

Macleod here is in the grip of a powerful if inchoate idea, the idea of Celticism. He associates it with what he reckons a family of related tongues, but he also knows it is a matter of blood and spirit, which give the idea its imaginative potency in the contemporary world. Moreover it is an idea which, as the distinguishing languages and dialects decline, is invested with the pathos of loss which gives a romantic, Ossianic glamour to its remains and monuments. It is also a spirituality which challenges an empirical age and as such can be the basis of nascent, Anglo-phobic nationalism.

It is with the multivalent nature of the idea of Celticism (as memorably invoked in such a passage) that the contributors to this volume engage. The papers collected here are the outcome of a workshop on Celticism which was held in the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, in May 1993, under the auspices of the European Science Foundation. All who participated on that occasion must express their thanks to the Foundation whose financial support made the occasion possible. Dr Max Sparreboom of the Foundation was unfailingly helpful in the administration of the workshop, as were the staff of the Royal Irish Academy (to which thanks are also due), where Dr Rachel Finnegan was responsible for arrangements in Dublin and ensured with tact and efficiency that everything went smoothly. The proposal that such a workshop be held came originally from the Royal Irish Academy's Committee for the Study of Anglo-Irish Literature, of which I am Chair, and I thank its members for their support. Other participants in the workshop were Professor Timothy Webb of the University of Bristol, Professor Séamus Mac Mathúna, of the University of Ulster, Dr W.J. McCormack of Goldsmiths College, London and Professor Gearóid Mac Eoin of University College, Galway. Professor Mac Eoin was enormously helpful at all stages of planning for the workshop and I am happy to acknowledge my indebtedness to him. The preparation for publication of the text of these proceedings in volume form has been made possible by a generous grant from the Patrick Kavanagh Bursary of the School of English, Trinity College, Dublin.

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CELTICISM

Joep Leerssen
(University of Amsterdam)

We have grown accustomed to the idea of calling a certain cultural tradition in Europe *Celtic*. That nomenclature is both ethnic and linguistic. Linguistically, it refers to a number of languages spoken (less so now than a few centuries ago) in parts of Northwest France (Brittany) and the British Isles; also, some long-extinct languages such as Gaulish are classed with the 'Celtic' group. Ethnically, 'the Celts' are seen as a cluster of primeval European tribes alongside other clusters like the Germanic or Slav ones, the westernmost in Europe, whose presence and/or influence can be traced from the Bronze Age onwards. As such, they comprise Gauls, Britons, Belgae, Helvetii, Celtiberi and other tribes whose names enter history as they come into the purview of the expansionist records of the Roman Empire.¹

Both linguistically and ethnically, then, the concept of 'Celts' is a highly disparate one. 'The Celts' and 'the Celtic languages' are a mixum gatherum. The similarities between Breton, Irish-Gaelic, and extinct Gaulish (such as we know it from very scant inscriptions) is by no means obvious — much less so, in any case, than the readily-apparent resemblances between 'Romance' languages like Latin, Italian, Spanish

¹ For a recent example, see the catalogue of the exhibition *The Celts — The Origins of Europe*, held in Venice in 1991: *The Celts*, ed. S. Moscali et al. (Milan and London, 1991).

and Portuguese, or 'Slavic' ones like Polish, Russian and Bulgarian. Likewise, the idea that there is a common 'Celtic' identity shared by Hebrideans, Welshmen, the Tungri and Nervii mentioned by Caesar, and the prehistoric men buried at Halstatt, is quite un-obvious, something we accept on the say-so of specialists, scholars and academics.

Indeed, there might be room to challenge the application of this holdall term to various cultures and artifacts in European history. A term so all-embracing, compounded from various ill-defined mentionings by Greek and Roman authors,² may well in some instances have been over-extended in its usage. Scholars were comparatively late in discovering the links between the various Celtic languages. Nowadays, some archeologists are sceptical as to the 'Celtic' nature of certain Bronze Age or Iron Age finds; and the distinction between Celtic and Germanic tribes in Roman times is not wholly unproblematic. The doubts and uncertainties voiced by R.G. Latham in 1857 still deserve to be taken seriously today:

Thus the historians of Gaul, England, and Italy, have all a great deal to say about some Kelt population or other. So have the historians of some portion of Germany. The geographer and ethnologist are in the same predicament with the historian; not to mention the philologue, who, if he write about the English or French, must recognize a Keltic element. Is this large or small? What does it represent? Supposing it to be large, is the infusion of Keltic blood in the veins of the population proportionate? or, is the language more (or less) Keltic than the blood? or is the blood more (or less) Keltic than the language? Are the English pure Germans or only-half-bloods? Are the French half-bloods or Romans? How much also is German? Which are the most Keltic parts of the country? Which of England? Supposing either or both of these populations to be ever so Keltic (or ever so Roman or German), what is the value of the fact? Is it a difference of race? What is race? Were the Kelts ever less Keltic than they are at present? Was there ever anything transitional between them and the Germans? Was nation *a* or nation *b* of antiquity, Kelt or German? or was it neither the one nor the other?³

² Concerning which, see Bernhard Kremer, *Das Bild der Kelten bis in augusteische Zeit. Studien zur Instrumentalisierung eines antiken Feindbildes bei griechischen und römischen Autoren* (Einzelschrift *Historia*, 88 (1993): 1-362).

