

## From Gombeen to Gubeen: Tourism, Identity and Class in Ireland, 1949-99

*Michael Cronin and Barbara O'Connor*

Only two years after the establishment of the Irish Free State, Daniel Corkery published a book that became an instant classic. *The Hidden Ireland* was hailed for its depiction of Gaelic Ireland in the eighteenth century, a depiction that subsequently, of course, was the object of much scholarly critique and controversy.<sup>1</sup> Corkery's work deliberately sets out to celebrate .the culture outside the Big House, a culture of poetry and poverty, the sacralisation of hardship resonant with the grim asceticism of the new State. Sixty-four years later another publication appeared with the same title, *The Hidden Ireland*. The subtitle, however, marked a radical difference in emphasis, 'Accommodation in Private Heritage Homes'. George Gossip in the preface to the brochure describes the heritage homes:

Some are great houses, at the centre of large estates. They may have been designed by famous architects and lived in or visited by famous people. Others are smaller but no less beautiful or interesting. Most are surrounded by their own tree-studded parks or by gardens, often internationally renowned. They are all in beautiful or historic parts of the country. Some have belonged to the family for generations.<sup>2</sup>

The Hidden Ireland is no longer the Ireland of the cottier and the spalpeen but that of the Big House and the Landlord. If Corkery's text was ideologically important in providing a genealogy for national frugality and self-sufficiency, there is a sense in which the *Hidden Ireland* brochure with its expensive and exclusive accommodation articulates the values of a new Ireland whose self-image is crucially mediated by tourism. Rather than being an extraneous reality foisted on Irish life, tourism has in fact been central to the Irish experience of modernisation and continues to inform not only how we represent ourselves to others but, equally importantly, how we represent ourselves to each other and to ourselves.

In this chapter we pursue the trajectory of tourist discourse by tracing shifts in tourist practice, policy and representation since the establishment of the Republic in 1949. Tourist representations will be analysed as a cultural barometer of the way certain dominant groups have sought and continue to seek to represent Ireland for touristic consumption. In exploring how we represent ourselves to others outside the Republic, we will see how as a society we have set ourselves up for tourist consumption. One of the key players in the process is the state, which has sought to win popular support for tourism development by casting this development as part of the production of modernisation. It is not possible to include all the other players in our discussion since there is a relative dearth of information on the relationship between the state and other groups engaged in tourist development. Despite the importance of tourism to Irish economy and society there is a chronic need for more detailed ethnographic research on tourism, particularly at regional and local level, that would illuminate the often complex and contradictory interaction between different groups and interests. Such research would allow tourism studies to move beyond the narrow, quantitative economism and footlose textual criticism that often limit the interpretive purchase of analyses of Irish tourism.

Here we shall argue that the rhetoric of modernity has dominated tourist discourse from the foundation of the state. As in the past, this rhetoric continues to embody inherent

contradictions in relation to tourist policy, practice and representation in the Republic. The theme of modernisation was central to the rhetoric of Bord Fáilte, the state body founded in 1952, for the promotion of tourist development. We get some indication of the variety of perceived benefits to the nation in Bord Fáilte's annual report for 1956, in which the following rationale is advanced for tourism development:

While based upon the Transport, Hotel and Catering and Entertainment industries, Tourism enters all branches of Social, Cultural and Sporting Activities; and operating as it does, over a wide and varied range of interests it plays a major part in the country's development and progress.<sup>3</sup>

In an unpublished Bord Fáilte document entitled 'History of Irish Tourism' references are made to the organisation of Tidy Town, Roadside Garden and Lock-Keepers' competitions. Under the heading 'Social Significance' the social and cultural benefits of tourism are explicitly underlined:

As well as the obvious economic benefits, tourism contributes substantially to the social and cultural life of the national community. Examples of this range from the obviously tangible benefits to local communities from the provision of facilities for tourists such as swimming pools, roads, promenades and so on, to the equally important concepts of revitalising our cultural heritage (such as through Siamsa) and improving international understanding.<sup>4</sup>

In a Bord Fáilte publication from 1983, *The Welcome Industry*, we are told 'not all the benefits of tourism can be assessed in money terms'. Among the other benefits are:

The amenities and attractions which are developed for visitors from tourism funds are there to be enjoyed by Irish people. Improved roads, scenic drives, golf courses, entertainment complexes, forest parks, angling and equestrian centres, festivals and cultural events of many kinds have all been created with tourism in mind, but the main users and beneficiaries are our own people.<sup>5</sup>

