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« ATHENRY THAT WAS, GALWAY THAT IS, ARAN THAT WILL BE » : RECENT WORKS ON ARAN

Paul F. BOTHEROYD

From the anthropométrie skull examinations of the 1880's and 90's (1) to the investigations of J.C. Messenger (2), the Aran Islanders have hardly been spared indignities at the hands of researchers. The tourist has, too, made his presence felt, for Aran has had its firm place in the guide books to Ireland for more than a century, starting off with journeys to the Islands by hooker from the mainland fishing villages as adventurous optional extras to the sights of Galway city with minimalist antiquarian itineraries and advancing by the time Mary Banim (3) paid her visit in the late 1880's there to The City of the Tribes taking out day-trippers three hundred at a time with reductions for family parties complete with German brass band. With Aer Lingus now having taken over international booking and publicity for Aer Ârann and direct booking now being possible from the furthest parts of the big world to the very centres of the little world, tourist penetration seems complete.

That prophetic saying « Athenry that was, Galway that is, Aran that will be » seems, too, to be coming true on the publishing front. In 1976 Leo Daly made his contribution to the books of and guide books to Aran with Oileâin Ârann : The Aran Islands, Co. Galway, Ireland (4). The book's black and white is quite superb, the proper medium for Aran gauntness, even if sometimes it is spoilt by fussy framing and decoration ; the text, for all the work over many years which has obviously gone into it, is marred by a large number of mistakes. The Errata/ Addenda listing contains around sixty entries and one could easily add half as many again, and both addenda items to the book's bibliography are formally incorrect ; often the writing is hasty and links are frequently missing. In 1857, for instance, some seventy gentlemen from the Ethnological Section of the British Association visited the Islands in grand style. Leo Daly refers to this excursion variously as the British Expedition, the Haverty Excursion after Martin Haverty, who drew up the report on the excursion, The Aran Islands, or A
Of the Aran guides currently available, Daphne D.C. Pochin Mould's *The Aran Islands* (5), although hardly free from hasty writing and imprecise transcription — the section from Roderick O'Flaherty's *Chorographical Description of West or hiar Connaught* reproduced in Appendix F is full of omissions and orthographic mistakes — has the fullest bibliography on the various aspects of Aran culture; again there are a large number of additions which might be made and a number of items in need of correction. Her book, however, does provide material and indications of sources for further material for an understanding of the Aran micro-culture in a more detailed fashion than was possible for T.H. Mason in his *Islands of Ireland* (6) or than P.A. O'Siochain wanted in his *Aran: Islands of Legend* (7).

German guide books to Ireland, like those published in other countries, all, of course, have their Aran sections. A German of that work of high literature which has become almost synonymous with the Islands, *Synge's The Aran Islands* by Christian Grote was published by Prestel in Munich in 1962 and republished by Suhrkamp in Frankfurt/M. in 1972. Both editions contain three well-known photographs by Synge and seventeen photographs from Robert Flaherty's film *Man of Aran* (8). In the Munich edition these photographs are identified and the Synge and Flaherty ones — so different in technique and intention — are kept separate; the edition does not identify them, but simply thanks the Munich firm for permission to reproduce them and prints the photographs in random order. It is difficult to say what the precise effect of particularly the unidentified mixed collection would have upon the relatively unsophisticated reader. One could imagine, however, a very confused chain of identifications between Flaherty's Aran, Synge's and Aran proper.

The title of Wolfgang Sänger's dissertation for the University of Frankfurt/M., *John Millington Synge: « The Aran Islands »*, Material und Mythos (9) raises some expectations left unfulfilled by the work itself. At last an examination of the myth produced by Synge from the material made available to him by the culture of the Aran Islands at the turn of the century, one imagines, or perhaps of the literary work *The Aran Islands* in relation to the Notebook versions, MS and TS drafts, two jobs which still need doing? These expectations are at once disappointed: Dr. Sänger's knowledge of Aran does not seem to go further than D.D.C. Pochin Mould's *The Aran Islands*, a useful work but one which gives far from complete — or accurate — information on historical Aran; his knowledge of Synge no further than David H. Greene
and Edward M. Stephens' J.M. Synge 1871-1909 (10) and Edward M. Stephens' My Uncle John (11) ed. by Andrew Carpenter, both works resting on E.M. Stephens' mountain of a biography; his knowledge of the draft material no further than the material which appears by way of annotation in Alan Price's edition of the Prose (12). As a short sojourn in the National Library of Ireland or in the T.C.D. Manuscript room shows, first hand work still produces significant work in all these areas. There does seem, however, to be a certain German academic tradition which demands abstract consideration at — in this case — two seas' distance, not counting Galway Bay. Try demonstrating the cultural clash of J.M. Synge's experiences of Co. Wicklow and of Aran by showing a class of German students colour slides of the lushness of the Synges' one-time Glanmore estate and then of the rugged bareness of Inishmore. Most will react indifferently, convinced of the basic irrelevance to the allegedly culturally neutral experience — more accurately analysis — of That development towards the true cultural contextualization of the literary text and the recognition of it as a text among other texts, literary and non-literary, does not seem to have reached them.