³ R.G. Latham, 'Supplementary Chapter', in J.C. Prichard, *The Eastern Origin of the Celtic Nations Proved by a Comparison of their Dialects with the Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and Teutonic Languages; Forming a Supplement to 'Researches into*

However, the interest of an interdisciplinary study of 'Celticism' is perhaps not in the first place to offer a terminological or conceptual purification of the notion of 'Celt', but rather to register the vicissitudes and repercussions of this vague term in the European history of ideas and attitudes. The term 'Celtic' has a wide range of connotations for all its lack of precise meaning. Vague and disparate as the 'Celtic' tradition in European culture may be, known almost exclusively from outside reports, its name, by virtue of its very imprecision, can attract all sorts of speculations and prejudice; the Celts can be disparaged as barbarians or praised as Noble Savages; they can fall under the shadow of ethnocentrism or be glorified in the spotlight of primitivism; they can be exoticized or identified with; with different authors at different periods, they can be made to fit any role (the Us or the Them; the Good, the Bad or the Mysterious) in the ethnic pattern of Europe's *dramatis personae*.

It is this topic that can be pursued fruitfully under the title of *Celticism*. By that term is meant, not the study of 'the' Celts and their history, but rather the study of their reputation and of the meanings and connotations ascribed to the term 'Celtic'.⁴ To the extent that 'Celtic' is an idea with a wide and variable application, Celticism becomes a complex and significant issue in the European history of ideas: the history of what people wanted that term to mean.

The freedom with which this particular signifier has been floating

the Physical History of Mankind, ed. R.G. Latham (London, 1857), 354-387 (370).

⁴ Concerning the background of this usage of the term, cf. below, note 11. This usage differs slightly from the word's original coinage by L.P. Curtis in his *Anglo-Saxons and Celts. A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (University of Bridgeport, CT: Conference on British Studies, 1968). Curtis employs the term as the antonym of 'Anglo-Saxonism', as the Irish cultivation of Milesian origins in response to English ethnocentrism (14-15, 108-116). Within the insular, Anglo-Irish context, Curtis' critical work on the opposition between 'Celt' and 'Saxon', has exercised great influence: cf. David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester U.P., 1988); Terence Brown, 'Saxon and Celt: The Stereotypes', in *Literary Interrelations. Ireland, England and the World*, ed. W. Zach & H. Kosok (3 vols.; Tübingen, 1987), 1: 1-9; and Victor Kiernan, 'The British Isles: Celt and Saxon', in *The National Question in Europe in Historical Context*, ed. M. Teich & R. Porter (Cambridge U.P., 1993), 1-34.

through the European discourse of cultural criticism was made possible by the fact that no 'Celts' have ever gone on record as identifying themselves under this name. Native Irish have identified themselves as *Gaedhil*, native Welshmen as *Cymri*, Bretons as *Breizhiz*, in an authentic discourse of self-identification which is in the record for us to read: but that all these should belong together (and together with La Tène people and Gauls *et hoc genus omne*) under the name of Celts is not part of an authentic native tradition. Rather, the classification 'Celtic' has been imposed from the outside, by scholars from metropolitan Europe, writing *about* these nations but rarely *for* them (let alone on their behalf). The term 'Celt' has only very recently (in the last hundred years or so) come to be used in the first person, as the result of an internalization process of what was originally a term from outside. As Malcolm Chapman has demonstrated in his well-documented survey *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth*, the term 'Celtic' carries with it the indelible connotation of 'Otherness', regardless whether it be used in the third or in the first person.⁵

The concept of 'The Celts' is, then, a *construct*. That is not to say that the term is valueless or wrong; rather, it means that its appearance is a product of discursive and cogitative activity, that its emergence can be historically (roughly) dated and that it carries the imprint of a number of connotations and ideological presuppositions.

The construction of a category 'Celt' to embrace all the cultural traditions which it now denotes took place over a period of some two hundred years. The beginnings lie with the archeological and linguistic speculations of scholars like Scaliger, Bochart and Boxhorn.⁶ The title of Paul-Yves Pezron's book *Antiquité de la nation et de la langue des Celtes autrement appelez Gaulois* (1703: translated into English in 1706 as *Antiquities of nations, more particularly of the Celtae or Gauls, Taken*

⁵ Malcolm Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth* (Basingstoke, 1992).

⁶ For a thorough and very inclusive historical analysis, see Daniel Droixhe's *La linguistique et l'appel de l'histoire (1600-1800). Rationalisme et révolutions positivistes* (Genève, 1978). As in many other cases, a glance at the OED, at Littré, and at *Larousse Grand dictionnaire universel du dix-neuvième siècle* is highly instructive for the terminological and conceptual history of words like 'Celt'.

to be originally the same people as our ancient Britains) seems to have brought the notion 'Celt' as an umbrella term for ancient Gauls and modern Cymri/Bretons into general use; at the same time, Edward Lhuyd demonstrated the Celtic co-familiarity between Cymri and Gaels in his *Archaeologia Britannica* (1707).⁷

The next century saw much speculation as to the place of these 'Celts' in humanity at large. Some saw them as related to Scyths, to Northern barbarians or to Teutons; others saw them as part of a seaboard civilization with roots reaching back to Carthage and Phoenicia; and there were speculations even wilder than that, involving links with Chinese and Algonquin.⁸ The matter was only resolved when comparative linguistics, in the wake of Sir William Jones, Jacob Grimm and Franz Bopp, elaborated the phylogenetic model of an Indo-European family tree of languages, and Johann Kaspar Zeuss after preliminary studies by J.C. Prichard, Adolphe Pictet and again Bopp was able to place the Celtic languages in this system (*Grammatica Celtica*, 1854).

