Returns, Regrets and Reprints

Timothy W. Guinnane

*Family and Community in Ireland*
Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball
3rd edn., with a new Introduction by Anne Byrne, Ricca Edmundson and Tony Varley

*Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics: Mental Illness in Rural Ireland*
Nancy Scheper-Hughes
20th anniversary edn., expanded and updated

A long tradition of writing on rural Ireland has produced its share of classics. *Family and Community in Ireland*, the product of fieldwork in County Clare in the 1930s, is one of these. Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball presented a comprehensive account of the life of two rural communities and the town of Ennis, including customs and practices related to marriage and sexuality, the transmission of property, the treatment of the young and the aged, etcetera. Their account, although not entirely admiring, reflects a generous sympathy and an effort to understand these Clare people on their own terms. Nancy Schepet-Hughes’s *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics* is famous (or perhaps infamous), not least because of its self-consciously diagnostic and critical perspective. She takes as her point of departure rural Ireland’s allegedly extreme incidence of schizophrenia, and sets out to uncover the features of one Kerry community that would account for this epidemic. The book made an immediate splash upon publication, and much discussion of it ever since has centred on whether she betrayed confidences, made her informants too easy to identify, or was too harsh in her judgements. These matters warrant discussion and reflection (and she provides a good starting point in the new material here), but this consideration has almost entirely crowded out discussion of the book on more narrow, scholarly grounds.

---

This CLASP press edition of *Family and Community in Ireland* is most welcome. The new edition contains a facsimile of the 1968 (or second) edition of the book, along with a new Introduction by Anne Byrne, Ricca Edmundson and Tony Varley and a bibliography of works about Arensberg and Kimball and their impact on anthropology in Ireland and elsewhere. Just keeping Arensberg and Kimball in print is justification enough for a new edition. Byrne, Edmundson and Varley’s Introduction is a nice bonus: they provide a useful history of the research and some broader context about its reception. Many readers will be aware of Arensberg’s earlier volume, *The Irish Countryman*. But even those familiar with the larger project will learn much from the Introduction. Byrne, Edmundson and Varley consulted unpublished papers and sought out Arensberg and Kimball’s friends and acquaintances. They also were lucky enough to have the support of Vivian Garrison Arensberg, Conrad Arensberg’s widow.

Under the direction of Professor Earnest Hooton of the Harvard Anthropology Department, three teams from three different disciplines began fieldwork in Ireland. In addition to the social anthropology project that resulted in *Family and Community in Ireland*, the Harvard project sent teams of archaeologists and physical anthropologists. Hooton apparently never visited Ireland during the project, but was overall director and closely involved with the physical anthropology component. Started with a $25,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, the project intended to ‘attempt a scientific interpretation of a modern nation, the country of origin of more than one-fifth of the population of the United States’. The original plan had been to use all three disciplinary approaches to write an integrated account, but that never took place. The Second World War placed other demands on the researchers (Arensberg, for example, worked for US Army Intelligence during the war) and developments in the social sciences made the original plan seem less compelling. The archaeological findings were published in Irish journals, and the physical anthropology appeared in a separate volume.

From the start the Harvard teams displayed a keen awareness of the problems they might encounter if they did not cultivate Irish public opinion and tread lightly on Irish sensitivities. The archaeologists sought the blessing and assistance of the keeper of the Irish Antiquities Division of the National Museum of Ireland, Adolf Mahr; and his support remained important to fending off criticism from those who either opposed excavations in general or feared the objects discovered would not remain in Ireland. The physical anthropologists’ task was perhaps more delicate. They sought to gather evidence on the ‘racial’ characteristics of the Irish population, and thus needed, in addition to measures such as height and weight, the full array of cranial and other measures familiar to these studies. The team responsible for taking these measures relied on local authority figures, including priests, doctors and the police, to encourage others to volunteer. One can only guess what the participants would have thought had they known that their measurements would be used to detect the presence of a ‘tall, dark, long-headed strain surviving from the Old Stone Age’ alongside a ‘shorter, dark haired, round-headed element which may have come in during the Bronze Age’. Some declined to participate for more practical reasons; a few apparently assumed the Harvard researchers were working for the Irish government, and would use their data to take away old age pensions.