However, the economy has not been forgotten, and we read on:

Neat and tidy towns have attracted industry, local crafts have been revived, existing businesses expanded, all creating more employment and adding to the prosperity and well-being of the community. A pleasant environment or relaxed way of life and a country which still holds to traditional values all add up to a strong inducement for businessmen to look favourably on Ireland as a possible base for new enterprises.<sup>6</sup>

The implication of these policy statements is that the traditional classification of tourism as an industry among others is in fact mistaken, and that there is a confusion of logical categories. Tourism here is not a subset of the set 'industry', but rather 'industry' becomes a subset of the set 'tourism', a set that includes other subsets such as 'culture', 'environment' and 'lifestyle'. In this respect, the rhetoric of modernisation informing Irish tourism since the establishment of the Republic prefigures later discourses of de-differentiation normally associated with postmodernity.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it is arguably a source of confusion in debates on tourism that the word, terminologically speaking, is used as both a superordinate and hyponym. The result is that the full extent of its impact on national culture is minimised if a narrow sectoral reading of the activity is the only one that is advanced.

However, the developmentally holistic rhetoric of the newly established national tourist board failed to materialise into an effective and systematic development of tourism.<sup>8</sup> A combination of *laissez-faire*, ambivalent, and at times, contradictory attitudes by government departments impeded substantial and coherent development within the tourism sector. In their study of tourism policy, Deegan and Dineen outline the prevalent Government attitudes of the time,<sup>9</sup> suggesting that tourism development was seen as peripheral to real economic development in sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing. The evidence also points to the feeling among policy-makers that Ireland's reputation as a country of beautiful scenery and friendly and hospitable people was sufficient to ensure the survival of the tourist industry. In addition, they claim that even the lip service paid to tourism development was the result of external pressure, notably the strong pressure, from the U.S. government (as part of Marshall Aid in Europe following the Second World War) to put more effort into the sector.

The fact that the reality of tourism development fell well behind the rhetoric at this juncture was not due solely to state neglect, but, we would suggest, was also influenced by an active resistance to tourism which was expressed through various public discourses. For instance, an article in the *Irish Independent* newspaper of 1 May, 1946 referring to the dramatic increase in British tourists visiting Ireland immediately following the Second World War mixes a hostility to strangers with the political philosophy of self-reliance:

There is not enough accommodation for our own people. Yet, the government intends to permit visitors from other countries to encroach on that accommodation. The *Irish* people should have the first claim on the food and board in this country.<sup>10</sup>

There was also a fear that the services provided for tourists could be a source of moral contamination. This was evidenced in a Dáil debate on the licensing laws proposed in the Tourism Traffic Act (1952) in which one deputy, Desmond, recounts his own observations and opinions:

It was before 12 ... but even so, we had the misery of seeing young girls drinking in a bar attached to the hotel. My opinion is that if you are going to cater for tourists - including those from our own country - and if we are prepared to stoop to such a low level it will be a bad day for our country.<sup>11</sup>

This is the obverse of Bord Fáilte's arguments for tourism; rather than enhancing the quality of life for Irish society, tourist facilities are seen to be a positive danger particularly to what were perceived to be the weaker, more vulnerable, and perhaps more impressionable sectors of that society. While the antipathy towards British tourists may be understood in the light of prior historico-political relations with the British,<sup>12</sup> available evidence indicates that internal tourists were also targets for expressions of hostility and resentment. In her analysis of representations of tourists-in the literature of the West Kerry Gaeltacht from the 1920s to the 1980s, Nic Eoin vividly captures the negative stereotypes and, at times, scorn which were heaped upon the unwitting visitors and Gaeilgeoirí - attitudes generated by a combination of social class, and other subcultural (including linguistic) differences between host and visitor.<sup>13</sup> These observations are indicative, at the very least, that Bord Fáilte's enthusiasm for tourism development was not shared unanimously by all sectors of Irish society in the early decades of the

Republic. What is apparent here is the association of the project of modernisation with that of modernity expressed in the fear that by materialising the material infrastructure there would be an inevitable and irreversible transformation of values and decline in moral standards.