The construction of the Celt takes place, then, roughly from 1650 to 1850. That means that it coincides with developments such as the invention of the Sublime, the cult of Nature and the idea of the Noble Savage. All these aspects have been written to the profile of what it meant to be Celtic. The construction of the Celt in itself documents the revolt against rationalism and against the Enlightenment, and the attributes stereotypically ascribed to 'the Celt' have a profile to match.⁹

These various pre-inscribed, stereotyped connotations of Celticism have remained operative ever since the notion of a Celtic cultural tradition was constructed: in the Irish Literary Revival, in the magical realism of authors like John Cowper Powys, in the cultural nationalism of Brittany, in the language-political debates of Britain, France and Ireland, in the folk

⁷ The appearance of Lhuyd's book was announced in the English translation of Pezron (translator's preface, 8th unpaginated p. after titlepage).

⁸ Cf. my 'On the Edge of Europe: Ireland in Search of Oriental Roots, 1650-1850', *Comparative Criticism*, 8 (1986): 91-112.

⁹ Witness a volume like Robert O'Driscoll, ed., *The Celtic Consciousness* (Toronto, 1981), which includes, alongside soberly factualist articles in Celtic philology, archeology and literary history, also a number of exercises in mystic speculation.

revival of the 1970s (Alan Stivell and Planxty), in the New Age mystification of the Celts in recent years: all these manifestations continue, in modified but still-recognizable form, the blueprint of 'the Celt' as he was constructed around the eighteenth century. Thus, to trace the construction and development of the notion of Celticism is not just a matter of antiquarian interest, concerning a bygone chapter in the history of European science and ideology; on the contrary, it is a matter of continuing relevance to attempt a historical and imagological analysis¹⁰ of these pre-inscribed connotations of 'Celticism'.

II

The construct 'Celt' carries with it, in its origin and original currency, the echo of a specific power relationship. Those who were called 'Celts' had no power over the fact that they were beginning to be called that name; they underwent, passively, a process of scrutiny, investigation and classification over which they had no control. To name the world around us means, at least to some extent, and at least intellectually, to control it. To be so named means to be subject to someone else's control.

That state of affairs recalls similar processes elsewhere. It recalls the construction of concepts like 'the Negro' or 'the Oriental' as analysed in its hegemonistic intent by critics such as Frantz Fanon and Edward Said. Indeed, the fact that the topic of Celticism as 'the study of a construct' has been placed on the scholarly agenda is in part due to the influence of Said's outstanding and influential book *Orientalism*; the very term *Celticism* was brought into currency by W.J. McCormack as an analogue to Said's *Orientalism*.¹¹ It may be useful, therefore, to offer

¹⁰ On imagology or 'image studies', cf. Hugo Dyserinck, 'Komparatistische Imagologie: Zur politischen Tragweite einer europäischen Wissenschaft von der Literatur', in *Europa und das nationale Selbstverständnis. Imagologische Probleme in Literatur, Kunst und Kultur des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. H. Dyserinck & K.U. Syndram (Bonn, 1988), 13-37, and the sources cited there.

¹¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978); W.J. McCormack, *Ascendancy and Tradition in Anglo-Irish Literary History from 1789 to 1939* (Oxford, 1985), 219-238. It is worth pointing out, that (as the work and influence of L.P. Curtis may have already indicated, cf. above, note 4) the critique of Celtic stereotype

a few thoughts on the (undoubted) achievement of Said and its (more doubtful) applicability to the 'Celtic' regions and traditions of Europe.

Those Celtic regions share (albeit on a different scale) one important attribute with the colonial or exotic world as studied by Fanon and Said: their peripherality vis-à-vis metropolitan Europe. From Brittany to the Hebrides the 'Celtic' parts of modern Europe form part of a distant and far-flung periphery (viewed from the metropolitan centres, that is), and as such they came to be dominated by, while remaining marginal to, the metropolitan polity and its cultural values. The position of the 'Celtic Fringe' in the British Isles (which geographically is characterized by being situated far from London and on mountainous terrain impeding smooth communication) has been studied in terms of 'internal colonialism';¹² and the fact that Celtic languages and relics should have survived in these impenetrable backwaters rather than in Berkshire, Normandy or Flanders, can be explained from such political and geographical causes.

The connotation of peripherality has been all-pervasive in the notion of Celticism. As early as 1711, Leibniz felt that the further one moved out on the Atlantic Fringe, the older the vestiges of some primordial 'Celtic' language one was likely to encounter. It was a spatio-temporal commonplace which left its traces in the famous opening paragraphs of Renan's essay *La poésie des races celtiques* of 1860 and Matthew Arnold's *On the Study of Celtic Literature* of 1867: both evocations of a journey outward in which one leaves the present and the quotidian pace of temporal progress, and moves out of time, into the past or into some mythical or primordial timelessness.¹³

goes back further than the 1970s and the Foucault-derived concepts of *discourse* and *construct*. Thus, the earliest example of a 'deconstruction' of Celticism is furnished by John Mackinnon Robertson's admirable *The Saxon and the Celt. A Study in Sociology* (London U.P., 1897).

¹² Cf. Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism. The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966* (London, 1975). See also Chapman, *op. cit.* (note 5), 235-237 for strictures on Hechter's approach and its influence on subsequent, 'postcolonial' critics.

