Passing the Time in Ballymenone

CULTURE AND HISTORY OF AN ULSTER COMMUNITY

Henry Glassie

Photographs and Drawings by the Author

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Crossing Drumbargy Brae

When I stood first on the road into Ballymenone, in July 1972, two problems pressed me forward. One was personal, mine, but by analogy yours as well. The other was traditional, ours, but by responsibility mine alone.

As a young professional I had published a paper that conformed to academic norms and dutifully cleared a patch of intellectual new ground, but it offended the man I wrote about and lost me a friend. Friends are worth more than books, but writing is my way to discover what I think. Unable to retreat from analytic writing, I turned from people to study their shadows on things, their projections into earth. Artifacts became my company. I could question aggressively, push, rip, criticize. Old houses remained placid and unconcerned. But artifacts gave me more than things to destroy and rebuild with words. They led me to history.[1]

From somber old barns and merry round pots, I learned how to expand history beyond the control of a prosperous, literate minority, and I learned a way to force the study of folklore past description. It is strange that in the name of science many folklorists have abandoned history for events they can observe, while many historians have abandoned folklore for facts they can count.[2] Without history, folklorists lack the means to explain what they see, and they are left to circle forever, refining and refining techniques of description. Without folklore, historians can find no alien mind in the constructs they build out of small facts, which become but mirrors, infinitely reflecting back to us our own worn visages.

Artifacts taught me that folklore and history are one subject, and they taught me much about the dead who left sad songs and broken houses as their legacy, but what I learned was too clear, too thin, fragmentary. I yearned for resistance, conversation, live guidance, a sense of the wholeness of another life so that I might better shape my own. So when I stood, in the midst of my coming, on the gray road into Ballymenone, my private goal was to study people, to probe and write and learn without harming anyone. There can be no questioning my wish to cause no pain, to atone for youthful misdeeds, but why study people? That is our problem.

A century ago William Morris understood.[3] If our experience is con-

tained by the walls around us, we begin to mistake artifice for nature. Complacently, we accept preposterous conventions, dismiss our failings as life's fault, and lose the ability to separate the bad from the good. What is becomes what is right, and advancement becomes impossible.

Bravely we engineer programs out of abstractions, but since the abstractions were drawn from the smallness of our own experience, we are doomed merely to perfect our imperfections. Our need is for a sustained investigation of alternatives, a human science in service to morality.

This science will work by establishing a second center of experience distinct from our own. Around it facts will be built into a true portrait of another way of life so rich and complete it can stand on its own. If adequate the portrait will prove so powerful that we will come to respect the people it represents. We will not alter their arts. We will not meddle with their lives. If adequate it will challenge by its very integrity the validity of our own existence. Through comparison our culture will rise into awareness and disassemble; then we will draw an ellipse around two centers of equal power, and between those centers find a way to genuine improvement.

Scholars need energy to gather enough information to create full portraits. They need imagination to enter between facts, to feel what it is like to be, to think and act as another person. They need courage to face alternatives, comparing different experiences to help their fellows locate themselves.

For William Morris, alternatives lay backward in time. Studying old churches, finding them symbols of missing spirit, he learned respect for their creators and worked against the violence of restoration to protect and preserve them as they stood, unaltered, intact. He collected old manuscripts and incunabula, but he analyzed old books to make new books and studied the carved stone of ancient buildings and the taut line of skaldic verse to envision a new society. Looking backward, he laid the foundations of modern design and dreamed of a better society, but since his inspiration came from the past, his futuristic vision, so clear as to detect flaws in his own utopia, can be ignored, mocked as nostalgic by critics anxious to protect their portion while the world around them runs with blood.

Historical imagination seems to turn us from the future. The revolutionary act of preserving artifacts from the past that are better than those we produce is defused, diffused when preservation becomes a hobby for antiquarians. Old societies alienated from us by chronology become but academic curios, no challenge at all to the status quo. The outward search for alternatives can likewise die into thrills and souvenirs, but when the traveler is serious the quest through space leads through confrontation into culture, into fear, and it can prove trying, convincing, profoundly fruitful. The crucial experience for William Morris did not come while he was examining medieval artifacts or reading philosophical argument, but when he met real men in Iceland. From them he learned courage and took hope.

