

The thesis which I venture to sustain, within limits, is simply this, that the savage state in some measure represents an early condition of mankind, out of which the higher culture has gradually been developed or evolved, by processes still in regular operation as of old, the result showing that, on the whole, progress has far prevailed over relapse.³⁵

A progressive, evolutionary model of cultural development can be established, Tylor argues, only by careful observation of native customs, practices, beliefs, and ceremonies and by equally careful extrapolation from archaeological research. The insistence on the localization of cultural phenomena is a refutation of the idea that innovations in primitive societies, when evidence for evolution or diffusion are absent, can be explained as instinctual or innate elements of human nature, what Tylor calls "transcendental wisdom." Rather, ethnographic evidence consistently points to the existence of "rude shrewd sense taking up the facts of common life and shaping from them schemes of primitive philosophy."³⁶

Tylor's influence on the early development of modern anthropology was enormous. Perhaps his most significant contribution was the definition of culture that he offered in the first sentence of *Primitive Culture*: "Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."³⁷ The elucidation of this "complex whole" became the principal activity of anthropologists and ethnographers who approached the project of cultural analysis with a wide array of methods and techniques. Franz Boas, for example, rejecting the evolutionism and diffusionism of Tylor and his immediate successors, put forward a theory of the "culture concept" which argued for a plurality of cultures, each of which was historically determined. For Boas, different civilizations had their own developmental histories, and he thus formulated a method in which localized knowledge was analyzed in historical contexts.³⁸ The "history of the fleeting moment" that for Lévi-Strauss constitutes an important part of Boas's contribution to anthropology,³⁹ underscores the near-impossibility of arriving at anything like a definitive historical account of cultures without reliable historical records. As Radcliffe-Brown writes, referring to the period 1908-9, "ethnologists were mostly thinking in terms of origins and history," and he began his study of the Andaman Islanders with a view toward making "a hypothetical reconstruction of the history of the

Andamans and the Negritos in general.” However, during the course of his work, Radcliffe-Brown discovered that “a systematic examination of the methods available for such reconstructions of the unknown past convinced me that it is only in extremely rare instances that we can ever approach demonstrable conclusions and that speculative history cannot give us results of any real importance for the understanding of human life and culture.”⁴⁰

A quite different development takes place in enterprises like the British Association’s Ethnographic Survey of the British Isles, which began work in the early 1890s. Headed by A. C. Haddon, the Association’s ethnographers employed anthropometric instruments in order to measure cranial size, “nigrescence” and other physical characteristics of peasants in the West of Ireland. Though rigorously empirical and objective, the anthropometric method could lead the ethnographer into comical situations that underscored the extent to which the psychological and sociological elements of native cultures were ignored or deemed irrelevant. In his *Study of Man*, Haddon quotes John Beddoe to illustrate some of the difficulties of fieldwork. Beddoe, after noting “the necessity and frequent difficulty of obtaining the consent of the owner of the head to be examined” (and this with the textual equivalent of a straight face), goes on to detail some of the ruses by which he got “unsuspecting Irishman” to submit to having their head-measurements taken.⁴¹ Though tolerantly indulged by the ethnographer, the behavior of the Irish subjects was regarded as little more than the expected reaction of a simple, primitive people; no attempt was made to understand the social psychology of the Irish subjects’ reactions to subterfuge. I will discuss Haddon’s scientific ethnography at greater length in chapter three of this study, but suffice it to say at this point that his methodology, and that of others of the Cambridge school, like W. H. R. Rivers and C. G. Seligman, in part because of its origin in the natural sciences, led to the development of a realistic style. This would become the “dominant mode of ethnographic prose,” a mode that Stephen Tyler refers to contemptuously as the “easy realism of natural history,” which is finally illusory because it promotes “the absurdity of ‘describing’ nonentities such as ‘culture’ or ‘society’ as if they were fully observable, though somewhat ungainly, bugs” and “the equally ridiculous behaviorist pretense of ‘describing’ repetitive patterns of action in isolation from the discourse that actors use in constituting and situating their action.”⁴² And, while there is some truth to

Tyler's claim about the self-assurance of ethnographers with respect to the realistic mode of representation, their methods of description are not as bound to naturalistic procedures as he makes them out to be – and this is due primarily to the development of a functional method that takes human psychology, especially insofar as it is manifested in social psychological behaviors, into account.