¹³ Leibniz argued as follows: 'Nam, ut alibi iam admonui quemadmodum Angli fueri colonia Saxorum, & Britanni emissio veterum Celtarum, Gallorum, Cimbrorum; ita Hiberni sunt propage antiquiorum Britannicae habitatorum,

The idea that a periphery is backward, bypassed by history, lost in time, is constant and almost universal in modern historical consciousness. Said has demonstrated this mechanism in Orientalist discourse; the phenomenon has been studied in general terms by Johannes Fabian in his *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (Columbia U.P., 1983). What Fabian calls 'the denial of coevalness' in attitudes towards distant peripheries can bespeak either a sense of 'advanced' metropolitan superiority, or else a primitivistic nostalgia for the more 'organic' and 'natural' past. To the extent that the Celts were seen as a peripheral culture (their erstwhile European territory having progressively been rolled back by the march of history until it occupied no more than the tellingly-named 'Celtic Fringe'), they were also habitually seen as 'a culture of the past', one without future, one with a mystical otherworldliness, exiled from the mainstream of historical progress. It is the 'Astérix Village' imagery of the Celts who, on the fringes, behind palisades and fortified by magic potions, have begged to be excused from historical reality and from the 'tyranny of fact'.¹⁴ And to the extent that Ireland is the most peripheral of all the Celtic regions, Ireland is, paradoxically, the most centrally Celtic of them all.

If peripherality was canonized into the distinctive feature of Celticism, it is no surprise to find that Ireland is often singled out in that respect (owing, witness Leibniz, to its outlying western position). Ireland is often focused on as the place where the most archaic vestiges of ancient

colonis Celticis Cimbrisque nonnullis & ut sic dicam mediis, anteriorum. Itaque ut ex Anglicis linguae veterum Saxonorum & ex Cambricis veterum Gallorum; ita ex Hibernicis vetustiorum, adhuc Celtarum Germanorumve et generaliter dicam accolarum Oceani Britannici cismarinorum antiquitates illustrantur. Et, si ultra Hiberniam esset aliqua insula Celtici sermonis, eius filo in multo adhuc antiquiora duceremur.' (*Collectanea etymologica*, 1717, 153-154). The parallel opening passages of Renan's and Arnold's essays are well known (see below, 107; McCormack *op. cit.* (note 11) quotes and comments them *in extenso*). One of the best assessments of the role of Renan and Arnold in the development of Celticism is chapter four in Malcolm Chapman's, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London, 1978), 81-112.

¹⁴ On the stereotypical backwardness or timelessness of the Celtic periphery cf., besides Chapman, *op. cit.* (note 5), my 'Nationalisme als discours: Het voorbeeld Ierland en de Keltische periferie', in *Het Europees labyrint, Nationalisme en natievorming in Europa*, ed. T. Zwaan et al. (Amsterdam, 1990), 191-203.

Celtic culture and tradition have lingered longest and have left their best-legible traces. The commonplace permeates Irish-related discourse: from the often and enthusiastically repeated truism that Ireland remained outside the sphere of conquest of the Roman Empire (that *primum movens* of European history), until the pulp fiction and New Age elucubrations of present times.¹⁵ For that reason, the study of Celticism tends often to fix on Ireland as the most typical, paradigmatic case; what is more, Irish and Ireland-related criticism seems to have most open to be placed under the methodological aegis of Said's *Orientalism*. Irish critics have been among the first to apply Said's method to their country. Among the attempts to read Irish-related discourse in terms of the hegemony of representation a prominent place is occupied by critics around the *Crane Bag* magazine and around the Field Day company.

It is at this point that two caveats are in order. One concerns the applicability of Said-style postcolonial criticism to the Celtic regions of Europe, the other concerns the paradigmatic status often accorded to Ireland in this type of study.

III

Said's study was important in many respects. Not only did it open the eyes of a Western readership to the tradition of attitudes vis-à-vis 'the' Orient, it also offered, in the textual hermeticism and (post-)structuralist climate of 1978, a Foucault-derived indication how to read texts in their political and ideological context. Said placed great emphasis on the basic asymmetry of the cultural confrontation manifested in orientalist discourse:

¹⁵ David Hume held that Ireland, owing to its having fallen outside the Roman sphere of influence 'from which all of Europe derives its civility', persisted in a state of primordial barbarity. Other, more romantic souls saw in this situation the saving grace of a country that kept its native authenticity pure and unmixed. Leon Uris's blockbuster novel *Trinity*, which contains almost all the stereotypes that can be found on Ireland and almost nothing that is not a stereotype, has for a *Leitmotiv* that 'in Ireland there is no future, only the past happening over and over again'. Similarly, within Ireland, the western margin on the Atlantic seaboard counts as the most characteristically Celtic; see, for instance, John W. Foster, 'Certain Set Apart: The Western Island in the Irish Renaissance', *Studies*, 66 (1977): 261-274.

the difference between those who represent and those who are represented. He also demonstrated that the representation of the Orient by Western observers, besides being often derogatory and negatively distortive, formed the discursive part of a larger pattern of colonial domination, in which the West subjected and took control of the Orient.

To read the record of representation (which can include fiction, poetry, history-writing, travel description and other genres, and even non-verbal 'texts' or representations such as painting) as the subtly, often artistically transmuted testimony of power relationships; to study such representations not in their mimetic pretense but as constructs; to bring to light their underlying power relationships; and also (though this last point is often overlooked by Said's followers) to offer a critical appreciation of the way in which these power relationships have been transmuted into literature, often of high artistic merit: all that is the deeper methodological importance of the approach applied in *Orientalism*. Obviously, Said's approach could be fruitfully applied to other areas of cultural confrontation besides the 'Oriental' sphere. Said himself has broadened his scope since the appearance of *Orientalism* in 1978; a log of his interests since then is provided in his *Culture and Imperialism* (1992). In that book, Said has a good deal to say about one Celtic country at least: Ireland. *Culture and Imperialism* includes a penetrating essay on Yeats, originally published in pamphlet form with the Field Day Company; Ireland being the one intra-European country which, going by Said's global survey, has been subjected to the same discourse of domineering representation and estrangement as the Third World.

