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Mad Kings, Proper Houses, and an Asylum in Rural Ireland

> For learn, there is no steadfastness of purpose upon the roads, but only under roofs and between four walls.
>
> —W. B. Yeats, *Mythologies*

WHAT IF THEY built an asylum and nobody showed up? By asking this question, I mean to forefront the problem of what sort of a structure it is to which people are committed or present themselves. In the extensive literature on asylums that has developed over the course of the last three decades, most authors assume a needy or dominated population to exist around such buildings who eventually give over their unfortunates to fill them up. Few theorists, moreover, look seriously at those who staff these structures, who are, at least in the rank-and-file jobs, generally locals. Thus, while we can find an ample literature about asylums as tokens of a type, we find much less on the actual local existence of any particular institution.[1]

This essay developed out of a project investigating the cultural and historical relationships between a (recently) large mental hospital, St. Columba's Hospital in Sligo town, serving the counties of Sligo and Leitrim in the northwest of Ireland, and a market town and its environs, containing about 1,600 people, that for the purposes of this study I am calling Kilronan. In this paper I am interested in the local presence of a bureaucratic structure, examining how this institution is locally constituted as well as looking at some of the historical changes that it has effected at this locality. By proceeding in this fashion, the argument both echoes and reinforces recent calls in the discipline to treat together local, colonial, and national histories, insisting that understanding historical change in culture and understanding how culture conditions historical change are equally necessary parts of a comprehensive anthropological analysis.[2]

The Asylum as a Local Place

From the beginning of my fieldwork until its conclusion, I was struck by the sometimes subtle, sometimes gross differences between what I thought I was investigating and what was stressed in the speech and actions of my informants. Among the most striking of these differences was the contrast between my original research idea of examining more or less discrete categories of psychopathology and the way my informants emphasized the physical presence of the asylum as such in recounting the personal experience of being mentally ill or in formulating opinions about such persons.

Consider one middle-aged man's response to my attempt to elicit his understanding of the stigma surrounding mental illness current in his youth:

> In the country parts, now, going to "the mental" would be the worst thing that could happen to you. You were never treated the same after that. I know for myself growing up that there was something about that place that changed people. I would never look the same on someone who had "spent the fortnight," as we used to say.

Maurice is a mechanic in Sligo, the son of a farmer who has made a successful life in the town. His garage is within sight of the Old Building, and he is frequently greeted by clients on the way from the hospital to the town and back again.[3] Other than these greetings, he has little contact with the residents of the hospital, although he does interact with many of the nurses who live in or near the town, due to his reputation for high-quality work and his relatively modest prices. In short, Maurice's opinions of the asylum or its categories are unlikely to have been colored by a special relationship with the institution.

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What impressed me most in Maurice's thinking was that he understood a question that I thought probed a concept of mental illness to apply to a person physically contacting a specific structure in particular circumstances. The image of going to "that place" in these circumstances and spending a particular amount of time therein, rather than the application of a diagnostic category (or even a more generalized notion of crazy), forms the core of his recollection.

Witness another, quite similar, aside made to me by a very different informant, Patrick, an educated bureaucrat originally from Kilronan but currently living in Sligo town. This gentleman, seemingly far removed from "peasant" prejudices, made the following remark during the course of one of our discussions concerning the ever-quickening pace of deinstitutionalization in the area: "I insisted on this before it became popular: you should be very careful of putting someone in a psychiatric hospital, because once it's done, you've done something to him that can never be undone."

In both these recollections, the asylum qua physical thing possesses a virtue to transform at least certain persons. This virtue appears to be incarnated in the institution's physical presence, particularly in its existence as a specific place, rather than in the abstract ideas that motivate a particular sort of institution, or even in the strange abilities of those it houses.

Finally, the mental hospital itself was also not quite what I expected. To be sure, like examples of its type all over the world, it is divided into wards, numbered rooms that help to divide various classes of patients. Its constitutive parts also bear their function indexically: Admissions, Adult Medical Unit, Geriatrics, and so forth. As I became more of a fixture around the hospital, however, I became conversant with a very different terminology that to this day forms the basis of my mental map of the place. I had my office not in a ward for geriatric patients but "on the Hill." I would find a nurse that I was looking to interview not on a numbered ward but "in the Chapel," or "near the Bowery." I would describe an interaction I had with one patient to another as something that occurred while passing through the "Straw Lodge." Outside the walls of the institution, moreover, other named places with seemingly obscure histories connected to the mental hospital, such as "the Tobacco Field" or "the Gold Rappers," were important markers in describing events or giving direction for clients, staff, workers, and some townspeople. All these names are connected to stories, and my learning such stories was both a tool and a register of my increasing command of a complex knowledge base concerning the institution and some of the local history to which it has contributed.

Thinking about Irish Asylums

From the worried testimony of witnesses in front of parliamentary committees in the early 19th century to sophisticated etiological and ethnographic analysis in the late 20th century, many observers have seen a *need* for the specialized services of which the asylum forms a part in Irish genetics, history, and/or culture.[4] A widely read work along these lines is Nancy Scheper-Hughes's *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics* (1982), which in many ways is an extended cultural and historical analysis of why "the Irish," or at least some of their representatives, should make use of the services provided by a mental hospital more frequently than other groups.

Scheper-Hughes's main points dovetail with a long scholarly and popular tradition of national character studies of "the Irish" that finds an unease with the physical world—and a desire to withdraw from it, either physically or into the realm of talk, fantasy, and drink (or, in parts of Scheper-Hughes's argument, into the delusions of mental illness and the walls of the asylum)—to be a quality of an Irish national ethos.[5] This practice relies heavily on the process of "recognition" in cultural history—cultural-historical sources are combed for familiar practices, which then get read back into the present as an explanation for modern behavior.

This strategy of finding ancient precursors for modern praxis is also widespread in the scholarship outside of anthropology concerning the presumed relationship between the Irish and insanity. Thus, the ancient Brehon Laws are routinely praised by many authors for the "enlightened" distinction that they make between various forms of irrationality and degrees of criminal responsibility for transgression committed while in these states (e.g., Kirkpatrick 1934:6; Robins 1986:14–15), as if the distinctions that the modern West currently recognizes between species of irrationality and gradations of individual agency are conceptually transparent to any civilized society.

These sorts of analyses, however, beg the question of the conceptual transparency of both the mental hospital and the services it offers. Given the data that opened this essay, it seems clear that we need to understand the hospital as a local presence before we can understand the purported needs in the populations with which it interacts. To put it another way, we need to understand something of the historical trajectory of a special sort of institution. We need to know how a colonial structure, a district lunatic asylum, constructed by London and Dublin Castle at the end of the Great Hunger in 1848, came to lead various local lives as St. Columba's Mental Hospital, a site of baleful transformations, and a collection of place-names and accompanying narratives.

