

This book makes a significant contribution both to analytic oral history and to ethnography. A prize-winner at the American Conference for Irish Studies, it presents a recent, long-term study of the oral history of Packy Jim, a solitary bachelor in rural Northern Ireland. Author Ray Cashman hails from Indiana University's Folklore Institute, where 'folklore' is explored using contemporary and transdisciplinary methodologies. Diarmuid Ó Giolláin's *Locating Irish Folklore: Tradition, Modernity, Identity* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), observed that 'there are few countries which offer as much scope for an analysis of this sort as Ireland'.

Cashman enjoys a prime position within ethnographic approaches to oral history in Northern Ireland. His previous book on the subject was also a prize-winner, and he was trained by the field's acknowledged master, Henry Glassie. This also means a certain burden of responsibility, of which more later.

So how does Cashman's ethnographic approach differ from just presenting 'straight' oral histories? Essentially, like all good ethnographers, he scrutinises the local and particular through questions that also interrogate much wider, if not universal, issues. The 'wide question' he asks here is how marginalized people use their own oral histories to help them navigate their difficulties (economic, political, sectarian, sexual and so on). A stated purpose of the book is to reveal how Packy Jim uses oral history to construct and project self-images in his dialogues with others, and with himself. The tools that Cashman uses to trace this dynamic in Packy Jim's oral histories are narrative analysis, and within that, narrative psychology. Cashman describes his own technique of layered psychological and narrative analysis as a sort of 'ethnography of communication'.

This methodology might sound complicated but in his hands, it's not. With a writing style well above the academic norm, his voice has an engaging ease, breathing free of the jargon that chokes many ethnographic commentaries. He positions himself around Packy Jim as the clumsy, slightly anxious, self-deprecating learner - a standard trope in ethnographic writing. And the heart of the book remains its very extensive quotation of Packy Jim's oral histories, showcasing their beautiful, theatrical patterns of vernacular speech.

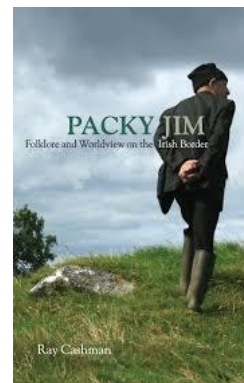
Several tasks are well executed by Cashman as he sits witnessing Packy Jim's oral narrations. He shows us how the narrator deploys his oral histories to navigate between the perceived successes and failures of his own life story; between external, imposed authority and internal morality; and between insular loneliness and a sustaining exchange with community. Adding in the ethnographic context, Cashman shows how these balances contrived by Packy Jim as an oral history narrator are boxed in by wider societal contexts in this poor, isolated area afflicted by the long, decolonising war in Northern Ireland. We are shown an oral narrator partly defined by the social mores around him, but also using oral performance to sketch out his own marks of individuality within the small existential spaces available.

But for me there is one problem with the book. As part of its stated purpose, a few passages expose certain intimate vulnerabilities that I struggle to believe Packy Jim would want published. I do ethnography abroad with foreigners, as Cashman does, but I was raised in rural Ireland, in a place very like Packy Jim's. My relatives were old men like him. Knowing their codes of personal dignity and self-disclosure, I will eat my words if Packy Jim has actually read that part of the book; understood its academic language explaining how he constructs and performs a projected self to handle his innermost feelings of inadequacy; and was happy with that information being published worldwide.

The author can defend himself in several ways. The oral history recordings where Packy Jim implicitly revealed these feelings will have been released by consent forms. And a sincere, transatlantic friendship - sustained by letters and extended collaborations - connects these two men from very different worlds. But a narrative psychologist, above all people, should know that vulnerable self-disclosure is always context-bound. We naturally come to know the innermost vulnerabilities of a close friend over time, but we don't write a publication about them.

There is a long, unfortunate history of ethnographers making this mistake in their commentaries on individual oral history narrators in Ireland. Even the great Henry Glassie learned through some early trial and error in this area. But the most infamous example was by Nancy Scheper-Hughes whose oral narrators - as described in her confessional article 'Ire in Ireland' (*Ethnography*, Vol 1, 2001, pgs. 117-140) - felt thoroughly and collectively violated by the interpretations she put on their oral histories in her controversial book *Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics - Mental Illness in Rural Ireland* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001].

Yet ethnographic and psychological analysis of oral histories can be done sensitively in ways that leave oral narrators their dignity, without shirking from deep, existential implications in their oral performances. It's not easy, but Henry Glassie achieved it exquisitely



around his oral history narrator, Hugh Nolan, in *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995). As just one example from the world literature, Keith Basso achieved it with the irascible old Apache trickster, Dudley, in *Wisdom Sits in Places - Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

Despite my one reservation on Packy Jim's behalf, Cashman's book and such work on Ireland remain hugely welcome. The cataclysm of 'Brexit'(Britain dissecting itself from the European Union) has forced on us yet another '*Great Reimagining*' of our identities within the once again problematic relationships between Ireland, Britain and the wider world (Hocking, B.T., *The Great Reimagining: Public Art, Urban Space, and the Symbolic Landscapes of a 'New' Northern Ireland* [New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015]). We hope that skilled listeners like Cashman will continue to come and help us think about the challenges ahead, as well as those that are behind us.

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