Tourism and holiday travel are themselves both a reaction to, and an index of, modernity, according to MacCannell.<sup>14</sup> By this he means that it is only in modern urban societies that people become so alienated that they feel the need to seek meaning and authenticity elsewhere, usually in more 'simple' societies. The Ireland of the 1950s was not a 'modern' society on this count, since the vast majority of people did not take holidays. This is not unexpected in a largely agricultural society with a predominantly rural population and a relatively small urban middle class. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that many Irish people failed to express enthusiasm for an activity in which they did not and could not participate. However, the rise in standards of living in the 1960s saw a broadening of the class base for internal tourism. Heuston<sup>15</sup> writes about the increase in the numbers of skilled working-class families at this time taking holidays at the resort of Kilkee, which until then had been the preserve of middle-income groups, while Gillmor<sup>16</sup> documents the beginnings of the charter flight and package holidays abroad in the 1960s which also began with young, urban and single groups.

Some of the paradoxes of modernisation may also be witnessed in the tourist representations of Ireland of the 1950s, paradoxes which still persist today. The tourist normally expects a combination of familiarity and difference/exoticism in her/his holiday destination.<sup>17</sup> It is imperative that the place to be visited must offer something which is not encountered in everyday life. But simultaneously it must also be a 'home from home' - not too much out of place. In marketing terms, Bord Fáilte was charged with the task of representing Ireland as simultaneously pre-modern and modern; on the one hand providing a culture and a people who are easygoing, convivial, garrulous and curious, and on the other capable of providing a clean, comfortable and efficient accommodation of tourist needs.

*Ireland of the Welcomes*, Bord Fáilte's marketing publication established in 1952, provides an interesting case study of the management of these tensions. Throughout its pages we see a division between the advertising and feature articles both in terms of visual iconography and in terms of language and discourse. It is the advertisements which foreground the 'modern' aspects of Ireland. They repeatedly use the adjectives 'comfort', 'ease', 'convenience', even 'luxury' in relation to accommodation and travel facilities as well as emphasising the regularity of the public and private transport service. Cheek by jowl with these advertisements for comfort, reliability, economy and safety - characteristics of a 'modern' service provision - are feature articles which represent the pre-modern Ireland. These articles show evidence of a kind of salvage ethnography referring to the primitive and the exotic and carrying titles such as 'Life at Europe's Edge' (2/4, 1953). Even when we were not being represented as remote from western civilization, and modernity, we were still portrayed as a romantic place and people, where one might wonder whom we hired to provide the regular bus and coach services among such a relaxed population. These feature articles were given extra authenticity and literary value by the fact that they were written by well-known and respected literary

figures of the era such as Paddy Kavanagh, Maurice Walsh, Benedict Kiely, and Walter Macken.

Table 8.1 Tourism growth in OECD countries, 1986-94

	<b>Tourists 1994 (M)</b>	<b>Tourists<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Hotel Nights<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>All Accommodation<sup>a</sup></b>
Canada	16.0	102	-	933
Mexico	17.0	120 <sup>b</sup>	-	-
USA	45.5	185	-	-
Australia	3.4	235	184	237
Japan	3.4	163	-	-
New Zealand	1.3	180	-	155
Austria	-	-	108	108
Belgium	5.3	-	144	133
Denmark	-	-	136	-
Finland	-	-	141	-
France	61.3	170	156	152
Germany	-	-	112	125
Greece	11.3	159	120	114
Iceland	0.2	157	-	-
Ireland	3.7	202 (258) <sup>c</sup>	212	220
Italy	51.8	97	116	101
Netherlands	-	-	122	127
Norway	-	-	152	135
Portugal	9.2	169	131	123
Spain	21.7	129	111	-
Sweden	-	-	100	94
Switzerland	12.2	106	100	-
Turkey	6.7	279	206	258
UK	21.0	151	-	-

Notes:

<sup>a</sup> 1994 Index (1986 = 100).

<sup>b</sup> Mexico (1988 = 100).

<sup>c</sup> 1996 Index for Ireland: 258.

Source: OECD Tourism Policy and International Tourism in OECD Countries, 1993-1994, Paris 1996.

### **From (national) Modernity to (global) Post-Modernity?**

The last decade has seen a phenomenal growth in Irish tourism, the rate of growth between 1986 and 1995 being twice the OECD average (see Table 8.1). The total number of overseas tourists increased in that period by 121 per cent. Income from tourism had risen from £436m in 1986 to £1,451m in 1996.

