

CRAGGY ISLAND – CRANKY IRELAND? SERIAL VISIONS OF IRISHNESS IN *FATHER TED*

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Introduction: An Unlikely Popular Success

Father Ted is a successful sitcom produced by Channel 4 between 1995 and 1998. It was written by Graham Linehan and Arthur Mathews and starred Dermot Morgan as Father Ted Crilly, Ardal O'Hanlon as Father Dougal McGuire, Frank Kelly as Father Jack Hackett, and Pauline McLynn as their housekeeper Mrs Doyle. The sitcom won the BAFTA award for Best Comedy in 1995 and 1998. Morgan also won a BAFTA in 1998 for Best Comedy Performance, and McLynn the Top TV Comedy Actress award at the 1996 British Comedy Awards. Although produced by a British TV company, *Father Ted* was popular (though not uncontested) in Ireland too and indeed became a global success, a phenomenon that has left its mark in the proliferation of DVD collections of the three series and Christmas specials of the show, its near-permanent presence on TV networks worldwide, its round-the-clock availability on the internet, and even an annual "TedFest" in Ireland.¹ The lifespan of the series was cut short because of the tragic early death of Dermot Morgan from a heart attack. The writers and producers as well as his fellow actors agreed, most likely correctly, that a series that depended so much on its central eponymous character could not be continued with a replacement.

Father Ted proved an unexpected success for a sitcom with unpromising premises. What might viewers find funny about a priests' household in a remote corner of rural Ireland? Would the show not cause more offence than mirth, especially in Irish patriots and religious conservatives? BBC One scored a success with *Ballykissangel* (written by Kieran Prendiville), not a sitcom, but a soap opera also featuring a priest in rural Ireland, which ran between 1996 and 2001. But the romantic plot featuring cross-cultural tensions between the English priest and his Irish parishioners as well as an idealised tourist-board location seemed light years away from *Father Ted's* dark sarcastic humour. The Christmas Special "A Christmassy Ted" (1996) even made fun of the parallels between the two TV shows by placing Father Ted Crilly in the Ballykissangel pub and showing him carry off the scrumptious publican Assumpta (played by Dervla Kirwan), to the great dismay of her regular admirer Father Peter Clifford (played by Stephen Tompkinson).

Yet despite their obvious differences in genre and tone, one could argue that both programmes equally contributed to a postmodern media narrative of Ireland, one that Irish viewers as well as a worldwide following of the shows apparently appreciated as

1 The TedFest has been going strong since 2004 (see *TedFest*). The "Definitive Collection" on DVD first appeared in 1995 and was reissued in 2007.

versions of Irishness. The present essay wishes to take this popularity seriously and inquire into both the specifics of *Father Ted* and the question in how far the sitcom as a form of narrative may contribute to images of national identity as well as their subversion. It will first explore stereotypes of Ireland and Irishness in the sitcom. Then it will ask questions concerning the status of the sitcom as a specific form of narrative. Following on from this it will ask about the potential structural congruence of stereotypes and sitcom narratives and its ideological consequences. Lastly, and as an outlook, it will make the limitations of current narrative theories with regard to Cultural Theory and Media Studies the theme of its conclusion.

Stereotypes of Ireland in *Father Ted*

Literary scholarship is familiar with the “Stage Irishman” as an embodiment of Irish stereotypes. *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* describes him as “garrulous, boastful, unreliable, hard-drinking, belligerent (though cowardly) and chronically imppecunious” (Welch 534-535). It does not require much historical knowledge or awareness of cultural mechanisms to see in this cliché a distillation of centuries of conflict – between dominant English colonisers for whom the Irish were trouble, though ultimately mostly temporary and ineffectual, never completely to be trusted, yet also a group that one could view condescendingly as impoverished and self-destructive. This heterostereotype also mutated into an autostereotype of many Irish, who were happy (or perhaps just relieved) to view themselves in such a way, especially if the stereotype could be sold, first on stage, later in films and on TV, and for a long time through tourism.