The reason to study people, to order experience into ethnography,

is not to produce more entries for the central file or more trinkets for milord's cabinet of curiosities. It is to stimulate thought, to assure us there are things we do not know, things we must know, things capable of unsettling the world we inhabit. The success of anthropology in the first half of our century proved that the great verities are beyond the grasp of middle-class intellectuals whose encloseted meditations can but spin endlessly into themselves. Only serious investigation of the human reality, in the highlands of New Guinea, the green hills of Ireland, the back alleys and boardrooms of our cities, can form the basis for rational and decent values.

Artifacts had carried me back, but I needed an outward venture to put things in their place, to let old houses do what they could and not more, to locate a new center of experience. My problem was to be scientific, compassionate, respectful; it was to create an ethnography strong enough to cause disquiet in my world, but gentle enough to cause no discomfort among the people I wrote about. There were other problems I did not have.

The landscape displayed no community. Before me, between tall hedges, a road lifted at a flat sky. Across the green, whitewashed houses scattered in no apparent pattern. The map folded in my rucksack had words on it but no clustering of dots to indicate a center of population, but I had to know the community. Our society, shifting (its critics say) from rugged individualism to frightened selfishness, needs information on how people form voluntary associations. Enacting our culture without a pause for thought, we study artists as individuals outside of their social scenes and delude ourselves into worthless theories of creativity. To help my profession and by extension my society, I wanted to study people as they grouped themselves through action, but I was not worried that I did not know where I was. Had there been a village with a name, I could have been misled, for I wanted to construct a community as the people who lived in it did, and there was no reason to assume their arena of action would match a territory on a map.[4] In no hurry, I was confident that one person would lead me to another. Connections would multiply and repeat. Eventually I would be able to drape the net of their social motion over a map of their place.

I knew nothing about the community and I had no hypothesis. Time for study is limited, not everything can be recorded, and erecting a proposal to test helps guide what to record. Before coming to Ireland, I had tortured myself through a meditation on hypotheses. Experience taught that they were not necessary, but I found sociological arguments to the contrary convincing. Study without hypotheses, and you might reach no conclusion. Or you might come to any conclusion with no means for its evaluation. But these are caveats inappropriately imported from natural to social science.[5] Culture is not a problem with a solution. There are no conclusions. Studying people involves refining understanding, not achieving final proof. Perhaps if you observe people as though they were planets or orchids, proceeding without hypotheses is foolhardy, but that was not my intention.

Ethnography is interaction, collaboration. What it demands is not hypotheses, which may unnaturally close study down, obscuring the integrity of the other, but the ability to converse intimately. It is vain to attempt ethnography without a knowledge of the language of daily life, and I expect much fancy theorizing about "unconscious mind" to be but compensation for an inability to ask and have answered a complicated question. English is the language of Northern Ireland. Using it, I would be able to find the community's wise speakers, and while scanning broadly to test their generalizations, I would let them guide me. They know.

They will not have the culture reduced to a formula, ready to hand over, but the community will include people who can turn interviews into conversations, who can present its significant texts. These will not take the shape of philosophical treatises, and they may not even be verbal. They will emerge as recurrent actions recognized to compress most richly the essence of right thinking. By recording them exactly I will have a base for study, created not by me but by them. I might interpret incorrectly, but the data will be inviolably right, and science will be served. The community's thinkers will point me to the key texts around which the rest of life will spread as context. I must be patient.

Years later I entered an English village. My Irish experience prepared me to attend to stories and farming practices. I heard stories, people farmed, but within a couple of months I was listening to bells. I had not planned to study call-change ringing—I had never heard of it—but once I settled in I found that was where the community had its intensity banked: in the ringing chamber, under the great bells of an ancient church tower.

What I would study did not worry me. People would direct me to one another. Among them I would locate teachers who could suggest texts to analyze. The community would appear, hypotheses would grow naturally out of experience. What did concern me was comparability.