A second central figure in the Irish project was William Lloyd Warner, another Harvard anthropology professor who was directly responsible for Arensberg and Kimball’s research. Warner had studied aboriginal peoples in Australia, but he is most famous for the ‘Yankee City’ studies, which used the methods of social anthropology to study
the people of Newburyport, Massachusetts. Both Arensberg and Kimball had worked on the Yankee City project; as Byrne, Edmundson and Varley remark, Warner’s influence can be seen in both the effort to extend the methods of the Yankee City study to another context, and in the selection of the two researchers who would carry out the Irish research. *Family and Community in Ireland* has little explicitly comparative discussion, but, given its origins, one can understand that it was firmly grounded in a comparative sensibility.

Warner took great care to negotiate the reception of the project in Ireland. Perhaps a more important step was Warner’s interview with Eamon de Valera in July of 1932, which resulted in a letter of endorsement for the project. Warner had the tact not to use de Valera’s name where it would not help, such as when he met with the bishop of Killaloe, no admirer of de Valera. Kimball later recounted the project’s method: “… it was standard procedure to acquaint local religious and political authorities with the objectives of the research and to enlist their support. In no instance was such a request ever denied and there were many among the Irish whose assistance was invaluable.”

This is not to say that the Harvard team did not encounter opposition or create ill will. Even in 1992, when Varley interviewed people in the two rural communities Arensberg and Kimball studied, there were bad feelings among the descendants of some of those
whom the Harvard team had described less than positively.

Most research monographs enjoy a hardcover edition and, if lucky, appear also in paperback. Only a book that has achieved classic status deserves to be reprinted more than sixty years after its first publication. Family and Community in Ireland certainly qualifies as a full-blown classic. No account of rural Ireland can ignore it, and it stands as a landmark in rural ethnography more generally. Yet this classic status poses some problems for readers today.

The first problem reflects not so much what Arensberg and Kimball wrote, as how others have used what they wrote. Arensberg and Kimball dealt with a particular part of Ireland at a particular historical juncture. The Harvard project went to some lengths to decide which area of Ireland was most ‘typical’, and the selection of Clare on those grounds was deliberate. Subsequent discussion of Family and Community in Ireland has challenged this characterization, and at some level it is both fatuous and harmless. The greater problem is that others have pulled the work out of its historical context, and tried to view it as applicable to some ‘long-ago’ rural Ireland that could just as well be the 1860s, the 1930s, or the 1960s. There is a serious danger in this, at two levels. First, many social scientists cannot escape the temptation to split human history into a before and an after, a ‘pre-modern’ and ‘modern’, and to assume tacitly or explicitly that ‘pre-modern’ societies do not change. Arensberg and Kimball clearly thought rural Clare was pre-modern, and if we follow their claim and the assumptions about modernization, then we have a slippery but convenient line of thought that allows us to assert that their fieldwork could just as well have taken place in the 1860s. This just won’t do, but we cannot blame it on Arensberg and Kimball.

The second problem reflects the assumption that Arensberg and Kimball’s Clare is a sort of rural Irish ‘benchmark’ and that later studies can deduce change over time from how their communities differ from the picture given in Family and Community in Ireland. Byrne, Edmundson and Varley’s discussion of this point is especially useful. Hugh Brody, although at points very critical of what he saw as the a-historicism in Family and Community in Ireland, also compared his ‘Inishkillane’ to the Harvard study as a way of deducing change over time. The temptation is there; we have a classic text about a rural community in the 1930s, and if we want to document ‘change and decline’ in the same region, we can compare life in our period to life in the 1930s. The problem with this is that, even setting aside any reservations about Arensberg and Kimball, it pulls their Clare study out of its geographic context. What Brody saw as change over time could just as well reflect differences at a given point in time.