Madness and Spatial Logics

To begin this interrogation of the local presence of this asylum in rural Ireland, I will, with some trepidation, analyze something very old in Irish history to illuminate the current existence of an Irish social fact. I say "with some trepidation" because too often this sort of cultural-historical reference is used to imbue the west of Ireland in particular with a sort of transhistoricity that, ironically, obviates the need to know much about the past. The canon of Irish historical and literary works is, of course, vast, so it is no surprise that something approximating modern notions of madness has at times been the subject of native exegeses. I make no claim to being able to cover such a rich trove in such a short work. It merely seems to me that even in a text that has been analyzed in much detail by researchers interested in the presumed relationship of the Irish to forms of pathological irrationality, there exists a large gulf between the ways two different cultures engage in externally similar projects, namely, the recognition of the difference of the lunatic and his or her spatial localization and possible transformation. This gulf makes a difference in our appreciation of what sort of place the Sligo institution might be, not because history has left no traces on rural Ireland, but precisely because it has.

Buile Suibne (The frenzy of Sweeney) is a medieval Gaelic poem concerned with the problem of the loss of rationality and personhood (Heaney 1983; O'Keeffe 1913). The text even lays out some practices by which this rationality, once lost, can be regained, as well as detailing the accepted behavior of, and the social and geographic place for, a person so afflicted. Traditionally, this text has been used as evidence that the ancient Gaels recognized "madness" in much the same way as the modern West. Sweeney, for example, is mentioned in passing in T. Kirkpatrick (1934:5), Scheper-Hughes (1982:78), and Joseph Robins (1986:7) as part of their preambles concerning the beliefs that ancient Ireland presumably held about insanity, implying that modern and ancient understandings of extreme irrationality are essentially similar. I will offer a very different reading, suggesting that ideas of irrationality and its relationship to place and person quite different from that found in the modern bureaucratic nation-state exist in this text.

These are the pertinent parts of the story, but the reader is well advised to investigate this short work in full.[6] In brief then, Sweeney is the king of Dal Araidhe (Dal Arie), a warrior-chieftain, quick to anger and fierce in battle. In the first scene of the poem, Sweeney is introduced in the act of assaulting Ronan Finn, a famous cleric. Before he can do serious harm, however, our hotheaded protagonist is called away to war. Through the complicated vicissitudes of medieval Irish dynastic politics, he is to fight on the plain of Maigth

Rath (Moira) against Donal the high king (his former liege).

This battle turns out to be a long and bitter one, but the two sides are kept in a semblance of moral order by the presence of Ronan, whose person is a surety that both sides will obey certain minimal rules of conduct. Sweeney, however, rejoices in violating all the rules laid down by the cleric, breaking every truce, slaughtering enemies outside the appointed hours of fighting, finally slaying one of Ronan's acolytes and casting a spear at his sainted person. This spear breaks the bell around Ronan's neck but leaves the cleric otherwise unharmed and in a maledictory mood. For this impertinence, Ronan beseeches God to curse Sweeney, transforming him into a *geilt* (madman, lunatic, wildman), condemning him to a life of wandering and fearful flight throughout the length and breadth of Ireland.

It is surprising that Sweeney's reaction to this malediction has received relatively little scholarly comment, given the large body of critical work on this poem.[7] After the curse is spoken, the armies clash, and Sweeney goes through a definite set of transformations, all clearly connected to the losing of his station of human person–in–society.

* * * * *

Darkness, and fury, and giddiness, and frenzy, and flight, unsteadiness, restlessness, and unquiet filled him, likewise disgust with every place he used to be and desire for every place which he had not reached. His fingers were palsied, his feet trembled, his heart beat quick, his senses were overcome, his sight was distorted, his weapons fell naked from his hands, so that through Ronan's curse he went, like any bird, in madness and imbecility.[8]

Ronan clearly changes Sweeney through some very specific steps, stripping him of his senses, by affecting his faculties of vision (darkness and distortion) and of touch (his feet shake and his fingers are palsied). Ronan's curse then strips Sweeney of his weapons and, in short order, even his clothes, for Sweeney (with one respite) is naked throughout the rest of the story.

The most important step of this deculturation, however, is Ronan's stripping of Sweeney's sense of place. Ronan's curse fills Sweeney with "disgust for every place he used to be and desire for every place he had not reached." Thus, after the curse, Sweeney no longer belongs anywhere in Ireland, an exile that is literally played out in his first day's flight, which covers every point on the island.

He halted not from his headlong course until he left neither plain, nor field, nor bare mountain, nor bog, nor thicket, nor marsh, nor hill, nor hollow, nor dense-sheltering wood in Ireland that he did not travel that day. [O'Keeffe 1913:15]

The rest of the poem, with a brief reprieve, chronicles Sweeney's incessant wanderings. It is clear that

Sweeney's former sense of personhood was intimately tied into a dual sense of place (within a hierarchical social structure on the one hand and on a specific landscape on the other), and that the gist of Ronan's punishment of Sweeney is the removing of this place sense.

Sweeney's only real resting place is a forest clearing, Glen Bolcain, a spot on the landscape with a very particular virtue.

> That place is a natural asylum where all the madmen of Ireland used to assemble once their year in madness was complete.
>
> > Glen Bolcain is like this:
> > it has four gaps to the wind,
> > pleasant woods, clean-banked wells,
> > cold springs and clear sandy streams
> > where green-topped watercress and languid brooklime
> > philander over the surface.
> > It is nature's pantry
> > with its sorrels, its wood-sorrels,
> > its berries, its wild garlic,
> > its black sloes and its brown acorns.

The madmen would beat each other for the pick of its watercresses and for the beds on its banks. [Heaney 1983:13][9]

Glen Bolcain's attributes are laid out very clearly in this passage. The glen is a specific spot on the landscape, an identifiable place, that is internally structured on the basis of both cardinal points and a river. The glen is also externally situated within a framework of other specific, name-bearing places in and around which the poetic action operates. It is bountiful, providing food and shelter for its inhabitants without stint or cost, a specific, identifiable place where madmen assemble, are provided for naturally, and live together in some numbers.

Far from giving us an easy access into a medieval Gaelic vision of insanity, *Buile Suine* presents us forcefully with a cultural connection between place, person, and narrative history and, as importantly, the direful consequences of the rupture of the various legs of this triad. Ronan's marvelous malediction that ruthlessly rips the king from human society and geography, Sweeney's plaintive laments about his new station, and the mad king's verbal celebration of the natural landscape that slowly weaves a new world about him all echo this connection between persons, places, and stories. The poem concludes with the Christian saint Moling providing Sweeney with narrative and eschatological immortality by recording his deeds, giving him a Christian burial, and, most important of all, creating in his honor a place-name in Old Irish, Tiupra na Gealta, the Madman's Well (Heaney 1983:13–14, 83; O'Keeffe 1913:154–155).