Asking for comparability, I do not ask for the culture to be rolled flat and cut into bits to compare with other bits from other cultures, but that the culture as a whole must come out looking like a human product. Then it can be compared with others to scientific ends, and it can be compared with our own to keep us from drowning in vanity.

Of all the techniques devised within the academy to prevent comparison by making people seem less or more than human, errors traditional to two disciplines that have concerned themselves with people in small country places most concerned me when I was on the road to Ballymenone.

Historians often exalt leaders into angels, aflutter on wings of free will, then denegrate most people into plodding dumb beasts, brutes of conditions, followers who can do no more than take orders. Folklorists celebrate the individuals stewed into masses by conventional historians, but they disregard conditions to concentrate on exceptional moments, little instants of freedom and escape. While the historian sees peasants as oppressed, grease for the economic system, meat for the battlefield, the folk-

lorist sees them as singers and dancers. Either way, country people seem weak or silly, hardly a challenge to us.

Human beings are defined neither by conditions nor by moments of escape. Wishing for frightening comparability, I want to see people as they are: free and stuck in the world. My interest is in the constant interplay of will and circumstance, so I care less about the rare celebration than about the daily round, and I care less about form than about content. I am concerned less with the structure of society than with the quality of social life, less with the economic system than with the nature of work, less with genres of literature than with the meaning in texts. I ask not how people fit into the plots of others but how they form their own lives, not what people do once in a while but what they do all the time.

My task was not to write another ethnography, but to write accurately and usefully about the workaday reality of other people. I wanted to know how people who share my world make it despite boredom and terror. Northern Ireland was a good choice.

Life's larger conditions loomed monstrous in Ulster. I could not possibly lapse into some vision of country people as jolly, colorful singers, nor would I be able to break them out of history, confining their culture in timeless circularity; they could not be portrayed as unaware, mere beasts. Journalists may repeat one another, describing the situation in Northern Ireland as an anachronistic religious squabble, but it is dreadfully part of our era. The political solution of partition was pioneered in Britain's first colony, and the variety of economic-cultural conflict that rages in Ireland will continue to erupt in small countries, once colonies, for the rest of our days.

I was in Northern Ireland to create an ethnography that would avoid common error by facing the commonplace. It did not matter where in Northern Ireland, as long as it lay near the Border and included both Catholics and Protestants, so I was in County Fermanagh because colleagues in Belfast and Dublin said they knew little about Fermanagh, and while my own problems guided me, I wished to contribute as well to the quite different native program of folklore research. And I was in this part of Fermanagh because it pleased me.

Green small hills swelled around me, split by tree-lined hedges, and before me rose a gray-blue road. There was nothing to be done, no excuse for delay. I let it take me up, then paused at its crest. To my right, a river glinted through the trees. My map called it Arney and indicated that after swinging south it would curve northeast to end like my road at Upper Lough Erne. An account written in 1700 called this area "wild," saying it was "scarce inhabited by any human creatures but ye O's and ye Mac's, who pillaged all that comes in their way, robbing the whole country," and concluded that "it was ye common Proverb of ye Northern part of ye Country to express a thing irrecoverably lost—'It's got beyond the Arnoy.'"[6] The Arney gleamed in flashes; the land could not have looked gentler, less wild, more inviting.