In describing the impact of Family and Community in Ireland, Byrne, Edmundson and Varley neglect another literature in which Arensberg and Kimball have figured heavily. Many historians, including myself, have tried to understand Ireland’s unusual demographic patterns, especially in the period between the Famine and the 1950s.

Probably starting before the Famine, the proportions that ever married rose to very high levels, and emigration became a central feature of the demographic system. By the First World War the Irish were relatively unlikely to marry if they remained in Ireland, but had large families if they did marry. The net result was an Irish birth rate too low to offset all the emigration, and the Irish population shrank continuously even after the Famine’s direct impact was long past, a decline that was reversed for good only in the 1990s. Efforts to understand these patterns have often turned to the institutions of marriage and family-transmission, and tried to understand...
what role they could play in the restriction of marriage to relatively few. The first systematic such efforts were due to Kenneth H. Connell, who relied heavily on folklore records and all but ignored Arensberg and Kimball’s work. Later demographic historians, including David Fitzpatrick, Cormac Ó Gráda, and myself, have tried harder to extract lessons from the Harvard studies. This latter effort risks the ahistoricism criticized above, of course, but the coherent account at the centre of Family and Community in Ireland has probably done more harm than good in coming to grips with Ireland’s demographic patterns.

Family and Community in Ireland first appeared in 1940. The editors provide a lengthy if necessarily incomplete bibliography of works about the study, and just perusing that list gives some sense of how much fruitful research it has generated. We can best convey that sense of debate here by briefly describing one way in which it encouraged a new line of research. Arensberg and Kimball’s account of the structure and dynamics of rural Clare households is nearly identical to the famous ‘stem’ family described by Frédéric Le Play.9 In contrast to a ‘nuclear’ family, in a stem family system one son brings his bride into his parents’ home, and the resulting offspring live in that household with their parents and grandparents. The result was, supposedly, a three-generational household that might also include other extended kinsfolk. The stem family played a particular role in the attack Peter Laslett and his colleagues in the Cambridge Group mounted against romantic conceptions of a lost ‘extended’ family in European history.10 Arensberg and Kimball’s account pre-dated Laslett’s work, and its status made the Irish stem family a credible exception to the generalization the Cambridge historians were pushing.

Peter Gibbon and Chris Curtin turned to the manuscript census of Ireland for 1911 to ask whether the type of rural family Arensberg and Kimball described was as common as they thought. This effort is precisely what historians and others should have done all along; rather than debate the ideological or other influences on the Harvard researchers, one could simply check other sources for the veracity of the claims made in Family and Community in Ireland. Gibbon and Curtin conclude that the stem family was no myth, but that Arensberg and Kimball had mistakenly over-generalized; the extended family system was most common among a middle range of farmers, and was not typical of either the poorest or the wealthiest. David Fitzpatrick later used more of the 1911 census manuscripts, as well as records of landholding, to mount a defence of the account in Arensberg and Kimball.11 The reader can turn to their publications to make up his or her own mind on the matter; I think Fitzpatrick got it right, but we owe Gibbon and Curtin for raising the question in the first place. More perhaps than they realized, these authors demonstrated what could be done with the 1911 manuscript census schedules, which constitute a rare and valuable historical source.12 And this debate in Ireland formed an important warning to scholars interested in the history of family structure that the stem family was not the simple myth that Laslett at first claimed it was.

Family and Community in Ireland enjoys a rare place in Irish history and social science. Byrne, Edmundson and Varley have done the world the added service of researching the project’s background and helping us to understand how it came about and how it has been received since. For that, they and the press are owed an additional debt of gratitude.

Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics is also a very well-known work, although its fame is of a sort very different from Family and Community in Ireland. Most discussions
of Arensberg and Kimball have been about the quality of the research. Nancy Schep-Hughes’s book, on the other hand, has been famous as much (or even more) for the offence it caused her informants as for any scholarly merits, and this part of the story motivates much of the new material in the 2001 edition. Schep-Hughes and her family lived in the parish of An Clochán, on the Dingle peninsula, during the period 1974–75, and she returned to the community for the first time in 1999. The account she first published in 1979 deeply offended many she had come to know during her fieldwork. In the new edition she acknowledges as inadequate her efforts to conceal both the place (which she calls ‘Ballybran’) and the identity of specific people among her informants. An Irish Times correspondent (Michael Viney) figured out the real name of ‘Ballybran’ soon after the book was published, and in reading her accounts of specific individuals in that very small community, it is no wonder they recognized themselves and each other.

But there is a second reason for the anger: she not only humiliated the people of An Clochán, she did so in writing a book that was, at best, not very good. In a curious way both the original controversy over the book and her reflections on it in this new edition have obscured the book’s real weakness. Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics argues — to put the matter only a little too baldly — that the way these rural Irish people were socialized made them unable to have normal sexual relationships; that some parents crippled their sons psychologically, to make sure they remained at home to ‘care for the old people’; and that an inability to deal with this stress accounted for what Schep-Hughes then thought was the unusually high incidence of mental illness and even schizophrenia in rural Ireland. Setting aside the understandable feelings of those who
thought themselves betrayed by a young scholar they had welcomed and befriended, the real question is not whether Scheper-Hughes violated confidences so much as whether her harsh conclusions are true.

This twentieth anniversary edition contains a new prologue and epilogue. The new material has two aims. One is to explain how her thinking has evolved since she first wrote *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics*. The second purpose is to tell something about her relations with the people of An Clochán since she first published the book in 1979, and about an abbreviated and clearly painful return trip in 1999. The new material is interesting, and it is much to her credit that she is willing in effect to apologize in print in this way. (She even concedes that her title, while cute, was not a good idea.) That said, the new material is frustrating in its own way. Many of the original reviews of her book were positive, but several also raised, in a critical way, the problems I summarize here. A few of these problems she more or less concedes, but in the new edition she is vague, almost evasive, about the central intellectual issue in the original work, which is the aetiology of schizophrenia and her explanation of its prevalence in rural Ireland. And as much as she was clearly saddened by her reception in 1999, one can hardly escape the sense that she still did not quite understand why the people of An Clochán were so angry.

Three general weaknesses of *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics* stood out at first reading, and do even more so today. The first is a puzzling lack of interest in how communities such as An Clochán were or were not unusual either in Ireland, or in Europe, at that time, and, more especially, in the longer sweep of European history. This weakness is part of a broader lack of comparative context. The second is a cavalier approach to facts, quantitative or otherwise. And the third is perhaps the most important: at no point did Scheper-Hughes try to situate An Clochán in the context of its own history, or in the context of the adjustments it was trying (and in her judgement, failing) to make in the 1970s.

The challenge and opportunity of comparative social analysis is simple and, at the risk of a bad joke, maddening. An Clochán is not quite like any other place on earth; An Clochán is very much like many other places on earth. Understanding how it is different enables us to learn more about variations in the human condition. Understanding how it is similar would yield several benefits, not the least of which is not believing that we are looking at some new and exotic variant on the human condition. Much of what Scheper-Hughes thought was shocking or pathological about An Clochán was in fact typical of much of Ireland throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More generally (and importantly), these same features had long roots in European history. The most glaring example is the marriage patterns that so amazed her. Historical demographers have long noted that Western European societies usually had household-formation systems that required some adults to live out their entire lives without marrying. The numbers of Irish adults who never married had, by the early twentieth century, reached extreme levels, and by mid-century were at levels hardly known anywhere else before or since. By the 1970s on the Dingle peninsula marriage was indeed rare. But the basic role she finds so appalling — young people who know they will never marry — was the fate of millions of Europeans for centuries before she wrote on this small community in the West of Ireland.