Table 8.2 Tourism numbers and revenue 1996

Number (000s)	1988	1993	1994	1995	1996
Britain	1,508	1,857	2,038	2,285	2,590
Mainland Europe	408	945	988	1,101	1,177
Germany	113	265	269	319	339
France	11	242	231	234	262
Italy	21	116	121	112	119
Netherlands	38	69	80	94	109
Spain	34	57	59	67	66
Switzerland	24	40	62	62	62
Belgium/Lux	20	41	41	53	60
Norway/Sweden	12	32	33	46	55
Denmark	14	17	19	22	23
Other Europe	21	66	73	93	83
North America:	419	422	494	641	729
USA	385	377	449	587	660
Canada	34	45	45	54	69
Rest of World:	90	124	159	204	186
Australia/New Zealand	46	56	68	89	88
Japan	na	18	22	30	33
Other Overseas	44	50	69	85	65
Total Overseas	2,425	3,348	3,679	4,231	4,682
Northern Ireland	582	540	630	590	600
Total Out-of-State	3,007	3,888	4,309	4,821	5,282
Domestic Trips	4,161	7,660	7,244	6,924	6,170

Source: Bord Fáilte /Irish Tourist Board, Tourism Facts 1996.

- Domestic trips in 1988 are not comparable due to changes in survey methodology
- Domestic trips 1993-5 revised in 1996 due to changes to the 'other trip' category

In addition to overall growth there has also been a shift in the origin and the type of tourist. The most notable feature in terms of tourist origin has been the increase in tourist numbers from continental Europe. Political difficulties arising out of conflict in the North meant the stagnation of the British market from the late 1960s onwards. The American 'roots' market was always under threat from the age-profile, but was severely affected by fears of international terrorist violence at the end of the 1980s. As Bord Fáilte put it rather coyly in 1983, 'The diversification of source markets, a conscious achievement of Bord Fáilte, ensures greater independence for Irish tourism from specific economic recessions or political uncertainties within any market area.'<sup>18</sup> The result was that one of the markets specifically targeted was the continental European market in the 1980s, and the results were impressive, as can be seen from the Table 8.2. Tourist numbers from

mainland Europe increased from 408,000 in 1988 to 1,177,000 in 1996. This threefold increase in tourist arrivals from continental Europe reflected a positive growth in almost all the European source markets.

The change in type of tourist was most clearly articulated by Marie O'Donnell in a collection entitled *Tourism on the Farm*. O'Donnell, appointed by Bord Fáilte to promote rural tourism, describes the new breed of tourist that emerged in the 1980s:

He (*sic*) is interested in culture and heritage, the environment, health. He demands high quality standards in accommodation. He seeks ease of accessibility to a range of activities and special interests.<sup>19</sup>

This new tourist is younger, better-educated and increasingly a member of the rapidly expanding tertiary sector in Western economies. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu,<sup>20</sup> Urry outlines how the cultural consumption of the new tourist is marked by an 'ascetic aestheticism' and includes preferences for 'natural' cultural symbols and practices, including leisure activities which involve an engagement with nature such as walking, hillwalking, horse-trekking, swimming and canoeing. This also applies to culinary taste, and is evidenced in the dramatic increase in restaurants offering what are described as prime quality natural products. Craft goods now range from the explicit kitsch of leprechauns to the stylish understatement of the Mulcahy lampshade. The cheese board moves from the processed hegemony of Calvita to the organic diversity of Gubeen and Milleens. The nature of accommodation changes with the appearance of the *Blue Book*, *The Hidden Ireland* and the *Friendly Homes of Ireland* brochures. There is a dramatic increase in the number of museums and heritage centres (148 heritage-based attractions alone were reported for 1997)<sup>21</sup> and more and more houses and gardens are open to the general public. One of the reasons for these developments is that the bulk of tourist spending is on items other than accommodation. Barrett observes that:

The breakdown of tourist spending ... shows that 76 per cent of it is spent in sectors not traditionally regarded as tourism such as shopping, internal transport, food and drink, and sightseeing and entertainment. In these sectors, tourism demand mingles with the demand from residents.<sup>22</sup>

Barrett's conclusions are based on the figures in Table 8.3. If we compare the percentage breakdown of tourist spending with the average weekly household expenditure for 1987 and 1994-95 detailed in Table 8.4, there are indeed remarkable similarities between the consumption patterns of tourists and residents.