The more we recognize our categories of madness and its amelioration in Sweeney and his adventures, the less we potentially see of the rupture in his personhood that is the overarching concern of the poem. Ronan does not transform Sweeney's personhood by occult shiftings within an abstract internal locus of mind (and still less in a self-evident somatic locus of brain). Instead, he verbally ruptures the specific connection between a particular human person and a cultural environment of places. Moling not only forgives the king in a Christian sense by providing for his immortal soul but also reintroduces him to the cultural landscape by creating a place-name that will catalyze the retelling of his story at some future date. Thus, both Sweeney's frenzy and his slow reconnection to a human and natural environment take place through the rending and repairing of culturally recognized verbal links binding together narrative, place, and person.

Changing Names

The purpose of this passage through a medieval poem in the analysis of a 19th-century colonial asylum turned 20th-century mental hospital is to make the point that whatever problems bedevil Sweeney and whatever relief he finds for them seem to have very different qualities from a modern understanding of insanity. In itself, this difference would call into question those analyses that use passages from this epic as evidence that insanity was recognized as self-evident in ancient Ireland. I am also arguing that the basic theme in *Buile Suine*—that the transformation of social persons, the social and natural environments, and, indeed, an entire moral order—is constructed on a narrative scaffolding of place-names and, by and through a sense of place, elegantly organizes an immense amount of cultural and historical material on the existence of the Sligo-Leitrim asylum.

Even today, one cannot live long in rural Ireland without being struck by the importance of "place" as a conceptual category.[10] The landscape exists as named places with remembered histories. Human action, human memory, and human dialogue constitute place and history. The elementary structure in this system is the relationship between a specific spot on the landscape and a remembered story, mediated by a place-name. Thus, the landscape is inescapably historical, and meaningful local history is quintessentially grounded. In my own Kilronan experience, the imponderable minutiae of historical consciousness—when one of Mary Pat's cows escaped or when the Brennan cousins fell out over a boundary marker—are constructed on and through a framework of place-names. In the limiting case, the event is unique, a sort of once and only time. In the

limiting case again, a spot on the landscape is an agreed upon topographical spot. More commonly, however, narratives and boundary markers are more fluid phenomena subject to physical and conceptual displacement, repression, or effacement. The important point is that the sense of boundedness of the event is reflected in the specificity of a spot on the landscape.

There is a term for the lore and uses of place-names that bears investigation in this regard. The Irish word *dinnsenchas* fuses together our relatively separate senses in English of the naming of localities (topography, if you will) and historical consciousness. It goes beyond this connection in many ways by also invoking a moral order through this connection of story and place. Thus, a place-name becomes "an emblematic tip of a narrative iceberg" (Coleman n.d.), one that connects locality, history, and purpose.[11] By not separating what we would call in English "topography" from either meaningful narrative or historical consciousness, this system requires that an enormous importance be invested in place-names precisely because the only way into this system is through such names. Conversely, knowledge of such names at once situates a person geographically, historically, and socially. Where names are so important, etymology is anything but an innocent or obscure affair, and this point is of capital importance in assessing the local history of the asylum. Etymologies at once stake a claim to a particular place *and* a particular history.

A Transformative Place

If the naming of places is a crucial issue in understanding how space has been traditionally produced in Ireland, then we must appreciate how central have been discourses and practices about space in the construction and running of asylums. The designers of the asylum insisted that it was the virtue of the asylum-as-physical thing to assist in the cure of deranged thought. The building itself was seen to be a critical tool for rehabilitating the lunatic.[12]

> The provision of a suitable building is in fact a most essential condition to any judicious form of treatment. The treatment of the lunatic is to be accomplished not merely *in* but *by* the Asylum, which may be looked upon as a great therapeutic instrument itself, without which the efforts of the physicians could accomplish little. [Fogerty 1867:39]

The designers of the asylum strove mightily to cut up space into places on a calculus of *function*. It was precisely the regular, cyclical aspects of the human condition—eating, sleeping, working, recreation—that demanded separate spaces. Here, function is a timed timelessness that organizes life in the abstract but is itself unconnected to any one life, and still less to any

one place. More importantly, this construction of function is connected to no particular story but a calculated, orderly cycle of human existence. The "people work" (Goffman 1961:1–124) of the 19th-century asylum was accomplished by and through a transparent instrumentality, the asylum building, whose logic was itself a balm to disordered minds.

The fundamental issue for lunatics in this cultural imaginary was precisely the fact that, like children, they did not understand the ordering of the world.[13] They were unclear about their place within it, how to move about in it properly, and their correct (i.e., productive) purposes therein. Thus, the 19th-century asylum, as understood by writers such as William Fogerty (1867), was both logically and self-consciously designed by concerned, paternal agencies as an elaborate map or model to guide lunatics. It was divided into male and female spheres, spaces for work and recreation, exercise and rest. The inmate learned such divisions and labored within them as a major step toward the production of himself or herself as a new person.

Transforming the Place

This official preoccupation with producing a particular sort of transformative space in the mental hospital tended to route local speculation about the institution into a relatively limited number of cultural channels. As we have already seen, specific places, certain glens, but also holy wells, ruined churches, and other specific spots on the landscape, were widely understood in Ireland to possess the power to treat and cure afflictions. Such spaces could also cause harm if certain rules were not followed.[14] Patrick Logan, an Irish medical doctor interested in folk medicine, gives a description of just such a site whose mode of use among country people is at the very least superficially consistent with the potential use of a 19th-century district lunatic asylum.

> At Tarmonbarry in County Roscommon there is a very old graveyard with a ruined church and a holy well nearby. Until a few years ago, many people visited the well, prayed there and drank the water. I was told that few people now visited it, but when I was there, I saw rags tied on the bushes, showing that cures are still being sought and certainly people believe that a visit to the well may cure some diseases. An unusual power attaches to the ruined church. It is believed that if a patient suffering from mental illness went with a companion and slept one night in the ruins, his illness would be cured. If he went, but did not sleep, the outlook was less favorable. [Logan 1990(1972):134][15]

W. Wakeman (1852:47) also mentions the high place that this same church occupied in the esteem of those who visited the site for cures. Such a site is a specific place that has the power to transform certain classes of

persons contingent upon their remaining within it for a period of time. It was also freely available to all in need.

The cultural recognition of the possibility and availability of transformation is one of the keys to understanding the current abilities attributed to the mental hospital. The direction of transformation (from rationality to irrationality or the reverse) was less important than the fact that such transformation was both possible and embodied as a virtue of a particular place. Robins (1986:9) speaks of a rock chair that possessed the ability to cure deranged individuals but also to drive mad those rash enough to sit on the chair while rational, a sense of transformative potential that seems to me to be quite consonant with that around the Sligo-Leitrim asylum. Thus, we have, on the one hand, an indigenous conception of named transformative spots, specific locales where occult forces could be freely, sometimes even unwillingly encountered and, on the other, a carefully constructed apparatus of the bureaucratic state that advertised its ability to change certain classes of persons on precisely the idea that it was a physical manifestation of transformative order.