There are many places in the text where she points out something about the people of An Clochán with the confident assumption that the reader will understand it to be bizarre, even pathological. But the implicit assumption can be baffling. For example, her discussion of Irish attitudes toward food, which is part of a larger argument about the denial of physical gratification, says ‘... it is
not considered odd for children to develop strong aversions to certain categories of food, this within an already restricted diet. What child has not decided, at one point or another, that a specific food (raisins in oatmeal, Brussel sprouts, and that all-time killer, peas) is poisonous to those under the age of fifteen? In another example, Schepet-Hughes makes much of the rarity of breastfeeding in An Clochán. Again, demographic historians have documented that breastfeeding was rare in several apparently mentally healthy European societies and, as Schepet-Hughes should know, it went out of fashion for a long time in the United States.

Not thinking through how An Clochán really differed from other places led to some very strange conclusions. She blames a specific ‘Jansenist’ Catholicism for producing these patterns, yet other parts of Europe with similar demographic patterns were not Catholic at all. One could wonder, in addition, how arrangements that led to mental illness in Ireland would not have the same effect elsewhere. She thanks Robert E. Kennedy, a professor at Berkeley where she did her graduate work. Kennedy authored a very fine account of Irish demographic behaviour that displays a keen understanding of how the Irish demographic system fits into the more general European pattern. But she neither accepted its message nor explained why she disagreed. And while she cites some of Connell’s work on marriage and households, she missed his insistence that permanent celibacy had been common in Ireland for over a century by the time she wrote.

_Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics_ also bears a strange relationship to _Family and Community in Ireland_. She calls Arensberg and Kimball’s research ‘definitive’. But Arensberg and Kimball explicitly deny one of her central claims. She says:

> Marriage in Ireland is, I suggest, inhibited by anomic, expressed in a lack of sexual vitality; familialist loyalties that exaggerate latent brother-sister incestuous inclinations; an emotional climate fearful of intimacy and mistrustful of love; and an excessive preoccupation with sexual purity and pollution, fostered by an ascetic Catholic tradition.

Arensberg and Kimball were fully aware that the marriage and inheritance system they described required some adult siblings to remain unmarried all their lives. They saw nothing sinister or damaging about this. The Harvard authors were aware that some claimed the Irish were repressed about sexual matters, and they explicitly deny this. The passage is worth quoting:

> Yet these [puritanical] attitudes [about sex] coexist together with other very hearty, casual, and sometimes ribald attitudes which make their appearance in banter, joke, and repartee even between speakers of different sex. These even take the form of taunts about prowess and mild ridicule for the possession of a greater relish than is meet, or fanciful recitation of past magnificent misdeeds. This is particularly true in the recitations of stories and adventures of persons in the ken of the community, where details of amorous desire and accomplishment are given with considerable gusto, and greeted and reiterated again and again amid hearty laughter.

We should not simply assume that Arensberg and Kimball were right, so Schepet-Hughes must be wrong. But no scholar can proclaim an earlier work ‘definitive’ and then ignore how its message contradicts her own.

A second weakness in _Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics_ is a cavalier attitude toward factual statements. Some of the original reviews noted that Schepet-Hughes was fuzzy about quantitative matters (which is true) but, given that she has backed off some of her original views about the
incidence of mental illness in Ireland, these specifics do not merit discussion here. There are many assertions, however, that lack any documentation whatsoever. Other statements are just hard to credit. For example, ‘... breast-feeding appears to have disappeared in the first decades of this [the twentieth] century with the introduction of the bottle (if the midwife is correct) by the English’.