It is important to note, at this point, that the interest of Ireland, for Said, does not lie in its cultural-ethnic 'Celtic' aspects but rather in its political background: as a country with a heritage of colonial oppression. That should already give us a first warning not to place the study of 'Celticism' as a whole completely under the auspices of Said's *Orientalism*. What is more, it would not be appropriate to consider even Ireland as a colony *tout court*. Certain aspects in Irish history recall a colonial pattern, others do not; and it is a tenuous assumption that such colonial aspects as we can trace in Irish history coincide with that country's 'Celtic' reputation. On the contrary, perhaps: to the (limited) extent that Ireland fits the pattern of colonial experience, it may be less suitable as a paradigmatic sample-case for European 'Celticism' in

For the subject of *Celticism* is at the same time wider and more specific than the scope of the postcolonial approach in criticism; moreover, Celticism cannot be understood properly if it is studied as a purely or even primarily Ireland-related phenomenon. For one thing, the image of the Celts as the peripheral waifs and strays of European history was for the first time formulated most importantly vis-à-vis the Celts of Wales and of the Scottish Highlands. Edward Snyder's still-valuable work on *The Celtic Revival in English Literature 1760-1800* (Harvard U.P., 1923) shows that the Welsh past was the first to experience an upsurge of Celticist interest. In Wales, the activities of native antiquarians (of varying scholarly reliability, including men like Evan Evans and Lewis Morris) went hand in hand with poems like Gray's *The Bard* to trigger a revival of the extinct institution of the *eisteddfod*, and a flurry of text-editions and historical research — not only in Wales, be it said, but also in Brittany. In Scotland, the process was sparked off by Macpherson's massively influential Ossianic writings of the 1760s.¹⁶ Walter Scott fanned the flame, not only in his Europe-wide bestsellers *Waverley* and *Rob Roy*, but also in his romanticization of Scotland's 'picturesque' Highland traditions, which were either wholly or partly invented around the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ The British Royal Family, since the days of

¹⁶ In recent years, critical attention has shifted from the fraudulence of Ossian to its subtext of that sense of defeat and self-estrangement so widespread in Scotland, and especially in the Highlands, after Culloden. It may be suggested, in addition, that an unconscious prototype for the Ossianic narrative lay in that other Celtic story of national defeat: the Arthurian material, especially in the nostalgic treatment of Sir Thomas Malory. The Arthurian material, especially in the post-romantic reworkings of Tennyson and T.H. White and even John Boorman's film *Excalibur*, offers a good example of the incorporation and internalization of Celticism into the canon of the English national past.

¹⁷ Cf. *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge U.P., 1978). Although the case of the invention of Scottish traditions may have been stated somewhat over-confidently, the case as such stands, and has been argued plausibly by various scholars (witness, for example, Chapman *op. cit.*, note 13). The romantic appropriation and fabrication of 'native' Celtic material, with more regard for picturesque effect than for historical authenticity, is closely matched by a comparable process in Ireland that is well documented in Jeanne Sheehy's *The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past: The Celtic Revival, 1800-1830* (London, 1980).

Victoria, seems happiest when, be-tartaned and be-kilted, they dance to bagpipe accompaniment at Balmoral castle — that mid-nineteenth century quasi-medieval mock-Scots concoction.¹⁸ A no less excruciating Welsh example of such ongoing invention of tradition, and of royal charisma battenning upon the periphery's local colour, was added in the pseudo-medieval installation of Charles as Prince of Wales in Glamorgan castle, Charles himself addressing the crowd in a few lines of carefully-rehearsed Welsh.

Here, then, lie important manifestations of Celticism, all of them significantly different, in one crucially important respect, from the Irish development. In all these regions, but not in Ireland, Celticism came in the course of the nineteenth century to be treated with a great deal of sentimental condescension and tolerance. 'Repressive tolerance', it may be. But the injustices of power relationships in the various Celtic peripheries (e.g., the Highland clearances, the enforced anglicization or francisation programmes effected through the school system) were never placed in tandem with cultural, Celtic separateness on a nationalist agenda — except in Ireland. In Ireland, which from Thomas Davis to Patrick Pearse sees a gradual convergence of political and cultural nationalism, Celticism maintained a far more radical political potential (as its eventual eruption into a national war of independence was to show). The cultivation of the national antiquity and of the country's essential 'Celtic' difference from England was far more politically charged than in the case of the Scots who ordered tartan kilts from the Edinburgh tailors in order to celebrate a visit from George IV, or the Welsh who dressed up in bedsheets and went through mock-druidic rituals at their latterday *eisteddfodau*. Accordingly, Celticism Irish-style was largely kept outside the pageantry of Greater British local colour, in marked contrast to the official, mainstream-English acceptance of Scottish and Welsh Celticism. Matthew Arnold's *On the Study of Celtic Literature* is already full of double standards vis-à-vis Wales and Ireland. And the case of Brittany, in the French context, takes shape under different parameters again. The potential political virulence of Irish Celticism is a measure of

¹⁸ As such, Balmoral fits a European pattern. Ludwig of Bavaria took his children to Scotland and Ireland, and the Hohenzollerns to the Highlands.

that country's more fraught, tension-ridden relations with the Centre. Thus, we arrive at our *demonstrandum* that, ironically, the very applicability of Said's *Orientalism* to the Irish context, resulting as it does from the more extreme economic, constitutional and social marginalization of Ireland as compared to Wales or Scotland, makes the Irish experience unsuited as a sample-case for European Celticism in general.