Radcliffe-Brown, a student of Haddon and Rivers, was one of the first to embrace what would become known as the functionalist method and to recognize the importance of social psychology and of the interpretation of social customs, rituals and myths. He was interested primarily in “social functions,” which “denote the effects of an institution (custom or belief) in so far as they concern the society and its solidarity or cohesion.” His analysis of the “ceremonial customs” of the Andaman Islanders revealed that their specific social function was “to maintain and to transmit from one generation to another the emotional dispositions on which the society (as it is constituted) depends for its existence.”⁴³ Only through intensive fieldwork can the ethnologist arrive at correct interpretations of such customs:

Living, as he must, in daily contact with the people he is studying, the field ethnologist comes gradually to “understand” them, if we may use the term. He acquires a series of multitudinous impressions, each slight and often vague, that guide him in his dealings with them. The better the observer the more accurate will be his general impression of the mental peculiarities of the race.⁴⁴

As will become evident below, Radcliffe-Brown's description of the field ethnologist and his understanding of social function served as a foundation and point of departure for the work of Malinowski, whose functionalist method, empirical and ahistorical, emerged in the 1920s and became the dominant mode of field-ethnography – a mode which enabled the exploration of social institutions and the “mental peculiarities” of natives as well as the development of totalizing, synthetic representations of native cultures created through the careful employment of scientific methods for the collection, translation, and analysis of ethnographic data.

The desire for a “complex whole” that subtends Tylor's famous definition of culture remained a constant in anthropology, though Malinowski's functional method redefined the ways anthropologists conceived of cultural totalities. “Functional anthropology,” he writes, holds “that the cultural process is subject to laws and that the

laws are to be found in the function of the real elements of culture.” These elements are “institutions, customs, implements and ideas.”⁴⁵ The conception of culture that emerges from functional anthropology is based not on any historical understanding but on the observation of these elements and the behaviors associated with them: “Culture is then essentially an instrumental reality which has come into existence to satisfy the needs of man in a manner far surpassing any direct adaptation to the environment.”⁴⁶ For Malinowski, culture is concerned primarily with secondary or derived needs, which constitute extensions of primary physiological needs (shelter, food, procreation); institutions develop in order to fulfill these derived needs and make up the “complex, many-dimensional medium of cultural interests” that is the object of ethnographic analysis.⁴⁷ It is out of this medium that the functional anthropologist constitutes, through scientific observation of empirical phenomena, the totality of culture.

The functional method, as it is enunciated in and exemplified by Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, involves the analysis not only of easily observable phenomena associated with social institutions, but also of those aspects of native culture that Malinowski calls “*the inponderabilia of actual life*,” a category that includes all manner of routine, mundane details, conversational tones and affective displays: “the subtle yet unmistakable manner in which personal vanities and ambitions are reflected in the behaviour of the individual and in the emotional reactions of those who surround him.” These inponderabilia are accessible for scientific formulation and documentation, but not by means of any “superficial registration of detail,” nor “by questioning or computing documents, but have to be observed in their full actuality.” The ethnographer must make “an effort at penetrating the mental attitude expressed in them.”⁴⁸ The functional analysis of social institutions like the ceremonial Kula exchange lays bare the structure of the institution as well as the constellation of attitudes, behaviors, and relationships that the Kula calls forth and organizes. The ethnographer “has to study the behaviour of the native, to talk with him under all sorts of conditions, and to write down his words. And then, from all these diverse data, to construct his synthesis, the picture of a community and of the individuals in it.”⁴⁹ Once the ethnographer has penetrated to the depths of the native’s mental attitudes, he then steps back and “take[s] in the whole institution with one glance, let[s] it assume a

definite shape.”⁵⁰ Lévi-Strauss criticizes this position of authority and the general truths that the ethnographer intuits through a process of “inner meditation,” arguing that the functionalist is disdainful of historical records or comparative studies with neighboring cultures because he does not want “to spoil the wonderful intuition” that enables him to grasp dubious “eternal truths” through “an abstract dialogue with his little tribe.”⁵¹