Table 8.3 Distribution of tourism expenditure

	<b>per cent</b>
Bed and board	24
Other food and drink	30
Sightseeing/entertainment	7
Transport in Ireland	12
Shopping	18
Miscellaneous	9

Source: Irish Tourist Board, Tourism Facts 1995

Table 8.4. Average weekly household expenditure, 1987 and 1994-5

Main Commodity Groups	1987		1994-5		% increase in Expenditure 1987 to 1994-5
	£	%	£	%	
Food	56.26	25.2	70.75	22.7	+25.8
Drink and tobacco	17.81	8.0	23.85	7.7	+33.9
Clothing and footwear	15.04	6.7	19.92	6.4	+32.4
Fuel and light	14.00	6.3	15.48	4.9	+10.6
Housing	19.66	8.8	30.56	9.8	+55.4
Household non-durables	4.64	2.1	7.26	2.3	+56.5
Household durables	8.75	3.9	11.28	3.6	+28.9
Miscellaneous goods	7.75	3.5	11.89	3.8	+53.4
Transport	30.30	13.6	44.73	14.4	+47.6
Service and other expenditure	48.87	21.9	76.01	24.4	+55.5
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>223.08</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>311.73</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>+39.7</b>

Source: Central Statistics Office, Household Budget Survey 1995

In common with many other countries in the developed world, Ireland has seen a dramatic expansion in its services sector over the last decade. Much of the impetus for the economic recovery of Ireland in the 1990s came from strong growth in the services sector. As can be seen from Table 8.5, though agriculture, forestry, fishing and manufacturing still employ large numbers of people, there is sizeable growth in all the private-sector service categories.

Like their European counterparts, the Irish have also been going on foreign holidays as opposed to staying with relatives and friends or holidaying in Ireland. This trend towards increased holidaying by the Irish has been commented on by Peillon<sup>23</sup> and has been borne out by recent statistical evidence. In 1997 the number of Irish visitors going abroad was 2,397,000 for the year to September, compared with 2,158,000 for the same period in 1996, an increase of 11.1 per cent (Central Statistics Office 1998). The growth in the indigenous service class, increased personal exposure to holidaying practices and similarities in patterns of consumption outlined above signal changes in the Irish experience of tourism. The former antithesis between sedentary native and transient newcomer begins to break down as the members of the new Irish service class become tourists in their own land. No longer tied to the once-a-year holiday on the family farm, they now compare 'bed and board' on an international level with a range of competing destinations, including Ireland itself. As with foreign visitors, they will visit the same design-conscious craft shops, park outside the same heritage centres and dine in the same restaurants listed in foreign good food guides and in the in-house journal of the new service class, *The Irish Times*, as foreign visitors. One of the paradoxes of contemporary tourism is that, as tourists come to Ireland in pursuit of difference, the Irish themselves



increasingly come to resemble the tourists in terms of lifestyle and cultural practices. Young Europeans find that Europe's Edge is peopled with other aspiring Young Europeans.

Table 8.5. Labour force in the Republic of Ireland 1992-7 (estimated persons)

Category at work per sector (thousands)	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	154	144	142	143	138	134
Mining, quarrying, turf production	6	5	5	6	5	6
Manufacturing	226	225	236	248	250	271
Building and construction	74	71	78	83	87	97
Electricity, gas, water	13	11	14	13	14	12
Commerce, insurance, finance	234	244	245	262	275	281
Transport, communication and storage	68	70	73	76	81	84
Public administration and defence	70	67	68	73	77	74
Other non-agriculture economic activity	300	314	327	345	371	379
Total at work	1,145	1,152	1,188	1,248	1,297	1,338
Total Unemployment	217	230	219	192	191	179
Total Labour Force	1,362	1,382	1,407	1,439	1,488	1,517
Not in Labour Force	1,262	1,275	1,280	1,284	1,278	1,298
Population 15 years and over	2,624	2,657	2,687	2,723	2,766	2,815

*Note:* 'Total unemployment' are those people who are available for employment but who cannot find work. 'Not in Labour Force' are those people who are not available for work (primarily children and old people).  
*Source:* Central Statistics Office.

There are two further aspects to tourism development that need to be mentioned in the present context. The first is the contribution of tourism not so much to the modernist project of industrial development as to the post-modernist project of post-industrial development. Lash and Urry argue that:

the increased mobility of people means that the ability of a locality to attract temporary visitors may play a crucial role in its economic development. Indeed, there are considerable interconnections between tourism, services and economic development strategies. In Britain, there is scarcely a free-standing town or city that does not have the encouragement of tourism, that is tourist-related services, as one of the central planks of its economic development strategy.<sup>24</sup>

At one level, this development can be seen as a classic example of post-modern de-differentiation, where work and leisure are seen as a seamless continuum rather than as polar opposites, a development that is epitomised in the advertising for drinks of the young service classes, 'Work Hard. Play Hard.' The blurring of boundaries between tourism and other leisure activities that is evident in the triple portfolio of the minister responsible, namely, Tourism, Sport and Recreation, not only suggests that tourism is a practice that informs our lives all the year round, but also that choices of economic location for the producer/consumer service class will be dictated by the pleasures of tourist consumption (clean environment, access to leisure facilities, good restaurants, cultural infrastructure including clubs, theatres and cinemas, and heritage attractions).