"A maze of woody islands" slipped past Arthur Young when he came to Fermanagh in 1776, rowing across Upper Lough Erne to describe this as a place of "wet tenacious clay," mostly under grazing, broken into small farms where people work "with spades they call loys" and subsist on potatoes, milk, and oat bread. After visiting Lough Erne about sixty years later, Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall wrote: "Both lakes are richly studded with islands, mostly wooded, and in many places so thickly clustered together as to present the appearance of a country accidentally flooded; . . . and it may be easily conceived that two sheets of water so enriched, and circled by shores finely undulating, to a great extent richly wooded, and backed on most points by mountains of considerable elevation, must possess the elements of beauty to a remarkable degree." At the end of the last century, Lough Erne's native novelist, Shan Bullock of Crom, wrote, "Our lake had the sinister look of a flood that had submerged a forest region; very often, indeed, it was a true flood, creeping up under everlasting rains to the foot of the hills, destroying crops and fuel, making roads impassable, leaving a precious deposit on meadow land that made the haycocks thicker when summer came again." Away from Lough Erne, through Fermanagh country like this, wrote Bullock, for miles "towards the Mountain were countless holdings, none of them more than forty acres in size, most of them much less, all of a pattern, cut into small fields by criss-cross hedges, and somewhere on each a small white house . . . hundreds, perhaps thousands, of holdings, each dependent and contributory, all pouring in rents, this half-year, next half-year, every half-year, as a matter of course and legalised custom, possibly after much struggling on the part of those paying, but with little effort on the part of those receiving other than was needed to sit at a desk in the agent's office and give receipts for money down." Since Shan Bullock's youth, the rampaging Lough has been tamed, the tenants have become proprietors, but the look of the land, soft, hushed, and dotted over with white houses, remains as he described.[7] Standing upon a gentle rise with the damp green around me, I could not imagine a loud noise disrupting the quiet that spread thickly and liquidly between the low rounded hills.

Surveys in our century have termed this land bad and poorly drained and described its people as mostly Catholic, unprosperous farmers dependent upon cattle of rough grade.[8] I stood, surrounded by lush small fields, trim hedges, a landscape under control, covered by the cool scent of distant water. Then I turned down to meet a ruined old house by the roadside. Camera, tape measure, and notebook appeared, detailed plans grew across paper. Then, damning myself for delay, for doing what I knew how to do, I pushed on.

To my left, a low ridge ascended. Above it poked the gable of a house. Light smoke played from its roof, and I forced myself through the first opening in the hedge, reclosing it with a dead branch, slipped up a wet field, scattering its cows, fumbled along the next hedge, scratched through,

stumbled into a drain, mucked my way up another field, skirting its bull, tore through more thorn, and stood finally atop the hill in front of the house. In front of it too stood a compact, handsome man in a black suit holding a rosary in both hands before his breast. He said I looked tired and invited me in, quietly introducing himself and the small man who sat in a big chair by the fire. They were two old brothers, he said, who lived on their lone. He was Peter, his brother was Joseph, they were Flanagan, and he apologized for the accommodations, gracefully placing a stool for me at the hearth between them.

Long after, once we had ceased mistaking each other for representatives of different nationalities, Peter would say I had scared them. I was too tall and they could not identify my accent. People who emigrate from here to America go to the Bronx. They return with Yankee accents. I said I was American, but they guessed my speech for Scots. I told them why I was in Ireland, but they guessed I was a detective. We talked about the weather.

Even after I spotted two violin cases leaning in a corner and began a conversation about music, what I said made no sense. Mr. Flanagan said he liked all music, though really the old Irish music was the only kind that was any good. He asked what kind of music I liked, and in the midst of an endless answer that twisted and qualified itself into nothing, I mentioned "Soldier's Joy," by chance the only tune to appear both in the Southern Appalachian fiddling repertory I knew well and the local one I did not. That made a little sense.

Cordially, our conversation staggered forward through the topics of high prices and the cold, wet summer, "the worst season ever there was," said Joseph. Then at my second request, Peter rose slowly, formally, apologized for being out of practice, lifted the bow suavely and splashed it into the strings, sending a torrent of notes, a wild cascade, through the room. Music rushed, flowing, swirling, breaking to the edge, perhaps over, then it was quiet again. Joseph smiled softly. "You are satisfied now," Peter said. Backlit curls sparkled around his head. The shirt, buttoned neatly to his throat, gleamed white beneath his smile. My enthusiasm gushed, and though he would tell me later that my words seemed still to lack reason, they appeared sincere. The fiddle sang again, then the tin whistle. Tunes and time passed, the conversation cracked, and we were laughing. I was the plainest, best gentleman ever to come out of America. He was the greatest musician since Michael Coleman. We were shaking hands over the stones sunk in the clay before his doorway. They apologized for the poorness of the entertainment. I protested I had never been entertained so well and promised to return in two days, on Sunday, so we could get his music on tape and go out for some drinks. "God bless," they wished me, and Peter, called P, showed me the way across the pasture to the lane leading smoothly down from their place, Drumbargy, to the road I came in on, the Rossdoney Lane. I was off.