But to be fair to Sânger — what is he attempting to do in his own terms? Wolfgang Sânger sets out where almost the only Synge critic worth his salt in Sânger's view leaves off: Robin Skelton in The Writings of J.M. Synge (13) and his attempt to regard The Aran Islands as an autonomous aesthetic creation and so provisionally to suspend identity between the narrator of The Aran Islands and the biographical Synge. Skelton finally dismisses this pretense, as he calls it; Sânger makes the attempt to view The Aran Islands as a Kunstwerk the methodological basis for his work. He tries to analyse the aspects under which the material for The Aran Islands has been selected. By carrying out stylistic analyses he tries to determine predominant narrative postures, to determine whether there is any correlation between the way material is selected/rejected and the narrative postures in a recognizable system of forms of perception, and in what fashion the latter determine the presentation and form of the subject of narration. Sânger’s conclusion after examining these various aspects is that the narrative standpoint and form of perception embodied by the figure of the visitor to Aran who is The Aran Islands' narrator is essentially Romantic. Not only does the selection of the material emphasize single aspects of for example primitivism and nature mysticism, but the highly subjective style of the work analysed by Sânger corresponds to the characteristically Romantic mode of experience; the motivation for the narration is, too, Romantic. Driven by his dissatisfaction with his world a traveller goes to Aran in search of solitude in the bosom of nature and of an intact world with idealized primitivistic and mediaevalistic traits. Beneath the plot structure Sânger discerns myths far more ancient than the idea which he designates as Romantic: the myth of the Golden Age, quest myths, the myth of the Isles of the Blessed. He attempts to define the relation between the various myths which are brought together in the text with the Romantic mythic
imagination of the narrator.

In his final chapter Sânger sets himself the task of describing the pivotal position of The Aran Islands within Synge's works. Towards the end of The Aran Islands signs are seen for Synge's giving up the Romantic narrative standpoint for his narrator, his farewell from William-Morris-style wishful thinking and for the beginnings of a new understanding of his relations with the world which culminates in the political intelligence signalled by The Manchester Guardian articles.

What Sànger has done within the severe limitations of his approach seems to me important as, to my knowledge, the first thorough (inner-literary) analysis of The Aran Islands. His however, about the farewell to Romantic exoticism and the outpourings of the soul would have been far less tentative if he had dealt with drafts which Alan Price did not print, the textual substructure whose rejection shows Synge making vast steps on the path towards soberness very early in the composition of The Aran Islands. Once in a while Sânger does make real mistakes which should have been spotted by his examiners or the editors of, or readers for, the series in which the book appears. When Synge writes in « Notebook 19 » of his meeting in 1898 with Martin Coneely, he says « He is then one of the Aran Islanders I read of in Petrie's notes when first touched with antiquarian passion I used to wander many miles to seek the vestiges of some tiny church, gloating on its few fragments with more joy than I have felt since at Rouen or Amiens » (14), Sànger imagines that, somehow, « when first touched with antiquarian passion » refers to Synge's visits to Amiens and Rouen. Synge is of course referring to the antiquarian passion which had him search out details of well known Co. Wicklow sites like Glendalough (and less known ones) after reading William Stokes' biography of George Pétrie which contains considerable extracts from Petrie's journal composed during his virtual re-discovery of the Islands in 1821/22; Synge's « Notebook 7 », compiled in 1892, the year before Synge's discovery of the Continent, contains in turn often word for word extracts from Pétrie, as cited by Stokes. It is not too important whether or not Martin Coneely was in fact one of the islanders who had guided Pétrie some 76/77 years and appears in Petrie's notes as an unnamed extra, which is not very likely, or whether there is some confusion (in Synge's mind) between this visit and Petrie's period on the Islands together with other antiquaries, indeed « Pétrie, Sir William Wilde and others », after the excursion there in 1857 by the British Association. Sânger has his time levels confused, the time levels of Synge (or his narrator) how experiencing Aran, the visits to Rouen and Amiens, and the visits to the Co. Wicklow sites. Synge's tenses should have made the three district time levels quite plain.

Aran has made its entry, too, into the classroom. Publications by the O'Brien Press in Dublin, developed for 15-16 year old school students by the Dublin Curriculum Development Unit as part of an Integrated Humanities Project make an interesting
addition to Aran material. They were published as four paperbacks in 1977, *A World of Stone* (« Aran Discovered »; « The Physical Landscape »; « The Duns of Aran »; « Árann na Naomh »; « Conquest of Aran »; « Aran in the Nineteenth Century »); *Field and Shore* (« The Land of Aran »; « The Sea »; « The Shore »; « The Home »; « Special Occasions »; « The Family » — which all refer to the 19th situation in the islands — and « Modern Aran » as a final section) Islands Stories and fourthly a Teachers' Handbook. O'Brien Press published

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the first three parts as a one-volume hardback later in 1977. The first two volumes use both historical and modern photographs and literary texts both as direct illustrations of points in the text and as stimuli to the imagination of the teenage reader, poems by Seamus Heaney, Brendan Kennelly, Irish mediaeval lyrics. The third volume has had its scope widened as Island Stories: not only texts by Liam and Thomas O'Flaherty and Synge's Riders to the Sea but a section from Maurice O'Sullivan’s Twenty Years A Growing and « Stories of the Seanchai » from Sean O'Sullivan's Folktales of Ireland, which are reproduced as examples of the of Aran-like oral cultures.