Even the designation of the District Asylum System in Ireland for the exclusive use of "paupers" (a class that, in any case, constituted the majority of poorer counties like Sligo and Leitrim) supported this local interpretation. First, there is a definite unease in traditional thinking about Irish cures concerning the immediate exchange of money or any other payment for healing.[16] To be sure, there is a compelling obligation accrued by the recipient toward the holder of the cure, but, insofar as possible, this obligation should not be absorbed under the rubric of price. Second, because there was almost no economic relationship between the patron and the place, the District Lunatic Asylum was a novel accretion of colonial power for an Irish peasant in the 19th century. In this respect, the asylum contrasted very strongly with other forms of government aid of that time. These other institutions functioned on the basis of an almost hypereconomic rationality, offering a series of carrots and sticks to a population that was assumed to be logically agentive, given adequately stark choices and close supervision. The Board of Guardians of the Union Workhouse (established under the Poor Law of 1838) was by law required to investigate claims of pauperism in order to make sure that effectively no property (less than one-fourth of an acre) was owned by the distressed citizen, a rule that many country people rightly took as tantamount to presenting them with a choice between giving up the family cabin and outright starving. But this was precisely the point of that institution, to offer aid to all, but make that aid so distasteful that only the truly desperate would make the rational move to avail themselves of it.

The asylum, on the other hand, was generally much easier to satisfy with respect to the requirement that a potential inmate was a pauper. A clerical note or even the deposition of a "respected citizen" that neither the "lunatic" nor his friends were capable of providing for him privately, rubber-stamped by a magistrate, and almost invariably approved by the board of governors of the institution, was generally enough for admittance.[17] In the years of the *Minutes of the Board of Governors of the Sligo-Leitrim District Lunatic Asylum* (Board of Governors 1854–1925), never more than 2 percent of the admissions for any one year were challenged with a letter seeking cash support from the family or friends involved, and fewer than half of these in all years appeared to result in actual payment. The Sligo-Leitrim District Lunatic Asylum, moreover, had a reputation with the Inspectors of Lunacy of pursuing such claims with much greater frequency than other institutions and for being more willing than most to mix paying and nonpaying patients.[18]

Such attributes and uses of the asylum allowed it to live a dual existence denied to almost all the other British intrusions into the area. It was at once an alien institution and a more or less understandable spot on the landscape. To both systems, it was an important place that attracted cultural speculation. It was a specific, spatially localized structure that transformed persons, and such transformations needed to remain outside of the realm of economic exchange, available to all comers. In short, the institutional virtue of the transformative order of an asylum aimed at paupers meshed surprisingly well with local understandings of transformative places in the narrative memories of country people.

Transforming Ireland

For those who put it on the landscape, however, the asylum was also a multilayered model of spatiotemporal order whose structure imposed not only a curative influence on troubled individual minds but also, implicitly, a critical gaze upon a local landscape that shared few of its organizing assumptions. At this level, the logic of the asylum in Ireland must be understood in the context of colonial understandings of disordered persons, disordered living spaces, disordered landscapes, and the importance of state appendages in the redemption of such disorder. Caesar Otway, a 19th-century Anglo-Irish writer, gives a description of such disorder and its amelioration that could be replicated time and again in 16th- through 19th-century sources.

I consider the Coast Guard establishment one of the greatest blessings ever conferred on Ireland—a positive blessing in not only putting an effectual stop to smuggling, the nurse

of profligacy and crime; to wrecking the stimulus to dishonesty and cruelty all around our shores; but also in locating prudent, honest, humanized, and often religious men, with their nice wives and children and all their clean and decent habits among a dirty, ignorant, and careless people. [Otway 1845:111]

While most foreign travelers found that Irish land was good, it seemed at the same time to possess a chaotic property for the English imagination. Woods and bogs often made overland communication difficult and, in nearly every generation when an Irish right to self-determination was asserted in arms, provided cover and refuge for rebels and outlaws. The settling of this landscape, in the dual sense of pacification and the establishment of centers of civility, is a long-standing theme in English understandings of Ireland (Smyth 1992 and Taylor 1995, among others).

For British and Protestant ascendancy observers, this quality of space in Ireland was often embodied in the distinction between the cabin and the hovel and their relationship to their respective landscapes.[19] The first is the neat, progressive habitation of the yeoman (generally Protestant) farmer, the other, the squalid burrow of a representative of a regressive race (Catholic in the eyes of unsympathetic observers). The former is connected to the taming of the land, the latter to its history of hostility to British civilization. In this vision, the organization of space is intimately connected to the organization of life. If farms are fenced and neat and houses are clean, well lighted, and airy, then tenants are generally successful and contented.

While traveling near Kilronan in 1862, Henry Coulter, a correspondent for the *Sander's News-Letter*, described a situation that brings this understanding of landscapes and living spaces very close to the official rationale behind the boundaries, divisions, and temporal order within the asylum.

> During the Famine years Lord Palmerston assisted a large number of the tenants who were unable to hold their lands to emigrate to America. The farms were then properly squared, and the tenants were encouraged to improve their land and to provide themselves with comfortable dwellings. They were supplied with lime at half price, and with windows, 3'9" by 2'3", and with doors 6.5' by 3'. In order to stimulate the people to adopt a better system of agriculture, and to observe neatness and cleanliness in their household arrangements, his lordship gave premiums for superior crops of clover, turnips, cabbages, etc., for the best managed farm, and for the best and neatest cottages on the estate. . . . Iron field-gates are also given to the most improving tenants. . . . The result of Lord Palmerston's efforts is to be seen in the neat and comfortable cottages of the people, and in the advanced state of their agriculture. [Coulter 1862:267–268]

It is easy to dismiss such a description as a euphemism and apology for rack renting, eviction, and consolidation of holdings. Although, from some accounts, Palmerston was one of the more humane examples of the large landholder in Ireland, we discover later on in this piece that he has refused to renew the lease on another townland nearby and is in the process of consolidating holdings, forcing some to emigrate, and "tearing down hovels and inducing people to build comfortable cottages."[20]

Note the care that is given in describing such improvements. Precisely measured doors and windows, the imposition of formal ownership through the consolidation of scattered holdings (squaring), and the erecting of gates and fences are in themselves gifts to the people, as if once these are in place no further complaint among a contented tenantry could possibly arise. The enrichment of land with lime and the lightening of darkened hovels with windows are important components of the same process, that of improving and enlightening a regressive race and landscape under the paternal eye of a concerned master. Both processes are consciously devised to discipline and redeem disorder. Fertilizers that increase yields, windows that let in light, and documents and fences that precisely demarcate what is one's own in law are metonymies and embodiments of civilization.[21] The new cottage, then, does not merely shelter its inhabitants, the new farms do not merely increase yields, they *organize the life* of those who depend on them for shelter and sustenance. Like the asylum, this environment (and the labor needed to maintain it) disciplines a new person into existence, while the activities of this new person in turn produce a new sort of rational space.