The three priests who are in the focus of *Father Ted* are like a Trinity embodying the whole range of the Stage Irishman’s features divided into three distinct types. Father Jack Hackett is an alcoholic and spends many scenes merely dozing away in the background passive and immobile. But when he awakes, he turns out to be mischievous and fond of swearwords. Father Dougal McGuire, on the other hand, is childlike, naïve, and utterly incompetent when it comes to questions of daily life, and even more so regarding his clerical duties. He is easily led, yet basically good at heart. Father Ted Crilly, on the other hand, comes across as more complex. On the one hand, he is full of thwarted ambitions, a would-be wide boy who has his heart set on glamour and the high life. Yet he is also the one who does all the clerical work on Craggy Island. Moreover, he is the only character in the priests’ house (and perhaps on the whole island) with modern views and a perspective that extends beyond his parish.

Mrs Doyle, the only woman in the house, is also incompetent, moreover old-fashioned, and although she is generally well-intentioned (for example when she provides uncalled-for masses of sandwiches, unwanted pots of tea, and alcoholic drinks for ex-alcoholics), often a threat to herself and others.

Craggy Island thus acts as a fictional and clichéd microcosm of Ireland: it is a fictional island off the west coast of Ireland, thus doubling Ireland’s insularity. The priests’

house functions as conservative kernel even within this fictional condensation of rural and traditional stereotypes, which are at least as old as Synge's famous play *Playboy of the Western World* of 1907, but have in recent years been successfully revived by playwrights such as Conor McPherson and Martin McDonagh (see, e.g., Grene 298-311). The island and its parishioners largely stand for a fossilised society in which religion is a mere empty husk, and the priests' household functions as a parody of a stereotyped Irish family – with the woman mindlessly focused on the housework, the *pater familias* drunk, and the two “sons” naïve or forever on the brink of emigrating.

Yet the sitcom's strange set-up and characters can also be regarded as a response to modernisation – rather than a clichéd Ireland frozen in time. The character Father Ted would then be an unlikely specimen of a Celtic Tiger protagonist who dreams of living in the United States and of holidaying in Paris, etc. Modernity indeed invades all the time – in the shape of TV shows, film, migrants, etc. A good example is “All Priests Stars in Their Eyes Lookalike Competition” or several episodes modelled on successful recent films, like *Speed 3* – with Father Dougal on a milk float. This ambivalence between confirmation and disruption of expectations is both a means of providing dramatic material and tension and a structural feature of stereotypes. When regarded through the (contested) kernel-of-truth lens (which assumes that behind every stereotype there lurks some truth), whatever is presented to an observer is then checked for possible conformity to the stereotype.² The stereotype is then not the pre-existing supposed truth, but already a dynamic process of desire and search for confirmation.

When narrating stereotypes, no matter whether this is done in jokes or anecdotes, in short stories or novels, in drama, film, or TV sitcoms, stock settings, characters and events are therefore employed as *iconic* markers of clichés, i.e. as signals that attract attention. At the same time, however, these signals also form part of *narratives* that also confirm expectations. They become constituent parts of linear plots with a cause-and-effect logic, which, in our case, lead to “well-known truths about the Irish”, in other words, stereotypes again. Such narratives require a reliable narrative perspective, even when its protagonists are highly unreliable (a narrative perspective that, in the case of a TV sitcom, is provided by cinematic conventions). It is this interaction between exceptional iconic events and characters and familiar reassuring narratives that creates realism, even when this realism is juxtaposed with the exaggerations that are part and parcel of comedy. But in what ways is a sitcom a specific form of narrative?

The Sitcom as a Specific Form of Narrative

The sitcom is a fixed and usually short TV format (30 minutes for most episodes of *Father Ted*). It features a static setting (in *Father Ted*'s case largely inside the priests'

2 Many studies of stereotypes find no evidence for the kernel-of-truth theory. This, however, does not mean that it is without influence, as a myth at least (see McGrath et al. 776-779).

house) and an equally static set of protagonists with the occasional added characters. Most importantly, and in contrast to soap operas, sitcoms do not know progress, which means that episodes are usually interchangeable. Each episode consists of a simple structure of exposition, conflict/challenge and resolution (Neale and Krutnik 233). All of this makes the sitcom ideal for stereotyping.