But Malinowski believed that such comparative approaches detracted from the more important business of understanding a single society in the present. For him, a synthetic picture of a native culture can only be drawn from the perspective of the field-ethnographer who seeks through empirical observation and analysis to grasp the totality of behaviors, attitudes, and relationships that constitute the complex function of a social institution. In this regard, Malinowski’s work is of signal importance, for it established the norm of intensive immersion in the field as the *sine qua non* of a scientific ethnography:

What is then this ethnographer’s magic, by which he is able to evoke the real spirit of the natives, the true picture of tribal life? As usual, success can only be obtained by a patient and systematic application of a number of rules of common sense and well-known scientific principles, and not by the discovery of any marvellous short-cut leading to the desired results without effort or trouble.⁵²

The ethnographer’s ability to draw “true pictures” of tribal life, to evoke the “real spirit” of natives, turns out to be not so very magical. The principles of scientific method to which Malinowski alludes were not clearly defined in the work of early ethnographers like Radcliffe-Brown, who readily admitted the limitations of an imperfect scientific method: “My failure fully to comprehend the Andamanese system was partly due to the difficulties of the language, in which I did not have time to become expert, and partly to the nature of the Andamanese terms, of which it is by no means easy to discover the meaning, even with careful observation.”⁵³ Less than ten years later, Malinowski was able to establish quite precisely the goals of a scientific ethnography that could overcome these obstacles: first, the ethnographer “must possess real scientific aims, and know the values and criteria of modern ethnography”; second, he ought to “live without other white men, right among the natives”; and third, “he has to apply a number of special methods of collecting, manipulating and fixing his evidence.”⁵⁴

A corollary to the methodological assurance that the ethnogra-

pher carried into the field is a conviction that the natives themselves were incapable of producing a “true picture” of their own culture because they lacked the ability to theorize their own social existence. If a native were asked to give an overview of the structure of the Kula exchange, for example, he would give only his own subjective views. “Not even a partial coherent account could be obtained. For the integral picture does not exist in his mind; he is in it, and cannot see the whole from the outside.” (To give him credit, Malinowski does suggest that the same could be said of “civilized” societies.) But it is not simply a matter of being inside the structure being analyzed, for the natives are, at bottom, incapable of “consistent theoretical statement.”⁵⁵ If they could articulate the function of their own social institutions, if they “could furnish us with correct, explicit and consistent accounts of their tribal organization, customs and ideas, there would be no difficulty in ethnographic work.”⁵⁶ Because the native lacked theoretical self-reflection, the ethnographer must set out to “grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world.”⁵⁷

But the norms of fieldwork embodied in Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* – the “scientific aim” of participant-observation, the selection and analysis of data governed by scientific principles, the use of native informants – are prey to internal contradictions that threaten not only the integrity of the norms themselves but the scientific nature of the results they are supposed to guarantee. These contradictions are rooted in the intersubjectivity that subtends the ethnographer’s participation in cultural activities and the establishment of rapport with native informants; both activities create opportunities for identification, empathy, hostility, erotic desire, and a host of other x-factors that must be suppressed in order to achieve the unbiased and objective point of view of the scientific observer.

The precise nature of these contradictions becomes clear when we examine Malinowski’s attitude toward his native subjects and the kind of representations he wished to make of them. On the one hand, the ethnographer’s attempt to “grasp” the native’s point of view is accompanied by a desire to represent more accurately the nature of the native’s mental attitudes. In this way, science “kills” the false picture of natives that had emerged in previous anthropological work (Tylor, for example, referred to “primitive” peoples as “lower races”), offering for the first time a “true” representation: “The time