Producing Persons

In recent years the widespread transformation in Irish housing along the lines envisioned by Lord Palmerston has drawn the attention of students of 19th-century Irish social history (T. Inglis 1991). Those who valorized the atmospheres of the progressive cabin and the asylum, of course, looked upon light and air, separate spaces for sleeping and dining, and the like, not just as ends in themselves but as a means to an end of a new person in Ireland who was, according to British measurements, rational, law abiding, and industrious. Both Palmerston's cabins and the 19th-century asylum, then, were deliberately constructed to be productive environments that rectified deficits in unproductive individuals. They were incarnated spatial logics designed to be logical spaces.

Thus, I do not believe that Lord Palmerston would have been at all surprised to find that, from the 1880s

until the mid–20th century, the Sligo-Leitrim institution was home to the countywide agricultural fair, where the most current and efficient agricultural techniques were showcased for the locals, and contests were held to see who could plow the most land in a given amount of time. It was not just the availability of a large amount of land that was decisive here. To this day, there are any number of fields in easy distance from the town. Those who developed the asylum, however, had long since made the case for the relationship between this particular area and a certain vision of progress. Also, the large farm (almost 200 acres at the end of the last century) that had by that time grown up around the institution to help supply its ever-expanding needs prided itself on its efficiency and its willingness to experiment with newer agricultural processes.[22]

It is certainly no accident that to this day mental hospital staff who are also farmers tend to be known by their neighbors as progressive because of their capitalist attitude toward land. Historically, for example, farmers on the staff of the asylum have more readily adapted to newer agricultural methods because of both the safety net that the institutional wage provided for them and a willingness to abandon traditional methods of land management. "They'll get out of cattle if there's no money in it," one of my more traditional small farmer friends somewhat critically observed. This gentleman meant that the nurses in his experience have more readily adapted to recent market forces, particularly the move to lamb rearing for continental consumption and away from cattle and dairy production, the more traditionally valued prerogatives of farmers who have access to good land. In short, such economic rationalizations have been more readily adopted by individuals who had already brought lessons home from a logical structure interested in rationalizations of another, related kind.

Translating the Asylum

Perhaps most important for the Sligo-Leitrim District Mental Hospital's historical trajectory, asylums in rural Ireland were self-consciously designed to be imposing structures. The Lunatic Asylum, for example, is mentioned as a very prominent building in three local histories of County Sligo.[23] When the institution was opened in 1854, the countryside was not given to large buildings, with the exception of widely scattered manor houses. Most of the large Catholic churches in rural Ireland are late-19th-century products (Larkin 1972, 1975). It is no surprise, then, that one of the common names for asylums throughout rural Ireland (including Sligo and Leitrim) in both Irish and English is Big House (Ir. *teach mór*), a designation it shares with seignorial manors. This issue of relative architectural extravagance of 19th-century asylums is even acknowledged in government sources. In the middle of the last century, John Nugent, a career medical bureaucrat who held the Inspector of Asylums post for nearly 50 years, contrasted the former and current living conditions of the ever-growing number of inmates under his charge as the difference between "a hovel and a palace."[24]

The institution in Sligo town is impressive even on the scale of Irish asylum buildings. A few years after the opening of the Sligo-Leitrim institution, a special commission appointed by the Treasury awarded a 10 percent rebate for the extra costs involved in what the commission considered serious frivolities in the building. While the commissioners were agreed that the public buildings of Ireland "should not reflect too much its crime, its poverty, or its misfortune," fiscal responsibility was still fiscal responsibility.[25] From the start, then, the designers of asylums in Ireland, and the Sligo-Leitrim institution in particular, called attention to these buildings as "important places."

To the extent that the asylum was locally recognized as an important place, it became a legitimate object of naming and story making according to the logic of dinnsenchas. Names like "the Tobacco Field," "the Straw Lodge," and "the Chapel" point to a dual movement of influence centered around the physicality of the mental hospital. On the one hand, they show clearly the mechanics of the local domestication of the institution. On the other, they chart, within a local idiom, the influence of the institution beyond its walls. In this fashion, the development and memory of names and narratives in and around the asylum exists in part as a challenge to the power that constructed the institution, and in part as a locally readable inscription of the historical changes that the asylum has helped to precipitate at this locality.

This latter point is readily demonstrated by charting variations in naming practices in and around the asylum over time. A large lot of land immediately south of the asylum, for example, was called "Wynne's field" at the end of the 19th century, named after a prominent landowner in the area who sold it to the asylum for a price of £1200 in 1872. This was a princely sum for the day, and one more indication that this family deserved its reputation for avarice in the region. Foreign travelers noted early on, for example, that this clan had a disturbing tendency for pushing the peasants on their extensive holdings to the wall. This sale was also the last moment in a public career that saw John Wynne, the seller, hold simultaneous public appointments as guardian of the Board of the Union Workhouse, the town Weighmaster, and as governor on the Board of the District Lunatic Asylum. In any case, the name on this field survived the fall in the Wynne family fortunes that

occurred in the turbulent decades at the beginning of this century.[26]

This survival was one of many testaments to the gentry pretensions of the asylum's upper management, pretensions that included formal dances held in the mental hospital under the seignorial munificence of the resident medical superintendent and a yearly parade led by this same personage of all the ambulatory patient population accompanied by the asylum brass band playing military airs, a tradition that lasted until after World War I (Saris 1994: ch. 4). During the Emergency, however, a nurse-entrepreneur decided that the southern exposure and relatively sheltered aspect of the land would allow him to grow tobacco (an extremely scarce commodity in Éire because of the economic dislocations of the period) in part of this field. The attempt was not a commercial success, but it did provide a new name for the entire area, "the Tobacco Field."[27] Finally, this plot was part of a whole section of the asylum farm sold to the state in the 1960s to house a Regional Technical College, the whole now being referred to simply as the RTC.

At each stage of this progression, then, a particular name summons up a particular historical context, the whole stratified according to broader influences in the area. Having knowledge of such names and their local etymologies is a powerful way of understanding local history and society. When a designation for the activities of a solidly middle-class nurse, for example, eclipses the name of an old aristocratic family for part of the demesne of the institution, we see evidence for a changing of the guard of those who officially "thought" the landscape in and around Sligo.

This same traditional process ironically indexes the influence of the asylum through the naming of places that are connected to the institution but well beyond its boundary walls. Some of these names, while still in occasional use, are so obscure that digging into the local sources and the keepers of local historical consciousness is necessary to unearth the institutional connection. In the early 1900s, for example, a row of cottages was built about two miles from the hospital to house married nurses. These houses were originally named after the part of an estate of a local landlord that lay next to them. The builder, however, had provided each door with a shiny brass knocker. When manpower was needed in the institution, a runner from the hospital would knock on them serially to summon workers. To this day, the name "the Gold Rappers" is used as a means of giving directions by some older residents in the town, even though most of the original houses, along with their brass rappers, have long since been replaced.