Soon I met Rose Murphy on another road, and Hugh Patrick Owens in

the bog, and Hugh Nolan, and he sent me to Ellen Cutler, and everyone told me to visit Michael Boyle in the hospital, for "Michael was very entertainin when he was at himself, so he was."

Half a year later, having come around the back way by the bog pass, I climbed an old carttrack up Drumbargy Brae and was stopped by the sweet smell of turfsmoke, a puff borne along the hill from the Flanagans' chimney. I pictured their hearth and turned, looking downhill to the flat brown bog, across to the green hills, their cows in gentle motion and houses glowing in low sharp light. I knew all their inhabitants and understood the community.

To the world, they live in Ireland, to Ireland they live in the North, to the North they live in Fermanagh. They use three kinds of spatial division smaller than the county to locate themselves more exactly.

Smallest and most important is the "townland," an official division entered on maps, in records, used by the post office and police for addresses. Townlands vary in size, containing two to fifteen households, and the terrain shoves them into odd shapes, but all are as small as they can be and still afford their inhabitants all the kinds of dirt necessary to life, and they are conceptually circular. Grassy upland rises in the middle of each, where houses are built, cows graze, and hay grows. Around the perimeter spreads bog, where turf is cut for fuel. Between bog and upland, a ring of moss ground bears gardens, and through the bog run drains to separate townlands from each other. Some townlands are grouped into unofficial, unmapped "districts," all are contained in parishes.

Cleenish is their parish, named for an island two miles north of the mouth of the Arney in Upper Lough Erne where Saint Sinell, student of Finnian of Clonard, established a monastery in the sixth century. They call their area the Lower End of the Parish. It is bounded on the south by the Arney, on the east by Lough Erne, on the north by the Back Road and the Chapel Road, on the west by the Swad Road. But boundaries are less important than centers. There are two large, predominantly Catholic centers—the district of Ballymenone on the east, the townland of Sessiagh on the west—oriented toward the Arney Cross with its chapel, school, store, and pair of public houses. Between and west of them are two smaller, predominantly Protestant centers, oriented toward the Bellanaleck Cross with its store, Orange Hall, and little Church of Ireland church, its tilting tower pinnacled in Georgian Gothic style. People shop at the store nearest them, and without any hint of religious-political commitment identify themselves when away from home as coming from about Arney or Bellanaleck.

The Lower End of the Parish is a place on the land and in the mind, but when I asked people about their kin and their movements, when I accompanied them working by day and socializing by night, I found that the constellation of households created by common action did not match a corner of the parish. People living on major routes formed associations along the road, while those living on smaller lanes followed the natural grain of the land along the Arney River. Ballymenone's center shifted southward

into Upper Ballymenone, the townlands of Drumbargy and Rossdoney, and sent its ties westward, leaping road and bog, to Sessiagh.

Their community is a matter of constant negotiation, always shifting, sometimes radically. They call their place "the locality" or "our district of the country." It is real, but no permanent name can contain it precisely, so, playing free with their words, I will call it the District or use the folk name Ballymenone loosely.[9]

In 1972 (this book's present) the community had forty-two households. They are numbered easily, but the population is elusive because children who have left home often return for extended periods to help with the farmwork, and some do not leave again. The total 129 is about right. Religion is clear—thirty-three households are Catholic, nine are Protestant—but economics are not. Only two households gain no living from the land. Twenty-four depend primarily on farming. The others draw livelihood about equally from farmwork and jobs with the County Council or in factories and shops in towns, but occasional employment, generally of a family member other than the farm's "boss," and a decent system of subsidy, grant, and pension bring cash from beyond the fields into all homes.