IV

Generally speaking, the main difference between Orientalism and Celticism is perhaps this: whereas Orientalist discourse as analysed by Said functioned against the background of a deafening silence (the silence of native, autochthonous sources which were disregarded or otherwise denied access to the Eurocentric process of representation), the Celtic regions of Europe (including Ireland) were to some extent in a position to let a native voice be heard. True: Celtic culture in the British Isles had been subject to severe prosecution; but Welsh learning did thrive after the ascent of the Tudors and the conciliation of the Welsh as good Protestants; Scottish history and Scottish culture were cultivated even as the Highlands were being cleared; and even in Ireland, where native culture was considered subversive and ruthlessly oppressed, the study of antiquity from Ussher and Ware onwards came to rely increasingly on native, Gaelic sources and native, Gaelic assistance; to the point that, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, the discourse of Irish antiquarianism came to be dominated by nativism and began to reflect a Gaelic rather than an English perspective on the country's past.¹⁹ In all these cases (but mostly so in the cases of Wales and Scotland), Celticism could become a form of exotic, romantic regionalism; different from, but not opposed to,

¹⁹ For a survey of the English-Irish cultural confrontation, see my *Myths of the Celtic Past: Studies in the Idea of Irish Nationality, its Development and its Role in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1994). It illustrates, the construction of mythical identities, largely, the 'Celtic' one, is not only the result of marginalization (as it would appear from the structuralist model, note 5), but also of interaction, translation,

mainstream English culture: a dash of local colour at the national periphery.²⁰

When seen from this perspective (the extent to which Orientalism does *not* provide a blueprint to map onto the development of Celticism: the extent to which the marginalization and subjection of the Celtic regions differs from the experience of extra-European colonies), the most interesting and paradigmatic relationship is perhaps not the one between 'Celtic' Ireland and 'Saxon' England, but the one between 'Celtic' Brittany and 'Gaulish-Frankish' France.

In Britain, the central national ancestry myth (that of England) had come to overshadow the country's Celtic roots. In the British national tale of the Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Danes and Normans, the Islands' Celtic population was generally seen as a primitive substratum, referred to in the third person and without sense of identification.²⁰ The case in France was far different. Since the country's first national record was provided by Caesar's appreciative description of the Gaulish nations he subdued, the triple origin of Gauls, Romans and (later) Franks firmly included a sense of a Celtic element within the national ancestry. The vicissitudes of the Gaulish ancestry myth in French historical awareness are fascinating to follow and would amply reward further investigation — especially to the extent that in France the Gaulish ancestry myth had to compete with the alternatives: a Roman or Galloroman ancestry myth, or a Frankish one. Montesquieu, in *L'esprit des lois*, speaks of 'nos pères, les anciens Germains', and thus traces the national ancestry back to the Germanic Franks.²¹ Two centuries later, French schoolbooks begin the national history with 'Nos ancêtres les Gaulois'; here and in the icon of Astérix it is obvious that French historical awareness now firmly traces the national roots back to Celtic forebears. That shift from a Germanic to a Celtic self-derivation can be traced from the mid-eighteenth to the late nineteenth

²⁰ Cf. Hugh A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History. Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons* (Univ. Press of New England, 1982).

²¹ Partly, one suspects, in order to co-opt the praise bestowed on the Germanic tribes by his great example, Tacitus. On the reception of Tacitus' *Germania* in post-renaissance Europe, see M.A. Wes, 'Tussen Hermann en Hitler', in *Id., Verslagen Verleden. Over geschiedenis en oudheid* (Amsterdam, 1980), 124-208.

centuries.²²

In France, then, the investigation of Celtic antiquity takes place on a wholly different national-ideological basis than in Ireland or Britain. The matter is made that much more complex, because from the very early eighteenth century onwards, men of letters have assumed a relationship between the ancient Gauls, praised and defeated by Caesar, and the present-day Bretons. Although one might hazard the guess that in eighteenth-century terminology the former are usually called *Gaulois* and that the appellation *Celtes* is rather reserved for the latter, such a distinction is by no means absolute. Eighteenth-century *Celtomanes* (Pezron, Bullet, Pelloutier, La Tour d'Auvergne), many of whom were themselves from Brittany, were apt to conflate Gauls and Bretons, and to see the present-day inhabitants of Armorica as the last unmixed descendants of Vercingetorix. That conflation is, of course, erroneous: the Bretons are an early medieval colony from Wales and Cornwall, arriving on the scene long after the Gauls had been romanized. But the strength of the conflation (which also takes in the megalithic monument-builders of Carnac) persists, so that Astérix le Gaulois has been given his residence in Brittany and his friend Obélix is in the menhir trade.²³

What spoke against this canonization of the Bretons as 'the last true Gauls' was mainly their resistance to Parisian politics. In the Revolution, Brittany with the adjacent Vendée were firm royalists, and the jacobin centralization campaign for a *république* that was to be, not only *française*, but also *une et indivisible*, had no truck with the Otherness of Brittany. In that respect, the situation of Brittany in the Revolution decades was comparable to that of the other Celtic regions which had backed an ousted monarch: Ireland twice in the seventeenth century (with its loyalty to Charles I and James II), the Highlands after 1745. French attitudes to 'the

²² Léon Poliakov, *Le mythe aryen. Essai sur les sources du racisme et des nationalismes* (new ed. Bruxelles, 1987), esp. 29-48 ('France: La querelle des deux races'); *Nos ancêtres les Gaulois*, ed. P. Viallaneix & J. Ehrard (Univ. de Paris - Sorbonne, 1982); *Primitivisme et mythes des origines dans la France des XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles*, ed. Ch. Grell & Chr. Michel (Université de Paris - Sorbonne, 1989).

Outer and Inner Others: The Auto-Image of French Identity
Eugène Sue, *Yearbook of European Studies*, 2 (1988): 35-

Celts', and especially to Brittany, were mixed (a combination of Gaulophilia and Bretonophobia) until the influence of Ernest Renan coincided with the strong anti-German feelings of the aftermath of 1870-71.