when we could tolerate accounts presenting us the native as a distorted, childish caricature of a human being [is] gone.”⁵⁸ We may quarrel with Malinowski’s assertion that he offers a “true picture,” but we sense that the attempt has at least brought him closer to an understanding of the concrete social reality of native peoples and of the value of that reality. On the other hand, this picture, even as it corrects invidious notions of native psychology and social life, appears at the same time to mark a kind of regression. To be sure, Malinowski’s discovery of a “primitive knowledge of an essentially scientific character”⁵⁹ – which reminds us of Tylor’s discovery that the “savage” possesses a “rude shrewd sense” that “tak[es] up the facts of common life and shap[es] from them schemes of primitive philosophy”⁶⁰ – suggests an enlightened attitude toward primitive peoples. However, Malinowski’s claim that certain “queer and sordid customs” have “a core of rational and practical principle” strikes Lévi-Strauss as a “return to the eighteenth century, but to its worst aspect.”⁶¹ Presumably that aspect is the idealization of native peoples as “noble savages,” projections of Western nostalgia for simplicity, sincerity and “naturalness.” What Lévi-Strauss could not have known when he wrote these words was the quite different picture, in *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, of Malinowski’s ambivalent, often violent attitude toward the natives: at times, “the niggers don’t exist,” while at other times, the ethnographer feels a petulant, murderous rage toward them: “The natives still irritate me, particularly Ginger, whom I could willingly beat to death. I understand all the *German and Belgian colonial atrocities*.”⁶² (We hear in this second remark an echo of Malinowski’s incessant novel reading, specifically Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.⁶³)

As these remarks clearly indicate, Malinowski had mixed feelings about his motives for pursuing ethnographic inquiry. However, I do not think this ambivalence arose from any serious doubt as to the scientific validity of ethnography; rather, it seems to have arisen as the effect of psychological conflicts, often articulated in terms of nearly uncontrollable sexual longing, that undermined his concentration: “I am strong enough physically to overcome my lack of concentration and control states of mind I don’t approve of.”⁶⁴ “[P]otential lechery” and “chasing skirts” are consistently linked, in the *Diary*, with his incessant novel reading, and the combination throws him into a “Dostoevskian state” which is alleviated only by reminders of the importance of “eliminat[ing] *elements of worry out of*

my work. To have a feeling of the ultimate mastery of things.”⁶⁵ This mastery over his work is something the ethnographer gains by an appeal to disciplinary authority: “I *should* read ethnographic works.”⁶⁶ But *A Diary* reveals a more troubling “element of worry,” for the sexual longing Malinowski feels for his fiancée and the fantasies he has about native women become inextricably associated with his ethnographic work, a psychic reality that is condensed, like the language of a dream, into the repeated image of mosquito netting, which serves as a metonymy for the ethnographer’s isolation in the field. In one particularly evocative example, Malinowski writes of the intense longing he feels for his fiancée: “I missed her – I wanted to have her near me again. Visions of her with her hair down. Does intense longing always lead to extremes? Perhaps only under mosquito netting.”⁶⁷ The implication here is that the ethnographic situation fosters a state of psychological crisis that would not exist if the ethnographer did not have to “live without other white men, right among the natives.” Perhaps the inverse is also true, and the ethnographer cannot achieve the scientific aims he sets for himself without the “Dostoevskian state” that continually forces him to reexamine those aims and to clarify how best to achieve them.

The ambivalence of the participant–observer, here interpreted in terms of sexual longing and despair about getting his work done, may be more than simply unavoidable; it may, in fact, be a crucial determinate for productive anthropological work, but one that must be suppressed in the interest of science. James Clifford has remarked that the “ironic stance of participant observation” was rendered normative and “scientific” by Malinowski: “By professionalizing fieldwork anthropology transformed a widespread predicament into a scientific method.”⁶⁸ What I am suggesting is that this irony is determined in large measure by the kinds of ambivalence associated with psychological crises centering on sexual longing and a sense of dissociation or dehiscence of the self. The “predicament” to which Clifford refers could therefore be regarded as the inevitable byproduct of a “modern” phase in the development of anthropology, a phase which was ambivalently split between an impulse toward *modernization* and one toward *modernism*. In a process of modernization, the empiricism of A. C. Haddon, which had been grounded in the categories of the natural sciences, and the early efforts of people like A. R. Radcliffe-Brown to formulate a functional method of