Connections beyond the community do not melt away equally in every direction. Social affinities are strongest to Inishmore, east across a strip of the lake, and to the districts of Mackan, Montiagh, Derrylin, and Kinawley, running south-southwest to Swanlinbar beyond the Border. They call it "Swad" (early eighteenth-century sources spell it as they pronounce it, "Swadlinbar"[10]), and they get there for drinks and sport on Sunday nights when public houses are closed in the North and the best singers and musicians come out of their small rural communities along the Cavan-Fermanagh border to form a casual parliament of artists in the pubs of Swad. Commercially and administratively, Ballymenone is pulled five miles northward to "the Town," Enniskillen, county town of Fermanagh, set on an island between Upper and Lower Lough Erne. The population in 1971 was only 6,553, but the feel of the Town is thick and urban.[11] Its long main street, busy with shops and pubs, curves from the cattle mart on the east, across the bridge by the Orange Hall, past the Court House, Town Hall, churches, and cathedral, to exit over the western bridge between the gray stone Water Gate and the clean neoclassical bulk of the old barracks, sandbagged and bound by barbed wire.

Confidently, I lingered on the hillside, the fragrance of turfsmoke around me. Across the grass the red metal roof from which the smoke blew touched me with familiarity. I would spend the night, my last in Ireland, with P and Joe. The day before, a chat with Michael Boyle had been squeezed between visiting hours. He was up, dressed, ready to go home. The conversations we recorded, he said, had done him more good than the doctors' medications. That evening had been charmed by Mrs. Cutler, filled with wit and tasty food. Now I was on my way to see Hugh Nolan. I would

turn, cross the brae through the trees, and descend Drumbargy Lane to make tea for him while he put on tape a few stories he had artfully worked into the conversation when the crowd gathered at his hearth a few nights past. I knew the community and had found its speakers. Tomorrow I would return to the States with twenty-four reels of tape, 2,192 photographs, 2,387 pages of notes, and my problems unsolved.

I had missed the center. During the next year I freed the folklorist within to write about Christmas mumming, a comical little play of death and resurrection performed from kitchen to kitchen when the year turned black. Once it had been a bright spot, a high point in the year. By discussing mumming and all it drew to it, the Great Days and Set Times, gay moments of festivity, I planned to cut away the exceptional and find the commonplace.[12] When 1973 ended and 1974 began, I was back in Ireland, the first draft of a book complete, with questions prepared to polish it off. Peter Flanagan had played Miss Funny, treasurer of the mumming squad. He was gentle and generous. We got the questions behind us. Michael Boyle had played the Doctor, the fullest, funniest role. He had been out of the hospital and worked at the hay, but he lay now, stilled, thin, the light gone from his eyes. "Is that me Yankee friend?" he asked, his hand on mine. My questions dissolved. We tried to smoke and talk as we had in the past. Soon Hugh Nolan would write me of his death on January 24, 1974.

March 1976: The book was out. I had sent copies ahead, but there had been no time for replies, and after a shallow, fretful sleep in a cold room in a small hotel in Enniskillen, I walked rapidly out of the Town. Changes met me. Tin had replaced thatch. The main road had been leveled and widened. Electricity had stalked on poles into Ballymenone. But there was no change in my welcome. "The book is great," P said, and when a neighbor interrupted our reunion with a request for a lock of plants, the book, wrapped in paper, was brought down to the kitchen and he was forced to take it and talk. "That's a quare book," he said, turning its pages, thinking about cabbage, leafing slowly from back to front until he came to the portrait that began it. "That man looks like Wee Joe," he said. "It is," P said impatiently, "it is ourselves." And then he revealed that I was the author and that the book told "the whole of the ould mummin."

"I love me book," Mrs. Cutler said when I entered her kitchen. All that "annoyed" her was people in the east of Ulster who call potato bread "fadge" when fadge is really soda bread. She had memorized passages out of it and recited them when we chanced to arrange ourselves into the book's scenes. Sitting in her big chair by the fire, she said, "She sits in her big chair by the fire. She has a lovely smile. . . . Do I, dear?" At that she would laugh, then smile. She does.