The case of France is, then, ambiguous, and in that respect it offers perhaps the best sample-case for 'Celticism' in general. It shows that 'the Celts' can count both as an exotic Other and as a central element in the nation's historical awareness.²⁴ Orientalist discourse, in Said's typology, is a way of cognitively dominating the alien; but unlike the Orientals, the Celts are not quite alien, they are at least fellow-Europeans and they do occupy a place within the nation's domestic past. As such they always offer a possibility of identification. It is symbolic, I believe, that the two key authors in nineteenth-century Celticism, Renan and Arnold, wrote their observations with a sense of their own Celtic 'roots'. Renan was himself from Brittany and throughout his life remained sentimentally attached to the homeland of his pre-lapsarian childhood. (Hence, perhaps, his penchant for ascribing to the Celts a childlike, innocent piety). The case of Arnold is even more interesting. His father was the famous Dr. Arnold, head master of Rugby, commemorated in that most arch-English of books, *Tom Brown's School Days*. Arnold senior was also known as 'Celt-hater' Arnold; he was a great admirer of Germany and set excessive store by England's Saxon roots.²⁵ Matthew Arnold's relationship with his father was a troubled one; and there are, then, some Oedipal overtones in his later defence of the Celtic heritage in English culture, as set forth in *On the Study of Celtic Literature*:

²⁴ For example: many European nations now have statues to Celtic heroes from the national (!) past who resisted foreign (Roman) aggression. London has Queen Boadicea on Westminster Bridge, France has Vercingetorix in Clermont-Ferrand and elsewhere, Belgium has Ambiorix in Tongeren; and even Cuchulain in the Dublin General Post Office, with its Pearsian overtones, seems (*mutatis mutandis*) to fit that description. Cf. my 'Image and Reality — and Belgium', in *Europa Provincia Mundi* (festschrift H. Dyserinck: Amsterdam, 1992), 281-291. For an inspiring parallel with a non-Celtic *lieu de mémoire*, see Wes, *op. cit.* (note 21): a brilliant and extensive historical analysis of the *Hermannsdenkmal* in Germany.

²⁵ Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867; Everyman ed., London, 1910); Poliakov, *op. cit.* (note 22), 64; F.E. Faverty, *Matthew Arnold the Ethnologist* (Northwestern U.P., 1951), 118.

I remember, when I was young, I was taught to think of Celt as separated by an impassable gulf from Teuton. My father, in particular, was never weary in contrasting them; he insisted much oftener on the separation between us and them than on the separation between us and any other race in the world [...] (19)

Such a statement takes on added meaning when we realize that Arnold's Celtic interest was stimulated to a great degree by a trip to Brittany, made in 1859, when he was made aware of the Breton-Cornish affiliation, and reflected on the fact that he himself, through his Cornish mother, had a hitherto unacknowledged Celtic ancestry.

V

To see Celticism as something which takes place in the context of domination or colonialism, or in a centre-periphery polarity, may be adequate if we study its manifestation in a single country — say, Ireland. It means that we can study the phenomenon as a manifestation of, or as a response to, marginalization; a form of exoticism (actuated by the periphery's troubled relations with the power centre); a struggle of historical narratives and self-definitions. Thus, to see a Celtic region in terms of postcolonial criticism is to study it in terms of its relationship with its dominant neighbour, England or France. Ideally, however, the study of Celticism should transcend the binary context of hegemonism. To be sure, it may be useful to discern structural patterns and parallels among the various relationships between the metropolitan, hegemonist culture on the one hand and each of the Celtic peripheries individually on the other (crudely: to compare the pairs of England-Ireland, England-Scotland, England-Wales and France-Brittany). But to do would be to foreground, and to focus on, the aspect of hegemony and cultural power imbalance. It would bring out the parallel with other such cultural confrontations elsewhere in the world (as Said had done in *Culture and Imperialism*) but by the same token it would leave little room for the question to which extent these relations were specifically determined by the perceived *Celtic* nature of the peripheries involved.

In order to study Celticism in its own right, under the aspect of its perceived *Celtic* nature, means that we must do more than simply

cumulate these individual bipolar, national confrontations. For the story of Celticism is more than the sum of Gaelic, Welsh and Breton stereotypes and nationalism, more than the sum of the peripheries' relations with their respective centres: it is also the story of these regions' sense of ethnic interrelatedness as 'Celts', and of the contacts between these peripheries mutually. I give a few examples.

- The scholarly elaboration of the relatedness between the various Celtic languages was worked out by a transnational group effort of the Republic of Letters, in which scholars from various nationalities collaborated. Frenchmen like Bochart, Pezron, and the eighteenth-century *Celtomanes*; a Welshman like Edward Lhuyd; Irishmen (including Gaels and Anglo-Irish) like Sir James Ware, Duald Mac Firbis, Roderic O'Flaherty, John Toland and Charles O'Connor. These men knew of each others' work and mutually inspired each other. Jean-Baptiste Bullet and Charles Vallancey invoked each others' examples.
- The story of Ossianism cannot be properly understood if one does not take the role of Ireland into account. There was a long-standing debate between Scotland and Ireland as to the meaning of the medieval Latin name *Scotia*, and that debate was re-opened by Macpherson. Also, to point out the uncouthness of the Irish tales of Oisín as opposed to the refinement of Macpherson's Ossian was an often-used argument against Ossian's authenticity; and Irish antiquarianism received a major boost from the need to refute Macpherson's imposture.
- French romantic historians (the Thierry brothers, Michelet, Henri Martin) drew on Walter Scott and on Irish sources such as Toland and Thomas Moore's *History of Ireland*; conversely, Thomas Davis, as Malcolm Brown put it, 'read and emulated [Michelet] as a matter of course. Those stiff saffron-robed pre-Conquest Gaels with their charming barbarisms of *geasa* and fosterage, stock figures in the future Irish literary movement, came ultimately to Davis of Michelet's medieval pageantry. Passing beyond Michelet, Davis found his true guiding star in [...] Augustin Thierry, whom