Setting aside the ritual blaming of the English, this is a thin evidentiary reed on which to hang a claim about the lack of breastfeeding, which she sees as verging on child neglect. Clarity on when breastfeeding supposedly died out might lead her to better understanding of long-term changes in child-rearing practices, which should be central to the argument. In another passage she claims that ‘The social services in Ireland — including orphanages, old age homes, and hospitals — are exceptionally prolific, well staffed, and heavily endowed.’ There is no source given, and she does not elaborate; does she mean more than other countries with similar incomes? Does she mean more than any mentally healthy society would require? The claim matters: she wants to argue that these institutions were used as a refuge from intolerable stress and as a way of removing from the community those viewed as in any way deviant. So it matters whether Ireland was in fact ‘prolific’ in this regard. There are many statements just like this, and while no single example is devastating, in the end their accumulation makes one wonder just how seriously to take any claim.

Historians who read *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics* complained of a different problem. Her argument is at one level historical: a culture and demographic system that might have functioned tolerably well in the past was producing intolerable strains on the generations she observed in the 1970s. But her placement of the community in that history is at best sketchy. There are a lot of references to the ‘ancient Irish’, the Famine, and so forth, but almost nothing more recent. In particular, the reader would be at a loss to understand the long-term changes in the Irish economy between the Famine and the 1970s, and how those changes had depopulated the countryside but left those who remained in much better economic conditions. She could have used the work of Connell, or Kennedy, or Brendan Walsh to place Ireland’s marriage patterns in historical context. These omissions are puzzling at several different levels. Her argument matches a particular understanding of Irish culture and Irish Catholicism to the dwindling economic possibilities of this small Kerry community. Given the argument, it would be important to have a clear understanding of both of these and, specifically, to understand why that particular Irish culture had not produced the same effects in Kerry in the 1890s.

The central problem with the book, however, is the aetiology of schizophrenia. This is the core of her discussion of *An Clochán*: all of her accounts of social life, sexuality, and child-rearing are an effort to understand why so many rural Irish people ended up hospitalized for schizophrenia. And it is here that she makes claims that are understandably offensive to many. At one time psychiatrists thought of schizophrenia and other psychoses as rooted in early childhood experience. Yet the standard medical textbooks in print when she wrote in 1979 dismissed virtually any role for socialization in the aetiology of the disease; it is difficult to understand why she was still making it the centrepiece of her account. In the original text of *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics*, Schep–Hughes at several points acknowledges the medical view, but then in effect ignores it. This is both baffling and frustrating. She takes great pains to discuss and dismiss the old theory of the ‘schizophrenogenic mother’, an ‘unfortunate term’ that ‘conjures up the image of hysterical, possessed women imbued with discriminating pathogenic powers that destroy the lives of one or more of their children...’ But then, to explain mental illness in rural Ireland, she makes an
argument that self-consciously evokes the theory of the ‘schizophrenogenic mother’. Here the new material included in the 2001 edition does not go nearly far enough. In the new edition Scheper-Hughes concedes, in effect, the medical view, but in an evasive way. Regardless of her understanding with the good people of An Clochán about their privacy, this seems to be well-founded grounds for anger. She did not just criticize the way people raised their children, in effect saying that the parish was populated by ‘schizophrenogenic’ parents, she did it in the cause of an explanation she should not have taken seriously. The new prologue discusses the difficulties of doing ethnographic work in Ireland, and gives the reader to believe that some Irish proclivity for ‘book burning’ makes it nearly impossible to do so without provoking strong reactions. The only example she mentions here is Eric Cross’s 1942 book The Tailor and Ansty, which was indeed banned by a Fianna Fáil government. But this is argument by selective example. Scheper-Hughes is not the first anthropologist to write a provocative account of a West of Ireland community. Enough copies of those books escaped the bonfires to remain reliably available on bookshelves in Dublin and elsewhere. And there are ethnographic works from rural Irish communities that have contributed to a fuller, if not always appreciated, understanding of Irish society. The most telling example is one she relegates to a footnote mention. Rosemary Harris’s Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster: A Study of Neighbors and Strangers in a Border Community, which is based on fieldwork in ‘Ballybeg’ in the 1950s, deals clearly and sensitively with that deepest of Irish sensitivities, the sectarian divide. Her findings — that Protestant and Catholic farmers treated each other with respect, and that the local Orange Order was as much about class resentment among Protestants as sectarian identity — were unwelcome to extreme nationalist and unionist alike. But scholars have treated Harris’s work with the respect it deserves. Others have followed in Arensberg and Kimball’s footsteps without provoking the reaction that greeted Scheper-Hughes.

Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics was puzzling when first published, and the appearance of this new edition only deepens the puzzle:

So, in the end, I regard Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics as falling into that large and forgiving category I have called good enough ethnography, a book that captured something true about the country people of County Kerry in the mid-1970s while it obviously missed a great deal as well.

We could debate the precise threshold of ‘good enough’, but for a scholar as celebrated as Scheper-Hughes, even this is an enormous concession. The original text gave the impression of a harsh and judgemental author, one who wanted to improve people’s lives without having any apparent warmth for them. The new material in this edition, as well as her subsequent work in other contexts, belies that impression. In the years since writing Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics, Nancy Scheper-Hughes has laboured long and hard on behalf of several groups of people who deserve any help they can get. One wonders if the good people of this small Kerry parish can claim some credit for that.

These projects both started as fieldwork in rural Ireland. The difference in their receptions reflects, among other things, their authors’ very different aims. Arensberg and Kimball thought they were participating in the writing of an ‘objective’ ‘science of man’. Claims such as this invite giggles today, even when placed in inverted commas, but we should at least try to give them credit. Arensberg and Kimball were trying to understand the people of Clare.
on their own terms. They were not trying to improve the people of Clare, and not horrified when their family and sex lives diverged from those of Harvard graduate students. It has to be easier to observe when one is not also trying to judge.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes was after something else when she lived in An Clochán. There is an old joke about the post-modern anthropologist that has the ‘native’ informant interrupting the logorrhoeic ethnographer with an exasperated ‘Can’t we talk about me?’ There are more than a few passages in Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics where the reader thinks he is learning more about Scheper-Hughes than about the people of An Clochán. That was certainly one taunt thrown in her face when she returned in 1999. She quotes an ex-friend as saying, ‘Who made you such an authority? You weren’t such a grand person when you and your family came to live in our bungalow. You could hardly control your own children.’ Scheper-Hughes disapproved of the way the locals raised their children. It turns out the feeling was mutual.

Her intentions in writing Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics seemed to be less a characterization of human communities than a self-conscious effort to improve them. Today Scheper-Hughes’s website at Berkeley says that her

lifework concerns the violence of everyday life examined from a radical existentialist and politically engaged perspective. Her examination of structural and political violence, of what she calls ‘small wars and invisible genocides’, has allowed her to develop a so-called ‘militant’ anthropology, which has been broadly applied to medicine, psychiatry, and to the practice of anthropology.

When she returned to An Clochán in 1999, she was essentially run out of town, presumably by militants who had had quite enough of anthropology. The anecdote, as she recounts it, is itself quite revealing. Her hosts turned against her because they found, in her room, discarded pages from a journal she was keeping about the return trip. The original offence was to publish people’s secrets, and here she was at it again, in their view, collecting material with which to humiliate them some more.

But Scheper-Hughes was ‘no novice at the art of quick getaways’. She compares her experience in An Clochán in 1999 to her detention after the military coup in Brazil in 1965, and to close calls with both militants and police in Selma, Alabama, ‘during a period of transition to Black power’. The reissue of this work fits into a broader pattern. If she had wanted to respond to the many serious academic criticisms of the book, or update her thinking on the issues she raised in the original edition, the appropriate forum would have been an article in a professional journal. If she had truly understood the damage done to the people of An Clochán, she would not have consented to a reissue of the book and the reopening of old wounds. The book sold many copies in the original hardback and softcover editions, and remains widely available in used book outlets. The only legitimate reason for a new edition would be a thorough reconsideration of her original arguments. Yet she declines to provide that here. This new edition of Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics represents its own kind of ‘quick getaway’.