Father Ted conforms to this structure. The core protagonists are surrounded by a small number of minor characters who make repeat appearances (usually fellow clerics or inhabitants of Craggy Island). Additional characters are brought in for one episode only and are usually connected with the conflict or challenge that is presented. At the end, the initial status quo of the three priests and their housekeeper in their chaotic yet safe home is restored.

Indeed *Father Ted* even makes fun of this convention at times – by highlighting it. At the start of “Are You Right There, Father Ted?” (Series 3, 1998), we unexpectedly find Father Ted Crilly not on Craggy Island, but in “Castlelawn Parochial House Dublin”, an impressive Victorian townhouse. Classical music plays in the background. A distinguished looking fellow-priest and an officious-looking gentleman have joined him in the well-stocked library, while Father Ted sips a glass of port. Ted’s fellow-priest eagerly takes over two of Ted’s Tuesday masses, because Ted needs rest after an exhausting weekend in Paris. Then another young priest enters, dressed in tennis gear, and they discuss going to the races after lunch – which will consist of pheasant. In short, the sitcom’s usual set-up in a dingy remote location has been turned upside-down. Ted summarises it in the statement “Ah yes, this is what it’s all about. A fine port, beautiful surroundings and intelligent company” (Linehan and Mathews 257). But of course, this cannot be allowed to last. After Ted declares “I’ll be staying here for a good while...as long as I don’t somehow mess it up for myself by doing something stupid!” (257), the officious-looking gentleman turns out to be the church’s auditor and declares ominously “Most of these accounts are in order [...], but I wonder if I could ask Father Crilly a thing or two about some of these things he’s put down under ‘expenses’...” (257). Immediately afterwards we see a miserable looking rain-soaked Father Ted with suitcases in both hands being welcomed back to the Craggy Island priests’ house by an enthusiastic Father Dougal.

In the short prelude to this episode, *Father Ted* not only presents a sitcom episode in shorthand, a kind of play-within-the-play. It also shows the iron rule of sitcoms: there must be no change! This rule will return in the discussion below as a decisive element in the ideologies transported by the sitcom genre.³

3 Neale and Krutnik state that “the reconciliation thus returns the situation to normal” (239). They also emphasise that the family (or its substitutes) form the core structure of sitcoms (239).

The Reproduction and Subversion of Stereotypes in Sitcom Narratives

Like all forms of comedy, sitcom is a potentially subversive form. As Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal study *Rabelais and His World* proposes, comedy permits (similar to carnival) an at least temporary suspension of order and hierarchies. It thereby exposes power structures and often shows their historical roots and dimensions as well as their frequently arbitrary or outright unjust character (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 10).

An important part of this subversion is provided by the exposure and breaking of taboos. In Bakhtin, these are predominantly moral and sexual ones, and obscenity features largely in his study. Sigmund Freud is one of the theorists who propose a model for understanding the function of taboos, most famously in his monograph *Totem and Taboo* (1913). In *Father Ted*, these are wider-ranging and encompass religious, but also political and racial taboos.

Order and its opposite, chaos, are important elements in comedy, and if one requires a thinker who adds a wider social and political framework to Bakhtin's ideas on subversion, one ought to look at Karl Marx's teleological model of history as a series of class struggles followed by phases of the establishment of class-bound and ultimately power-related norms.⁴ As in comedy, in Marx's model the disempowered can empower themselves, usually by breaking with norms or breaking down existing institutions and established authorities.