Post-industrial production and consumption have further implications for tourism development in Ireland. In common with contemporary modes of self-reflexive production and consumption, tourism is design- and knowledge-intensive, as are the culture industries that have come to the fore in recent decades in the Republic, such as cinema, television, multimedia and music. Mr Michael Kenna, marketing manager for An Bord Tráchtála, explicitly linked Irish tourism and new Irish music at the International Record Music Publishing and Video Music Market held in Cannes in January 1998. He argued that music provided large amounts of invisible earnings for the Irish economy and that musical culture works as a tourist magnet:

Studies carried out by Bord Fáilte and the National Economic and Social Council show that up to 80 per cent of tourists who visit Ireland cite our music as one of the main reasons why they come here - whether that be people coming over to see where U2 record their albums in Dublin or people who are attracted by live traditional music in pubs all over the country.<sup>25</sup>

A central part of Bord Fáilte's European strategy in 1998 was to capitalise on Riverdance's European tour, and the continuing success of the show in the US was also exploited: 'With Irish bands and theatre continuing to take America by storm, Bord Fáilte's sponsorship of the television screening of *Riverdance - the Show* on PBS stations in every major US market, was seen as a natural publicity partnership.'<sup>26</sup> Tourism was an important element in the funding rationale of the *Imaginaire irlandais* festival in France and the 'Ireland and its Diaspora' stand at the Frankfurt Book Fair. The association between tourism and the culture industries is not simply one of straightforward incorporation where a Cranberries song ghosts a video-clip, however, but relates more fundamentally to a post-industrial mode of production where symbol-processing of various kinds is at a premium. In this sense, U2 songs and Neil Jordan films become so many tourism advertisements for Ireland, just as stylish tourist video promotions become advertisements for Ireland's culture industries. Here again, we see evidence of de-differentiation between tourism and other culture industries such as music, dance, film and literature, where tourism becomes one culture industry among others.

### **Drowning the Shamrock?**

Economic developments at a European and global level over the last decades have resulted in a rolling-back of the hegemonic and centralising role of the state in constructing tourist imagery and, indeed, policy. This is manifest in the shift in tourist funding from the national government to Europe. The emphasis is now on 'Europe of the Regions', and much tourist funding is distributed through the Leader programmes, structural funds and other projects largely financed by European monies. The phenomenal growth in heritage centres and golf clubs, for example, is due mainly to the availability of European funding. The declining hegemony of the state's role in tourism is also manifest in the recent controversy surrounding the changes proposed for marketing logos. The Shamrock motif has long been popular as a logo among a number of state companies including, *inter alia*, Bord Fáilte. Plans to update the logo initiated in 1996 were the result of a joint effort on the part of Bord Fáilte and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) to develop a new all-Ireland marketing strategy. The aim, according to Robin Wilson in an *Irish Times* article of 20 November 1997, 'was to market Ireland as a single destination building on its clean, green and "emotional" image', and the strategy was to include an international television advertising campaign and an internet site in addition to a new logo. The shamrock was no longer the main visual feature of the new logo, which consisted instead of a somewhat abstract representation of two dancers, arms outstretched, forming a circular gesture of embrace and included a tiny image of a shamrock in the corner. When the new logo was presented to the minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Dr James McDaid, he was unhappy with it and requested that it be changed back to the original. A public debate ensued between the minister and the representatives of the design company which had produced it. The main argument used by McDaid for the retention of the old logo was in terms of the familiarity of its appeal over the years, how people had developed a sense of emotional attachment to it and how it had come to be identified with Ireland and Irishness over a long period of time. The appeal of the new logo, according to the design company, was that it was based on market research and that it would appeal to an international market. Furthermore, the NITB were happy with the new logo. And indeed, any fears that the NITB might have had about the political association of the shamrock with only one cultural tradition in the North of Ireland were justified in the light of the comments of the Ulster Unionist leader, David Trimble. Speaking at a meeting of the Institute of Directors in Dublin in May 1996 he roundly attacked the idea of a joint tourism authority and objected in no uncertain terms to the use of 'Gaelic' imagery:

It is important to unionists that an all-Ireland, essentially Gaelic image of shamrocks, Irish music and Guinness is not slowly imposed on Northern Ireland, which has a range of different traditions.<sup>27</sup>