Names and Narratives

Through this process of naming and narrating, the asylum and its grounds were slowly transformed from a locally amorphous space into a series of named places. The domestication of the asylum mirrors precisely the constitution of the landscape itself: space is defined by place-names with remembered histories. In the Old Building (the original structure), we have already mentioned named areas such as the Chapel, the Straw Lodge, and, in a neat example of cultural borrowing, the Bowery.[28] Almost invariably, however, such names invoke varying, even competing, stories. The way that narratives associated with places are currently debated highlights both how thoroughly has the space of the institution been absorbed into the dinnsenchas system *and* the real influence that such modern state appendages as the asylum have exercised at this locality.

Most of my consultants agree that the Straw Lodge is a section in the female wing of the Old Building whose name marks a time of hardship for the institution. Due to severe overcrowding at the turn of the century and financial wranglings between Dublin and the newly created, nationally minded county councils over the proper distribution of tax moneys (particularly, the desire of the latter to show that self-government meant lower taxes), the financial situation of the asylum became precarious. In the end, for some years, straw was spread out over the floor and used as bedding by the patients, hence the name Straw Lodge.

How such stories are told, however, is at least as important as the facts that they relate, demonstrating again how the asylum qua institution is folded into the mold of local life. It is no accident that those staff members who are most attached to the ideal of the asylum, who see their employment as largely hospital based, and, thus, are least influenced by the rhetoric of deinstitutionalization and cost cutting current in official government circles see in this story an evocative model for the current transformation of the health services in Ireland. As one nurse said to me during the course of giving me an etymology for the Straw Lodge,

> They must have shivered through the night, so. Aye, I wonder if we're not going back to that. I remember when this was a carin' place, a place where the individual mattered. It's not like that now. They just want to throw them out.

He concluded by worrying that Ireland as a whole was in the process of changing, noting that, "money is now more important than a caring society."

In other stories about named places in the asylum, we can read old social tensions that marked the history of the building as well as social divisions that have

developed more recently. As a retired administrator related to me at the end of one of his stories about places in the Old Building,

> The old resident medical superintendents had lots of power. They were little gods, really. Way back, of course, they even had a ball, an annual ball hosted by the RMS. It was the real yuppie crowd that got invited to that, not you or I, mind you. "Bonner" [the RMS in the 1920s and 1930s] used to have a wild time there apparently. There's still a place on the first floor called the "Ballroom" where they used to dance. Of course, there are patients in there now, but any of the old nurses could show you.[29]

In this story we can find a narrative memory of older social tensions combined with more modern grumblings about a newer successful class of young professionals in Sligo town—a yuppie crowd. Both complaints exist in the intersection of narrative memory and a particular spot in a physical structure, but in a fashion that is impossible to derive from the understanding of the institution as a transparent instrumentality. Still, "any of the old nurses could show you."

Like the landscape itself, moreover, such stories can just as often exist in several, sometimes competing versions. Thus, it is a matter of some debate as to whether the Chapel (another room in the Old Building) received its name from unofficial masses held therein in the 19th century, from the elaborate window constructions that happen to adorn this particular ward, or because at some point in time many of the inmates there labored in the grip of religious delusions. Such variations also broadly map the two groups of local background that currently staff the mental health services for Sligo and Leitrim. Those nurses who are hospital based tend to argue for the mass option, presumably because it adds significant history to the place, as well as evoking, however distantly, an emotional incident in Irish history, that of secretive and unofficial masses held on the run during penal times (a connection that was, by the way, spontaneously made by two of my older informants).

Still, it is worth noting that this narrative religious memory is not so out-of-date as it would appear in the light of a reference to the 17th- and 18th-century penal laws. During a major expansion of the asylum in 1904, for example, the board of governors came across a knotty problem. Enough money was budgeted to build a house of worship for the inmates, but the political climate of the two counties (Sligo in particular) made the idea of a single structure problematic.[30] At the same time, the Nationalist-controlled (largely Catholic) county councils were unwilling to spend proportionately more on the Protestant part of the inmate population by constructing two buildings of equivalent size. The interested parties eventually settled on an elegant

compromise, one that we might expect given this discussion of the importance of the constitution of space and place. A Protestant house of worship and a Catholic church roughly six times the size were commissioned and built. To this day, these two structures squarely face one another, about 60 meters apart, directly in front of the main entrance of the Old Building. They bear mute witness to the rough denominational proportions of the asylum population at the turn of the century and make the point of the importance of spatial logics in understanding local life of the institution.

At first glance, however, such history seems to be of far less interest to the foes of the church-service hypothesis. Nurses who are more oriented to the new community psychiatry, for example, tend to favor the curious decoration theory in explaining the Chapel in the Old Building. After insisting that the explanation of the name of the Chapel was "the incredible workmanship that went into the windows on that ward," nothing more, one nurse said to me,

> The Ireland of my youth was not the Ireland you see today, Jamie. We were very poor and very isolated. It was no secret that many that went to St. Columba's were social cases—an old person or someone the family couldn't get on with.

In short, these new nurses tend to see this room as but one more quaint feature in an obsolete structure. Their sense of themselves as involved with modernizing the treatment of the mentally ill and as helping Ireland catch up with the rest of the world predisposes them to view the entire complex of the hospital as a burden bequeathed by the past—an obsolete curiosity more than a living presence.

Despite this apparently modern sensibility, however, disagreements over names of rooms and areas in and around the institution are still argued forcefully by *all* parties. It is a mark of distinction for much of the veteran staff, community or hospital based, that they have gathered such knowledge during their tenure at the institution. Clearly, though, in the very act of debating with place-names, even the most modern of the combatants acknowledges a universe of discourse that constitutes space through proper names, specific events, and meaningful narratives rather than as an obvious container for a bundle of services delivered to a self-evident population, never mind as a logical three-dimensional model built to redeem irrationality.

Conclusion

I have tried to accomplish two things in this essay. First, I have furnished a narrative of an interaction between an institution and a locality. Through this narrative I have also presented a way of thinking about

national, local, and colonial histories as necessary aspects of one another. To accomplish these goals, I have relied on what I have called the physical presence of the asylum, suggesting ways in which the cultural production of space is always at risk within any particular social-historical context. In this fashion, I have also contributed to the analysis of phenomena such as place-names and cultural constitutions of the landscape that have enjoyed a long, if sporadic, anthropological interest, going back to Boas's (1934) observation that place-names are social constructions par excellence and continuing at present in work such as that of Basso (1992).