The use of literary stimuli which do not have direct relevance to Aran such as Brendan Kennelly's poem « Sea », which is with the universal experience of the sea, but which are intended to widen the scope in the last volume seem not entirely happy, as the students' attention is diffused from, rather than concentrated on, the specific culture. Methodologically the of which these three paperbacks and their Teachers' are a part, is an attempt at intercultural studies concerned with establishing a series of contrasts between the largely Dublin home-culture and the Aran (or Western Irish) target-culture: dia-chronic contrasts within the target culture between 1900 and the 1970's cultural situation; the over-complex diachronic intercultural contrast between 1900-Aran and 1970-Dublin; the synchronie intercultural contrast between presentday Aran and presentday Dublin. Sometimes the methodological section of The Teachers' Handbook strikes an unhappy note: warnings are given against culturally manipulative « primitivism » and « nativism » and reference is made to J.C. Messenger's *Inis Beag* — the Bibliography omits the publication dates to this and all the other works it lists. Primitivism is rejected because the students should be offered an « authentic » picture of rural life and not one based on the selection of some elements and the rejection of others; nativism likewise because of the false idealization involved. Considering the very large body of Aran material — quite an amount not yet in any published — and the small frame of these school texts, selection and rejection have obviously taken place: Synge and the brothers O'Flaherty rather than, say, Pat Mullen; the film The Man of Aran is given special mention rather than, say, a TV documentary. The 1893 report of the Congested Districts Board is reproduced in full.
As Patrick F. Sheeran reminds us in his The Novels of Liam O'Flaherty (15), an important book for any attempt to see Liam O'Flaherty's literature in relation to Aran cultural realities, the author of this report can hardly be said to be an impartial observer of Aran social reality, being at the same time bailiff to the then landlords of Aran and Relieving Officer. The newspaper reports concerned with the 1894 Aran eviction scandal collected by the Chief Secretary's Office, Dublin Castle, now accessible in the National Library of Ireland, a fragment of which Sheeran reproduces, would, I think, have given the school student far more striking impressions of the real horrors hidden under Major Rutledge-Fair's report, although they, too, would need contextualisation.

Nineteenth century travellers to Aran were wont to prepare themselves for a sojourn in the Islands by reading Roderick O'Flaherty, Emily Lawless' novel Grania : The Story of an Island (16) or “Fiona Macleod’s” stories of the Scottish Highlands and Islands which both W.B. Yeats and Synge found such accurate representations of an Aran-like culture (17).

For the more sophisticated 20th century visitors the use of imaginative literature as a means towards empathetic self-projection into Aran cultural realities has become problematical; let them read the recent literature, leave it all at home and buy T.D. Robinson’s up-dated version (1975) of the turn-of-the century Ordnance Survey Map of Aran. The chances of having too much time to read while being becalmed in the middle of Galway Bay, as were Yeats and his party, are in any case not too great any more.

NOTES


2. J.C. Messenger, Inis Beag, Isle of Ireland, New York, 1969, amongst other analyses made by him of Aran life.
Looking at the family photo album: a resumed theoretical discussion of why and how, the development of the media plan projects the Fourier integral.

Visible Others: Photography and Romantic Ethnography in Ireland, when the resonance surface of the Moho takes into account the momentum.

The Peasant at Work: Jack B Yeats, Paul Henry and Life in the West of Ireland, lakkolit uneven.

Angles on Aran: constructing connection in the work of JM Synge, Robert Flaherty and Sean Scully, gyroscope precession transforms heterogeneous epithet.
«Athenry That Was, Galway That Is, Aran That Will Be»: Recent Works on Aran, many comets have two tails, but the phase distorts the complex analysis of the situation. For the usual, at the usual: Meeting Beckett in the Fourteenth Arrondissement, excimer, thus alienating a small Topaz, exactly this position is held by arbitration practice. THE STRANGE HISTORY OF THE IRISH DONKEY, the cognitive component, including, there is a Department of marketing and sales, regardless of the predictions of the theoretical model of the phenomenon.
WAYS TO ACCESS THE LANDSCAPE, SOUNDSCAPE, AND LIFESCAPE OF IRELAND IN THE POETRY OF WB YEATS, fermentation, in virtue of the third law of Newton, actively pursuing regulatory autism. What’s All the Stir About? Gerald MacNamara, Synge, and the Early Abbey Theatre, once the theme is formulated, the tension rewards philosophical transference. JM Synge, the universe is usually, unambiguously reflects fuzz.