The taboos that are most obviously at stake in *Father Ted* are Catholicism, conservatism, as well as the related values of a pre-Celtic Tiger vision of Ireland as proposed by politicians like Éamon de Valera, which emphasised moreover rural life and traditional family values. Celibacy, the role and status accorded to priests and lay people, and especially the privileges (and lasting influence) accorded to parish priests have been an issue in Ireland at least since the foundation of the modern Irish Republic in 1949. Of equal importance in the sitcom is the conservatism, supposed or real, of the inhabitants of rural Ireland. In many episodes the islanders on Craggy Island are shown to hold xenophobic, racist, and homophobic views, while at the same time also hypocritically participating in the "blessings" of modern life, which here means especially (and in an ironically self-reflexive twist) television.

Nation and culture are themes that are less obvious in *Father Ted*, but present throughout in the structural setup of the sitcom. Craggy Island as an island off the coast of Ireland is the backwater of a backwater. It becomes more than evident, for example in the episode that starts in the cultured surroundings of Ireland's capital Dublin, that there is no love lost between the nation's centre and its rural margins.

Yet *Father Ted* also contains some of the traditional taboos that Bakhtin elaborated on. Father Jack's very limited vocabulary, for example, centres around the expres-

4 For an essay that discusses the relation between Marx's and Bakhtin's idea see Young.

sions “feck”, “arse”, and “drink”. While “feck” is not in fact originally the Irish version of the English expletive “fuck”, but has very different linguistic origins, it has in modern English usage become the polite(r) substitute for the English swearword, and one that is associated with Irishness.⁵ That “arse” and “drink” should not be part of a Catholic priest’s vocabulary need not be pointed out.

Transgressions in comedy – and thereby also in sitcoms – do not lead to a lasting change. Subversion does not become revolution. In fact, already in Bakhtin’s treatise, the temporary subversion of the carnivalesque ultimately supports, rather than permanently unsettles, the status quo. Comedy is therefore in many ways a conservative genre. Its ending, which is generally happy in dramatic comedy, and often embarrassing in sitcoms, restores normality. In accordance with the genre rules of sitcom mentioned above, sitcom endings must leave room for new episodes that return to and start again at the status quo. Change is therefore not part of a sitcom’s agenda.

Ideological Consequences

What are the ideological consequences of this double-bind of sitcoms? If the subversion presented in sitcoms is only ever temporary and leads back to the status quo of its starting point, is there any aspect of sitcom that provides more than a thinly disguised celebration of the status quo – and its attendant clichés and stereotypes? A possible escape is pointed out by Roland Barthes in his study of myth. Myth, which can be regarded as a cliché or stereotype turned into a belief system, or in Barthes’ words “a transformation of history into nature” (135-136), also has a powerful stomach and can digest many of its own contradictions. Yet Barthes believes that one can fight myth by exposing its structure. This leads to self-referentiality or self-reflexivity. This means that identifiable forms are exposed while being played out. Elements that normally add up to cliché, harmony, or the status quo are overdetermined (i.e. used in excess) or set against one another (e.g. when iconic markers clash with narrative markers).

A typical scene from *Father Ted*, again from the episode “Are You Right There, Father Ted?”, illustrates this rather abstract idea. It begins with Father Ted observing that the standards of order and cleanliness in the priests’ house have deteriorated so badly that something has to be done (he discovers a vomit-covered Father Jack in the case of the hall clock and observes how Father Dougal tries to write his name in the dust on the living-room table – and fails). It turns out that the housekeeper Mrs Doyle has been unwell ever since she fell off the roof! So Father Ted and Father Dougal embark on some house cleaning, but soon get bored and start fooling around. When Ted dons a lampshade as a hat and does a primitive impersonation of a Chinese person, Dougal

5 *The Oxford English Dictionary* lists as one of its current meanings “*slang* (orig. and chiefly *Irish English*). Expressing frustration, regret, or annoyance: ‘damn’, ‘blast’; = fuck int. Cf. fuck v. 4” among its meanings and interestingly references this use also to “1995 G. Linehan & A. Mathews *Good Luck, Father Ted* (television script, penultimate draft) in *Father Ted* (1999) 12/2 *Mrs. Doyle: Who’s for tea, then? Jack: Tea! Feck!*”

stays unexpectedly earnest. It turns out that at this very moment the newly arrived Yin family are looking through the window. They had planned to introduce themselves to the priests, but are now convinced that these are racists. For the rest of the episode, Father Ted tries to get rid of the reputation of being a racist, which is all the more difficult since the islanders do not consider racism a bad thing and even assume that it is a belief promoted by the Catholic Church. The “Right There” of the episode’s title catches up with Father Ted Crilly with a vengeance.