The book was not entirely harmless. I consigned its royalties to my teachers in the District (as I have again with this one; less is unimaginable), and some jealous talk rose among the neighbors who had overestimated

the profits scholarly books bring. But my teachers were planning the next book before I was, and their letters keep me at it. One problem down: I had written and lost no friends.

Encouraged, its way cleared of distracting exceptions, my thought became direct. Common days break into light and dark. While the sun shines, they work. When night falls, they assemble in the kitchen and talk. The nighttime gathering of neighbors is called a ceili (pronounced kaylee). Its center is held by stories.

I had not come to Ireland to record stories, nor had I concentrated on them during my first visit, but the more I considered my experience and read through my notes, the more stories consolidated their centrality. It is not the folktale as a category of oral literature that claims such significance, but those stories adults who know one another tie into the conversation when they face the long night together. As I thought about stories, life began to arrange itself around them as context.

Context is not a difficult notion. But loose colloquial use can trick us into employing "context" to mean no more than situation. Then the power of the idea evaporates, and studying context we enlarge and complicate the object we describe but come little closer to understanding than we did when we folklorists recorded texts in isolation. Context is not in the eye of the beholder, but in the mind of the creator. Some of context is drawn in from the immediate situation, but more is drawn from memory. It is present, but invisible, inaudible. Contexts are mental associations woven around texts during performance to shape and complete them, to give them meaning.

Meaning is a difficult concept, for it means too much. Meaning begins in the correspondence of sensate form to invisible idea, logically links intention and response, then expands through private association to join all a thing is with all it can be in the minds of its creators and perceivers. Finally, meaning carries through the shared experience of form and idea to philosophical bedrock. Most crucially, meaning is that which joins people through things, transforming forms into values, values into forms. Understanding values is the purpose of study.

The tale in the ceili is central, situationally, contextually, philosophically. It emerges in the middle of the nighttime's conversations. It draws widely from life to make itself meaningful. Its meanings lead into confrontation with fundamental values.

When I went to Ireland next, in June 1977, I felt I had located the culture's key texts, and stories were our topic. I came to stories from ceilis, from their situation, rather than the other way around, and that was good, for I knew how they fit their scene, and I knew I was dealing with tales that were alive and throbbing with importance. They could lead me into the culture.[13] But I had happened on them as they were told and had returned to record only those I heard first in ceilis as part of a general program of interview. Though recording sessions usually led to new tales, I could have missed whole classes of narration. Fragments of repertories can be made

meaningful, but since stories provide contexts for each other, only the entire repertory can be followed properly into culture, into the deep structure of values. So I asked questions about what stories are and how they are classified, and when I showed up again in August 1978, not only did I have the texts of 231 stories, mostly taken verbatim from tape, but many were the same story in different renditions by the same and different tellers, and I was confident I had the community's corpus of ceili tales. I did not know every story. Mr. Nolan told me six during that visit, and one was new to me—the origin myth of the bicycle. But all I heard confirmed the patterns emerging in my book's early chapters.

This book was blocked out and mostly written by the time of my latest trip to Ireland in December 1979. While Christmas came without mummers, and black winds broke over the hills, I sat quietly with Peter Flanagan, Ellen Cutler, and Hugh Nolan, asking them what they thought of the ideas in this book.

When the people of Ballymenone tell stories, they say what they know to discover what they think. My writing is the same. I learned why—though the enterprise of the folklorist should be to record, present, and analyze a community's complete works—that is not the discipline's norm. It takes too long and the result cannot fit into one volume. So I began with historical stories because they are rich and because Peter Flanagan said "the old history" would make the best topic for my next book. Tales of mystery and comedy are left to the future. More important, I learned that the reason I could concentrate on stories was that I had come to an understanding of the whole of daily life first. Once I tried to present stories as alone occupying the cultural center, I found it necessary to double my task and tell about the day as well as the night.

Day and night are different experiences. Each is a situation, each has a memory, a history. These connect into a culture that complexly traps people, forcing them into awareness, into courage, into action.

Night's stories remain one entrance to the culture. We begin on the road into Ballymenone by seeing how stories fit together into a system constructed by those who tell the tales.