But it was not just sections of unionist opinion which were critical of the shamrock imagery. It was described by a design consultant as 'deeply religious and backward-looking'. And Brian Boylan, chair of the London-based consultancy, Wolff Olins, compared it to the Union flag, and suggested that both stood for a country 'more of the past than of the future'.<sup>28</sup>

This debate over the symbolism of the shamrock generated a number of oppositional categories: between the 'old-fashioned' and the 'modern', between the 'past' and the 'future', between the 'national' and the 'anti-national', between the 'national' and

'international' and between the 'religious' and the 'secular'. The clash between the minister McDaid and the other participants in the debate could be seen as symptomatic of a broader clash between the desire to maintain the role of the state in the construction of national symbols and the desire to change symbols in accordance with the market; or in other words is expressive of the tensions between the national and the global. What we are witnessing is the start of an era where the state is no longer the key player in the construction of national imagery, and one in which the 'free market' is taking precedence. This shift must also be understood in terms of the shift in the profile of tourists visiting Ireland over the last two decades; the relative decline in the 'returning emigrant' market and the relative increase in the 'global' but particularly the European and other new markets, for whom the shamrock symbol will not have the same 'national' emotional resonance.

### **Real Irelands**

Tourism, as we have argued, is a powerful vector of modernisation in the Republic of Ireland. As Graburn notes about tourism generally:

The very success of the tourist industry brings with it a way of life - work schedules, pay rates and promotions, literacy and electronic skill, bureaucracy and attitudes - which are imported along with the tourists.<sup>29</sup>

The recent success of the tourist industry in an Irish context highlights the conflict between tourist expectations of appropriate host behaviour and the changing cultural values and practices of the host population. The recent debate in the national press about the demise of hospitality, until now one of the key factors in Ireland's tourist allure, provides an interesting example of just such a conflict. Traditionally Ireland has been a tourist destination in which engagement with the people was one of the main ingredients in the tourist package. Indeed, the title of Bord Fáilte's trade magazine 'Ireland of the Welcomes' makes this promise to tourists and the content, too, places emphasis on the hospitality afforded to tourists. 'If you want to know Galway,' says Walter Macken in the May-June issue of 1953, 'meet its people.' In the same issue a letter from a recent tourist from France marvels at the hospitality received during a family visit the previous season. The reasons for the highlighting of hospitality as a tourist expectation have been addressed elsewhere.<sup>30</sup> David Rose, an English journalist and long-time visitor to Ireland, writes in an *Irish Times* article of 13 September 1997<sup>31</sup> of the problems associated with the growth of modernity on a family visit to Co. Clare the previous summer.

We love the music, the mountains, the food, the Murphy's. And we also love the people: their unsolicited interest and hospitality; their warmth, culture and charm. For a long time, we've thought they enjoyed seeing us. But for the first time, this summer, we found ourselves wondering if that was the case: and whether the intangible qualities which made Ireland different from anywhere else we've visited were vanishing before our eyes.

He recounts some of the changes following on the economic boom which he and his family have noticed:

In little towns like Corofin, where there used to be one shop open if you were lucky, there's now a bustling High Street, and daily deliveries of items such as fresh French bread. The boom in Ballyvaughan has turned old bars into bijou eateries where you can wash down oysters with Cabernet supplied by the Australian wine-exporting commission next door.

Rose welcomes these improvements in quality of food and other tourist services but feels that the economic boom also has its downside. He goes on:

It's difficult to be specific about a feeling like this, difficult to identify incidents whose cumulative effect amounts to a change in atmosphere. But one of the things I did notice this summer, in hamlets as much as bigger towns, was that the people who serve in shops and restaurants have become just like their counterparts in London: not quite rude, but almost; brusque; businesslike; pressed for time; keen to get on to the next customer.

In effect Rose is registering one of the fundamental paradoxes of contemporary tourism: namely that the desire to escape the pressure of modern living generates those selfsame pressures in the host destination.