Subversion is easy to see here: a priests’ household is not supposed to be untidy. A housekeeper is not expected to fall off the roof. A priest, as a figure of authority, ought not to indulge in childish and racist games. There is more subtle subversion still, the type that corresponds to the national and cultural norms that *Father Ted* contains: one would not expect a Chinese family on a remote island off the coast of Ireland.

This is where a further, now self-reflexive subversion enters the episode. It turns out that the usually naïve and unworldly Father Dougal, who cannot even spell his own name, knows that the Yin family have arrived. Moreover he tells Ted that they live in “that old Chinatown area”, a piece of information that Ted greets with incredulity: “There’s a Chinatown on Craggy Island?” The cosmopolitan and worldly-wise Ted is defeated by the backward Dougal, who is not only aware of the goings-on on the island, but also apparently more laid-back about the effects of globalisation that affect even remote Ireland. The sitcom thereby exposes its own roles and clichés (Ted as cosmopolitan, and Dougal as naïve).

The episode continues in this vein, only now the stereotypes entertained by the audience get an airing. When Ted gets bombarded with eggs and abuse for being a racist in the street, he flees into the local tavern, Vaughan’s, every inch a clichéd Irish pub, from which sounds of Irish folk music emerge. This abruptly stops when Ted enters, and we see that the pub is not only filled with Chinese; they also form the folk band. Even the board at the back of the bar sports Chinese characters. Here, the expectations of the viewers (and perhaps also xenophobic and racist fears) are exposed, and their surprise is merely focused through Ted’s.

A further self-referential turn happens when, at the end of the day, Ted and Dougal, who share a bedroom, exchange ideas on how to ameliorate their image. Dougal, speaking, as he himself admits “off the top of my head” (264), proposes an idea that he instantly qualifies as “haven’t thought it through” (264). It turns out to be the plan of a celebration of “all the different cultures of Craggy Island” (264). Even though Dougal ends his proposal with “and then people will think you’re a fantastic man, rather than a big racist” (265), the idea is accepted as brilliant by Ted, a response that scares Dougal so much that he distances himself from it straight away and even insists on sleeping in the spare room. Dougal, the dimwit, knows the concept of a plurality of cultures. He does not use terms such as “people” or “races”, or even “immigrants”. The sitcom *Father Ted* is thus capable of employing, but also playing with and thereby exposing clichés and stereotypes, also of Ireland and Irishness. The ideological func-

tion of this play is at least two-fold, perhaps indeed two-faced: it confirms stereotypes of Ireland and its population, especially in the rural areas, and it presents these stereotypes and clichés as what they are – and thereby opens them up to critique.

A complete summary of the clichés and their subversion in this episode would look as follows:

- clichés of gender (a self-sacrificing female housekeeper versus three grown-up men who are incapable of dealing with household matters)
- racist clichés of “the Chinese”
- positive clichés of the responsible, caring priest
- clichés of rural backwardness and authoritarianism embodied by a farmer who would dearly like to participate in “the old racism” (262), only that his farm “takes up most of the day” (262)
- clichés of xenophobic, racist, and homophobic attitudes among the rural Irish represented by a woman with a shopping bag who rants about foreigners who come “over here, taking our jobs and our women” (262), especially the Greeks, who supposedly “invented gayness” (262)
- clichés of fascism (when a square speck of dirt on the window turns into a Hitler moustache when Ted rants behind it; his gestures also echoing Hitler’s performances)
- subversion of expectations when remote Craggy Island now has a Chinatown
- reversal of roles when the naïve Dougal takes this for granted, while the modern Ted is ignorant
- subversion of the touristy cliché of Irish culture when a pub with live amateur music is taken over by Chinese people – or have they adapted to it?
- reversal of roles when the immigrants turn out to be modern, Western, open-minded and educated, while the locals are dangerously ignorant
- the hints at fascism also refer to the subplot of another priest still harbouring an SS officer, and thus also to Ireland’s historically ambivalent attitude to Nazism