he repeatedly exalted above "any historian that ever lived".²⁶

- Michelet concluded a sentimental description of the long-term Ousting of the Celt, from Roman times to the present, by evoking the Highland Clearances in the following terms: 'Les Highlanders ne seront bientôt plus que dans l'histoire et dans Walter Scott. On se met sur les portes à Edinburgh quand on voit passer le tartan et la claymore. Ils disparaissent, ils émigrent; la cornemuse ne fait plus entendre qu'un air dans les montagnes: *Cha till, cha till, sin tuile*: Nous ne reviendrons, reviendrons, reviendrons jamais.' This met with so much empathy on the part of a Breton reader, Guillaume Lejean, that he sent Michelet an ardent fan-letter and a poem in Breton on the harsh fate of the Celtic nations. In that poem, the Scots-Galic quotation from Michelet was assimilated into the Breton: *Birwiken, birwiken, biken ne zistroïmp d'ar vro*.²⁷
- The Welsh *eisteddfod* as it was resuscitated in the early nineteenth century offered a strong inspiration for romantic cultural patriots in Brittany. Hersart de la Villemarqué, the collector, editor and 'embellisher' of Breton folk poetry, was a regular guest. The Methodist clergy, strongly represented in *eisteddfod* circles, supported Le Gonidec's translation of the Bible into Breton, for reasons not only of proselytization but also of cultural kinship and solidarity.²⁸ And it may not be superfluous to mention that the

²⁶ Malcolm Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature. From Thomas Davis to W.B. Yeats* (London, 1972), 46. The reference is to Thierry's 'Sur l'esprit national des irlandais', *Censeur européen*, 24 November 1819. Cf. also Joseph Hone, *Thomas Davis* (London/Dublin, 1934), 26-7.

²⁷ Communicated to me by Arthur Mitzman, who is at present engaged on the edition of this part of Michelet's correspondence; cf. also Jean-Yves Guiomar, 'Un jeune républicain breton: Lettres de G. Lejean à Michelet (1847-1860)', *Cahiers mennaisiens*, (1985): 61. The description in Michelet concludes Book I ('Celts, Ibères, Romains') of the first volume (*Le Moyen-Age*) in his *Histoire de France*. Cf also Ann Rigney's contribution, below, 175-176.

²⁸ Witness the case of the Rev. Thomas Price (bardic name: Carnhuanawc: author of a Welsh-language History of Wales, *Hanes Cymru*), who repeatedly read pan-Celtic prize essays at various *eisteddfodau*. Cf. *The Literary Remains of the Rev. Thomas Price, Carnhuanawc* (Llandovery & London, 2 vols., 1851).

damburst of Celticist interest in England, Matthew Arnold's *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, was triggered by Arnold's reading of Renan, by his visit to Brittany and by his experience of an *eisteddfod*.

- There is evidence of a persistent streak of 'Pan-Celticism'. That movement, which warrants closer historical and critical scrutiny should ideally be studied with reference [a] to revival movements in the individual 'Celtic' regions,²⁹ and [b] to other pan-ethnic movements such as the Pan-German and Pan-Slavic ones. The well-documented work of Peter Berresford Ellis, though written by a zealous partizan in the Celtic cause, would provide a useful point of departure.³⁰

Celticism is a multi-genre, multinational phenomenon; it should be considered therefore from an interdisciplinary and supranational perspective. The exchanges between countries, and between the various spheres of intellectual or artistic activity, are at least as important as the developments within each genre or region. While no single person may marshal all the evidence to provide an integrated understanding of this highly fascinating chapter in European intellectual and artistic history, a collaboration format like the present one (interdisciplinary and international in scope and composition) may point the way towards significant advance.

²⁹ For a good treatment of the Irish case, see Philip O'Leary, "Children of the Same Mother": Gaelic Relations with the Other Celtic Revival Movements, 1882-1916', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 6 (1986): 101-130.

³⁰ Cf. Ellis's *The Celtic Dawn. A History of Pan Celticism* (London, 1993).

OSSIAN, HERMANN AND THE JEW'S-HARP IMAGES OF THE CELTIC LANGUAGES FROM 1600 TO 1800¹

Daniel Droixhe
(Universities of Liège and Brussels)

The Arab Language is surely a hundred times
more subtle than its mother in the rough beginnings;
and our German surely more subtle than old Celtic.
Herder, *On the Origin of Language* (1992: 152)

The Jew's-harp-house & the Green Man,
The Ponds where Boys to bathe delight,
The fields of Cows by Willan's farm,
Shine in Jerusalem's pleasant sight.
Blake, *Jerusalem*, Pl.27 (1979: 650)

The image of the Celtic languages has always hesitated between low-assimilation and hyperdivision. As early as 1555, Conrad Gessner opted 'for an identification of "Gallica vetus" or "Celtica"' with modern High German' and 'it was this concept which his Mithridates helped to perpetuate in German linguistics until well into the 18th century'. E. Poppe details the statement by mentioning Schottel's famous *Treatise upon*

¹ This article summarizes some parts from Droixhe 1987-93. A stronger emphasis is put on Scaliger, Leibniz and Süssmich's influence in France.