More importantly, this analysis of the historical trajectory of a mental hospital moves us away from both the notion that there has been a single, linear colonial project locked in a deadly struggle with a hidden Ireland for 800 years and the idea that Ireland can be understood simply within the conceptual frame of the modernization of a backward periphery. The classic problematic in ethnography of the west of Ireland, that is, the waning of tradition under the rising star of modernity and the slow but inevitable destruction of the past by the present, is modified by understanding the historical development and the current cultural existences of St. Columba's. Instead of a foreign-modernizing-bureaucratic structure overwhelming or thriving at the expense of an indigenous-traditional-natural way of life, we find an institution that answers to and mediates between both sets of oppositions, through its physical presence on the landscape. For a very long time in Ireland—from Elizabethan inquisitions into the legal titles of holdings through Cromwellian ravages in the countryside to post-Union mapping, schooling, and population-disciplining projects—the organization of space and the domination of a population has been seen to be fundamentally interrelated by colonial regimes in Dublin Castle and London. Nowhere in Ireland, however, did this sort of project encounter a cultural tabula rasa. Instead, vibrant local appreciations of space and time exerted a strong influence on institutions such as asylums that were given part of this task of colonizing and modernizing an often recalcitrant periphery.[31]

Yet, precisely because the Sligo-Leitrim District Lunatic Asylum so clearly concerned itself with the transformation of persons as well as self-consciously presenting itself as an important place, it became fair game for absorption into a preexisting spatial logic that shared almost none of the assumptions of its builders. The asylum in Ireland became, to build on Lefebvre's (1974) terms, both a contested space and a space of contestation.[32] The Irish system of named places with remembered histories, some of which were able to transform persons, offered a principled alternative to the representation of space that the asylum embodied

and the representational spaces through which it was expected to redeem disorder.

Ironically, however, a structure that almost point by point emphasized (indeed fetishized) Lefebvre's "trio, triad, or trinity" of "lisibilité-visibilité-intelligibilité" (1974:115) in the architecture of the modern encountered a traditional Irish way of thinking about space that could engage the asylum building without fetishizing its visual properties. The connecting of names to narratives (dinnsenchas) often employs what we might call a visual channel in linguistic description, but it does not necessarily prioritize it.[33] Thus, many narratives about place-names in Ireland call forth not visual images, at whatever level of detail, but only more narratives, some of which are designed to debate the very name or the very place that called the original story into being. One of the striking features about many important places produced under the dinnsenchas system, for example, is their lack of spectacular visual features. A mossy rock with a dribble of water running from underneath it, the whole so overgrown with bracken that it is in the event all but impossible to find in the absence of knowing exactly where it is, will sometimes bear a name commemorating a miracle that sanctified an entire area (e.g., Taylor 1995: ch. 2). Similarly, in the hospital itself, places like the Straw Lodge or the Ballroom do not provide obvious visual clues to either their name or their history, and still less to the debates about them. Indeed, some of these names, like the Gold Rappers, refer to visual clues that no longer exist.

There is resistance of a sort here. Ideologically, for example, the environment of the asylum (and, for that matter, Palmerston's cabins) has one main purpose, that is, to restrict the "choice" of the inmate (or inhabitant) to the point where he or she can make only the "correct" one—precisely, the choice to fetishize a specific notion of function, rationality, and economic productivity in such a way that their cultural basis is naturalized and therefore made invisible. The slow percolating of the Old Building and its surroundings through this system of names and narratives challenges this mystification, if only by making known a local presence. When nurses debate "folk etymologies" or when local people narrate the spectacular transformations that the asylum is capable of effecting, they stake and perpetuate a claim to the local ownership of a specific place and a specific *type of space*, exercising what Séamas Ó Catháin and Patrick O'Flanagan aptly call their "freedom to name" (1975:273). And, by naming and narrating, various local commentators continue to alter the cultural garments that dress a structure that, they have always been told, is essentially naked (i.e., natural).

What we learn from *Buile Suine*, then, is not that there exists an exceptional Irish connection to insanity. Rather we glimpse certain cultural connections between the transformation of persons, a sense of place, place-names, and narrative memory that has implications for our understanding of the history and current existence of a modern mental hospital. The stories about the baleful influence that the asylum building is capable of exercising as well as the names and narratives that now constitute this structure as a local space become more recognizable after understanding these cultural connections. The tracing of the influence of these connections over time, moreover, illuminates one part—the social life of the Sligo-Leitrim District Lunatic Asylum—of a grand movement of people, things, and ideas: the development of a colonial and then postcolonial state at a rural periphery. This is, of course, history in the broadest sense of the term. The effects of this history are seen at once in the "modern" sensibilities of some of those currently associated with the hospital and in how these same individuals help to constitute the asylum as a local space according to "traditional" logics.

For a century and a half, thousands of local people have cycled through a particular place in rural Ireland, finding in some cases a job, in others both the gentler and grimmer meanings that we equate with the term *asylum*. These people have been both the channel of the domestication of a bureaucratic institution and one of the routes through which the influence of bureaucracy and modernity has been imported into a locality. They have over the course of decades developed a set of understandings, misunderstandings, and partial translations around the existence, abilities, and proper uses of a physical structure. This structure possesses an official history that needs to be understood, yet its current existence is incomprehensible in the absence of being able to read the marks of a local presence. In this fashion, a confluence of interests in, and effects of, a physical structure has resulted in a curiously hybridized institution. The place now called St. Columba's, at which people in the Sligo-Leitrim area continue to show up, is part hospital connected originally to London and then, after formal independence, to Dublin, by the iron logic of a bureaucracy working historical change at a periphery, and part native growth, watered by various local cultural streams that have effected historical change in and around this bureaucratic instrumentality. This hybrid quality of a mental hospital provides us a way of understanding the dynamic nature of cultural structures and the structured nature of historical change in one part of rural Ireland.

Notes

1. For general analyses of asylums and their technologies, see Donnelly 1983; Foucault 1973; Goffman 1961; Porter 1987a, 1987b; Scull 1979, 1981; and Skultans 1975, 1979. For progressive histories that include the asylum as part of a scientific assault on a medical condition, see, among others, Grob 1992, 1994; Roth and Kroll 1986; and Rothman 1990. Analyses of specific institutions can be found in Charuty 1985; Dwyer 1987; Fisher 1973; and Tomes 1984. For histories of the Irish asylum system, see Finnane 1981 and Robins 1986.

2. See, among many others, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1992; Ohnuki-Tierney 1990; and Sahlins 1985, 1995. For examples of this type of work in Ireland, see Gulliver and Silverman 1995 and Silverman and Gulliver 1992.

3. The original asylum building was begun in 1848 and opened in 1854. This structure was substantially enlarged in 1904. A new set of buildings was erected next to it "on the hill" in the 1940s.

4. See, among many others, Corbett 1874; Dawson 1911; Murphy 1975; Murphy and Vega 1982; Scheper-Hughes 1982; Select Committee 1817, 1843; Torrey et al. 1984; World Health Organization 1973; and Youseff et al. 1991. For critique of some of the specifics of this connection between medical irrationality and the Irish, see Clare 1991.

5. The general thrust of Scheper-Hughes's analysis has received some criticism, particularly within Ireland (see, for example, Kane 1979, 1986). For the idea that "the Irish" (Irish men in particular) desire a retreat from the realm of the physical, see, among many others, Carroll 1953; and Messenger 1971. Most of the time (but not always), this quality is seen to be damaging to "the Irish," particularly when it includes the idea of sexual repression (Sheehy 1968). Some authors, however, such as the Irish playwright Paul Vincent Carroll, see in this trait "the savior of idealism in a world jungle of rank material weeds" (1953:69).