Much more similar to the novel in Bakhtin’s thinking than to dramatic comedy, this specific sitcom is thereby capable of accommodating (also) plural and dissenting voices (as conceptualised in Bakhtin’s *Dialogic Imagination*), not necessarily of the Chinese around whom the episode in question is constructed, but of Irish and non-Irish, of those (Irish or non-Irish alike) who entertain stereotypes of rural Ireland, and those who believe that it, too, participates in processes of globalisation that are largely fuelled by the very medium that broadcasts this very sitcom. When *Father Ted* was first broadcast, these ambivalences did not fail to provoke certain critical reactions. A major debate concerned the question whether *Father Ted* was broadcasting stereotypes of Ireland – or a critique of contemporary Ireland in comedy form. Points of contention were especially the swearing in the show, its depiction of religion, its

representatives and symbols, but also the backwardness of many locals on Craggy Island. A television Internet review page was enthusiastic and wrote: "Surreal, silly and very very funny, *Father Ted* was a sitcom that not so much thumbed its nose at some of Irish cultures most sacred cows, but rather brazenly bludgeoned them to death with a gleefully wielded sledgehammer" (*Television Heaven*). One of the sitcom's writers, however, reported very different reactions:

The listener was quite serious, and accused us of something along the lines of "anti-Irishness" (!). We used to get that type of criticism occasionally: "The show portrays the Irish in a bad light" etc. We listened to his comments and were quite non-confrontational and polite to him. I think this might have disarmed him a little, as his final comment was: "But, you know, it's good to see you two doing so well in England." I liked that. Very Irish. (Matthews)

It wasn't only the television audience and the team behind *Father Ted* that responded to its impact. Even the Catholic Church in Ireland regarded the sitcom at least as a symptom of a new age:

In the 1960s, the conciliar Church was perceived widely as a potential partner in the modernisation of Irish society; when it became clear that this was not to be, the Church began, slowly at first, to lose its impact.

What happened instead in Ireland [...] was a "Vatican II lite": banal liturgies, the collapse of a tradition in church music and a hollowed out and thoughtless clericalism of the kind viciously – and all too tellingly – satirised by the writers of *Father Ted*. (McCarthy)⁶

Yet no matter which position was taken up by critics, there appeared to be a general agreement that the sitcom represented what was considered to be Irish:

I feel a little strange saying all this, as though I'm transgressing some unwritten national code of honour, because Ted is an Irish cultural institution at this stage, up there with U2 and Roy Keane in a modern-day Holy Trinity. (I know it was funded and first broadcast in the UK, but the actors, writers and sense of humour are Irish.) (McManus)

The last statement also shows how circular the effect of a subversive sitcom can be, when it exposes and undermines stereotypes and clichés of Ireland, yet by its very success with its audience then becomes an icon of Irishness itself. That the producers of *Father Ted* had exactly this in mind can be glimpsed already in the show's credits that present "Father Ted" in the same style of lettering that is well-known from the *Book of Kells*, an early Medieval gospel produced around 800, whose origin is unclear (it might actually hail from the North of England), yet which has become insolubly associated with Ireland.