Tourism has occupied an unusually important place in the development of economic and cultural identity in the Republic of Ireland. The sector continually presented itself internally as a driving force behind the modernising project of the State in the age of high modernity, and has latterly been a key element in the emergence of new class identities in the post-Fordist era of late twentieth-century Ireland. The project of modernity was not uncontested, as we saw, and a certain ambivalence characterised Irish responses to tourism development in the early years of the Republic. More recently, the debate surrounding the symbolism of the shamrock evidences a tension between an older State-driven and nationally defined notion of identity and a newer, globalised, market-driven idea of what constitutes iconic identity in the post-modern world. Uncertainty over market representation is not the only difficulty, however, facing Irish tourism. The tourism sector in Ireland may paradoxically become a victim of the very project of modernisation that it has so ardently espoused. In a country with an uncertain climate, the personal contact element that is a standard feature of tourism becomes even more crucial than elsewhere. If you spend your day lying out on a beach, surly, unwelcoming natives may be nothing more than a mild irritation. However, if low temperatures and driving rain mean you spend a lot of time indoors, then indifferent or unfriendly hosts can be a major source of dissatisfaction. Whether the 'Welcome Industry' will survive the distancing effect and instrumentalisation of human relations that is frequently a feature of modernity is an open question that has been asked by David Rose among others in this article. There is, in addition, the problem of 'spatial polarisation' where tourists tend to congregate in a limited number of areas thus destroying the initial desirability of these areas. Getting Away from It All for the independent traveller usually entails Getting Away from Them All, but this is increasingly problematic when everyone wants to escape to the same few places.

The process of de-differentiation that we have described as operating in Irish society means that tourist practices have invaded all areas of Irish life. Distinctions between host and guest become more and more unstable, and the symbolic capital of the dominant

sections of the Irish middle class is increasingly (though not exclusively) based on the cultivation of a lifestyle that was formerly associated with the tourist on holiday: conspicuous consumption in expensive restaurants, four-wheel-drive cars (adventure holidays), an increased frequency of foreign holidays, ethnic cooking, foreign theme bars such as 'Pravda' and 'Zanzibar' in Dublin, a dramatic growth in wine drinking and supermarket shelves in affluent inner and outer suburbs laden with exotic produce. In a society that places a greater value on consumption than hitherto as a marker of identity, tourism has emerged as a crucial paradigm for the lifestyle of the new identity-makers in the Republic of Ireland. In an article on Westport whose title was taken from a postcards series called 'The Real Ireland', Kathy Sheridan spoke of the regeneration of Westport in County Mayo. The introductory section tells the reader that Westport has 'a thriving, cosmopolitan air, yet its character remains intact'.<sup>32</sup> The local Teachta Dála (Member of Parliament), Michael Ring, is quoted approvingly on the cosmopolitan air, 'Sure, all you've got to do is to stand in Bridge Street any evening and you might be in New York or Amsterdam. You'll hear more languages than in both put together.' Keva Lawlor, a Dublin-born restaurateur, came to the Mayo town in the belief that 'Westport was ripe for kangaroo, wild boar, enormous field mushrooms, old Irish bread recipes and dishes from her travels in the Far East.' Another American resident claims, 'It's like walking through Temple Bar without Dublin around it.' The analogy with another urban area in Ireland that targets both tourists and native consumers of the culture industries is significant. The sobriquet generally given to Dublin's cultural quarter is 'Dublin's Left Bank', the cosmopolitan tag a guarantor of the forward-looking modernity of the capital's cultural precinct. So, the Real Ireland is no longer the polychrome Eden of turf-gatherers and elderly cyclists, but a land of gourmets and espresso drinkers, where identity is a nomadic as opposed to a fixed construct. None the less, the Hidden Ireland remains, and it is more like Daniel Corkery's than George Gossip's, an Ireland of urban deprivation and vastly restricted social mobility, where long-term unemployment and poverty mean that the benefits of modernisation, including the prospect of tourist travel, remain as remote a possibility as they were at the inception of the Republic over fifty years ago.

## Notes

1 Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland* (rpt.: Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1979).

2 *The Hidden Ireland: Accommodation in Private Heritage Homes* (Dublin, 1998), p.4.

3 Bord Fáilte, *Annual Report and Accounts. Year ended 31 March 1956* (Dublin: Bord Fáilte, 1956), p. 5.

4 Bord Fáilte, 'History of Irish Tourism' (unpublished and undated document, c.1980), p. 5.

5 Bord Fáilte, *Tourism: The Welcome Industry* (Dublin: Bord Fáilte, 1983), p. 8.

6 Ibid.

7 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

8 This represented no more than a continuation of the status quo since independence. The Irish Tourist Association, a voluntary group, had been established in 1925 shortly after the foundation of the state under pressure of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, but after its establishment tourism was effectively left in Its hands by government.

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- 31 David Rose, 'Drive for big bucks could leave Irish hospitality in the ha'penny place', *The Irish Times*, 13 September 1997.
- 32 Kathy Sheridan, 'The Real Ireland', *The Irish Times*, 4 July 1998.