6. Séamus Heaney's modern translation in particular is very accessible and does great justice to the intense natural images that form the artistic heart of the work. Heaney has, however, been taken to task for some of the liberties he takes with the translation of certain passages (Donoghue 1986:269–271). O'Keeffe's (1913) facing-page translation is more literal

than Heaney's and has been my source for etymological issues.

7. Besides the works interested in Sweeney's irrationality, Irish (and other) folklorists have devoted considerable attention to the poem, its language, and its history (see Heaney 1980, 1983; Nagy 1982; O'Keeffe 1913:i–xxx; Ó Riain 1976; and Partridge 1980. Sweeney was, of course, also hilariously resurrected by Flann O'Brien (the pen name of Brian O'Nolan) in the slightly disturbing, but profoundly funny, novel *At Swim-Two-Birds*.

8. O'Keeffe's translation (1913:14–15). The original reads:

dobhar agus dásacht agus fáoinnel agus fúalang agus foluamain agus udmhaille agus anbsaidhe agus anfhoistine, miosgais gach ionaidh ina mbiodh, gach ionaidh noco roichedh; romheirbhlighset a meoir rocriothnaighsiot a chosa, roluathadh a chroidhe, roclódhadh a chedfadha, rosaobadh a radharc, rotuitset a airm urnocht asa lámhuibh co ndeachaidh la breithir Rónáin ar gealtacht agus ar geinidecht amail gach n-ethaid n-æerdha.

9. It is telling that Heaney, a poet with subtle and nuanced command of both Irish and English and possessed of a difficult-to-define "feel" for the country parts of Ireland, chooses the word *asylum* for this translation. The sentence in Old Irish runs *Ann nothaigtais gealta Eirenn o robadhb slán a mbliadhain ar gealtacht, ar as ionadh aoibhnesa móir an glenn sin do gheltaibh dogrés*, which O'Keeffe (1913:23) translates, "It is there that the madmen of Ireland used to go when their year of madness was complete, that glen being ever a place of great delight for madmen," *nothaigtais* having the sense of coming together.

10. See, among others, Hannan 1991; Ó Catháin and O'Flanagan 1975; Slater 1993; and Whelan 1992.

11. As MacCana describes the etymology of this term,

It was this combination of cultural, spiritual, and practical consideration which assured *dindshenchas* [*sic*] its place in the curriculum of the *filid* [poets] and no doubts of the druids before them. The word *dindshenchas* is of course a compound of *senchas* "knowledge of all that pertains to earlier time," "history (in the pre-modern mythopoeic sense)" and *dind* meaning "height, hill," then "fortified hill, stronghold" and "famous or important place." [1988:333]

12. For a modern statement on the therapeutic importance of spatial design for mental hospitals, see Baker et al. 1959. Also, see Donnelly 1983 and Foucault 1973, among others, for reflections on the spatial aspects of asylum technologies.

13. This connection between lunatics and children (as well as "savages") goes back at least as far as Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1975[1700], esp. bk. 1: ch. 2: sec. 27 and bk. 2: ch. 11: sec. 10–13).

14. See, among others, Bradshaw 1989; Hardy 1851; Joyce 1913:224–227; Taylor 1995: ch. 2; and Wilde 1849.

15. Such offerings can still be found at some healing sites in rural Ireland.

16. See, among others, Arensberg and Kimball 1940:261–262; Logan 1990[1972]; Saris 1994: ch. 4; and Thompson 1974:136–137.

17. See Harris 1930 for a history of the development of lunacy laws in Ireland.

18. This was technically an illegal practice that the board of governors continued to allow well into the 20th century. Unfortunately, I am not familiar enough with the records of other asylums in Ireland to get a sense of how widespread, in absolute terms, was this mixing of paying with nonpaying patients. The strenuousness of the complaints leveled by the Inspectors of Lunacy and the fact that Sligo and Leitrim had a reputation for running a very economical asylum, however, suggest that this institution was a worse offender than most (see Board of Governors 1854–1925: July 1870).

19. See, among others, Carr 1806; Hall 1850; Otway 1839, 1845; and Young 1892[1780].

20. Coulter 1862:269. See Foster 1988:350 n. 3 for a good word on this particular Lord Palmerston, but also see Curtis 1995:51 for a much less benign description.

21. For a nearly identical situation in colonial South Africa, see the excellent studies of Comaroff and Comaroff (1991, 1992).

22. Board of Governors 1854–1925: October 1870, January 1876.

23. Kilgannon 1926; O'Rourke 1890; and Wood-Martin 1892.

24. Poor Law Union 1879:lxxix.

25. Commissioners for Inquiry 1855:8.

26. See Board of Governors 1854–1925: October 1872. For a negative assessment of this generation of the Wynnes, see H. D. Inglis 1835:125.

27. The Emergency is the official name in the Republic of Ireland for World War II, which, of course, Éire sat out as a neutral nation. The failure of the tobacco crop was not that surprising, given the latitude tolerance of the plant, although it has historically been grown with occasional success in other parts of Sligo and Leitrim.

28. The Bowery is the old ward for violent and refractory patients. To the best of my knowledge, this is a New World term that drifted back to the institution through the medium of motion pictures, which were shown regularly in the asylum from the second decade of this century until the 1960s.

29. There is a historical question concerning whether this ball was annual or occasional. That dances to which polite society was invited (and that were in part catered by staff and some patients) were held in the institution from time to time seems to be well supported in local historical memory and an occasional mention in the official documents. The evidence for this dance being an annual rite is less clear.

30. Even the planning of this work caused great difficulty for the board of governors. In one of the minutes of their meetings, the secretary recorded that both a Protestant *church* and Catholic *chapel* were being contemplated as a solution to the impasse. Mr. Hughes, a Nationalist governor, complained that such a distinction "savored of the Ascendancy." And, in a sentence rife with irony, given the history of the asylum system and the political tensions of the period, he joked, "They don't seem to understand the proper use of the English language in this institution" (*Sligo Champion* 1900).

31. In this respect, it is telling that two recent, but very different, histories of Ireland, Foster 1988 and MacDonagh 1983, both launch their analyses with the problem of space in Ireland, Foster with an analysis of an Elizabethan map, and

MacDonagh with an extended musing on different cultural appreciations of space and time in England and Ireland.

32. This issue of "contested space" is forefronted in an extensive literature in geography. See, among many others, Allen and Pryke 1994; Harvey 1990; and Soja 1990. For a recent historical-sociological look at the Irish landscape as a contested terrain, see Slater 1993.

33. I am using *channel* here in a way close to the formal textual sense of the word, that is, as a medium or mode (Hanks 1989:101). I am indebted to Steve Coleman for discussions clarifying my ideas concerning the relationships between visual and narrative/aural elements in stories about place-names in Ireland.

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