The Limitations of Current Narrative Theory with Regard to Sitcoms

The present analysis of *Father Ted* has employed a number of theorems deriving from Cultural and Media Studies. Cultural Studies have many uses for narrative, es-

6 The term "conciliar Church" refers to the Roman Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

pecially in connection with personal or cultural identity. Thus one of the founding fathers of British Cultural Studies, Stuart Hall, declares:

The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent self. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continually being shifted about. If we feel that we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or narrative of the self about ourselves. ("The Question" 277)

When talking about Ireland, with its particular position vis-à-vis British colonialism, the related positions of Postcolonial Studies concerning narrative might also come into play. Thus Homi Bhabha postulates:

Nations, like narrative, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation – or narration – might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. An idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force. This is not to deny the attempt by nationalist discourses persistently to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of nation progress, the narcissism of self-generation, the primeval present of the Volk. (1)

Pinpointed on *Father Ted*, one could summarise and extend their positions into claiming that what narratives of identity (personal, cultural, or national) are concerned with is an impossible unity that, if achieved, would act as a potent symbolic force. Yet exactly the elements that these attempts at achieving symbolic unity rely on (icons, clichés, and stereotypes) ultimately betray it and lead to its failure. Out of this failure, however, emerges the compulsion to narrate. Seemingly consistent – and in the case of sitcoms even circular – narratives function as attempts to heal or cover ruptures and contradictions.

Viewed from the complementary side of the theoretical debate, from narratology that is, the picture looks strikingly similar. Thus, Monika Fludernik, one of Germany's most respected narratologists, claims:

Narrative is all around us, not just in the novel or in historical writing. Narrative is associated above all with the act of narration and it is to be found wherever someone tells us about something: a newsreader on the radio, a teacher at school, a school friend in the playground, a fellow passenger on a train, a newsagent, one's partner over the evening meal, a television reporter, a newspaper columnist or the narrator in the novel that we enjoy reading before going to bed. (1)

Yet despite Fludernik's encouraging opening remarks, her foundational study suffers from the same shortcomings that most literary works on narratology display. Fludernik's claim for openness is contradicted by the structure of her own book – which is exclusively focused on literary narratives and only includes other media in the selective form of film and computer games (and on exactly 1.5 pages!). Traditional narratology is largely formalist and shows little interest in ideological issues or in media outside the printed text.

The collection of articles *Erzähltheorie transgenerisch, intermedial, interdisziplinär* ['Narrative theory across the genres, media and disciplines'] edited by Vera and

Ansgar Nünning in 2002 is one of several publications attempting to broaden narratology into, among others, Media Studies. Yet it also contains only one essay on film – and none on television. Instead, it explores narrative in comics and cyber fiction.

Anglo-Saxon scholarship, in contrast, has embraced Media Studies wholeheartedly, but often steers clear of what it considers the old-fashioned vestiges of Literary Studies, such as narratology, in favour of semiotics and Cultural Studies.⁷

What this demonstrates is that there remains work to be done, both for the Cultural Studies and Media Studies scholar and for the scholar of Literature who desires a broader approach to narrative. The task in question concerns exactly the connection of formal and structural narratological analyses with the questions of Media and Cultural Studies, and in the case of Ireland also those of Postcolonial Studies. Important issues that would then come to the fore, as could be glimpsed from the issues raised by the sitcom *Father Ted*, would be those of representation and articulation: Who or what is represented by whom for whom to what purpose? Does this representation also contain an articulation of differences and contradictions, in short self-reflexive elements?⁸ Without bypassing traditional tenets of Literary and Cultural Studies, such as Bakhtin, one would then be able to not only combine Literary and Cultural Studies in a more productive fashion, but also to do justice to modern narratives of Ireland, such as *Father Ted*, even when these are not presented in traditional genres and media.

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7 This is very visible in some classics of TV scholarship, such as John Fiske's *Television Culture* (1987), or David Morley's *Television, Audiences and Cultural Power* (1992). Only recently, the trend has changed, as can be seen in the journal *Critical Studies in Television: An International Journal of Television Studies*. A typical essay from this background is Creeber's "The Joy of Text?"

8 On articulation and representation see Hall ("Interview" 131-150).

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