11 The Past, the Present and the Wonderful, Worrisome Future

Transculturalism, Memory and Crisis in Irish Studies

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I

In 2003 the Translation Studies expert Professor Michael Cronin published an unusual little book called *Time Tracks: Scenes from the Irish Everyday*. The blurb reads:

> Did you ever watch the butter in your Marietta sandwich ooze through the pinpricks on the surface like inquisitive earthworms? Do you remember the hum and song of the extinct bus conductor, his fingers raking through the change? Did you ever toast bread on a one-bar electric fire or doze in the glow of a Super Ser? Or did you ever panic on the telephone as a distant voice shouted 'Press button A! Press button A!'

Like most people who grew up in Ireland in the latter decades of the twentieth century, I can answer "Yes" to most of these questions. Michael Cronin and I attended the same primary school – Firhouse National, seven miles or so south of Dublin city centre – where he was one year ahead of me. We grew up at the same time in more or less the same place, so it's no wonder that the "Irish everyday" of our childhood was substantially the same.

The world described in *Time Tracks* has almost completely disappeared, cut away across the intervening years by a range of economic, technological and cultural developments. That's as it must be, and as it should be. Twenty-first-century Ireland is quite clearly a more cosmopolitan, more connected, more complicated prospect than that insular land of living memory. In ways too plentiful and too obvious to enumerate, we are all conspicuously "transcultural" now.

But could it be that the Ireland of our childhood was actually a more complex place than memory might allow? The opening chapter of *Time Tracks* (on the subject of biscuits) would seem to suggest so. Partly this is to do with Professor Cronin's reframing of his own memories – from the

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perspective of an adult looking back on his own childhood, certainly, but also from the perspective of an academic well read in theories of translation and postcolonialism. His training will have primed him to appreciate that the journey from one language to another parallels the journey from the past to the future, and that the relationship between each element is volatile and fraught. The simplicity of the remembered world is belied by the complexities which, unrealised by the youthful protagonist, overlay and thoroughly inform it. For it turns out that Ireland was already a deeply unstable world – a "transcultural" world, in fact, in which "elsewhere" had crept, much of the time unnoticed and unremarked, into the corners of everyday life.

As a specialist in French literature, it's no surprise that Marcel Proust's colossal act of literary remembering (sparked by a similarly innocuous confection) is invoked immediately in Professor Cronin's discourse. After that, the nationalities proliferate: besides France, in the first chapter alone we discern the presence of the United States, England, Belgium, Italy, South Africa, Japan, Russia and Spain. Sometimes this presence may be no more than the name of a biscuit: "Kimberly", for example – its frankly disappointing reality mitigated by the association with an exotic elsewhere. "Ireland" remains the organising idea, the centripetal force, as it were, but the experience of "Irishness" is fundamentally displaced – the texture of its lived reality threaded through with strands of experience (sounds and smells, colours and tastes, images and attitudes) derived from many different times and places. "Ireland", as Fintan O'Toole once remarked, "is something that often happens elsewhere" (O'Toole "*We Don't Know* Ourselves" 27).

In the years after the revolution, Ireland's postcolonial condition had launched the island on a programme of strict, almost pathological, identity formation, and this condition was still very much in the ascendancy in the 1960s and 1970s. The nation state was the "natural" unit of geopolitical organisation; that's what Irish men and women had fought so hard over so long a period to establish. But Professor Cronin's book describes a world that is at the very least aspirationally transcultural – a world opening up to "the other", whenever, wherever and however encountered.

Time Tracks speaks to the central issue I wish to address in this chapter: the confluence of memory, crisis and identity in modern Irish life, and the various ways in which that nexus has been played out in a range of professional (such as academia) and personal (such as popular music) discourses. I begin by turning to two acts of remembering by high-profile modern Irish figures.

II

In 2021 the *Irish Times* journalist Fintan O'Toole published *We Don't Know Ourselves: A Personal History of Ireland Since 1958*. It's a long

(over 600 pages), idiosyncratic overview of the country across six decades, commencing with the author's birth and finishing with the devastating economic crash of 2008 and its protracted aftermath. O'Toole's subject is the recent past; but he's not an historian, and this is certainly not "standard" historiography. The method, rather, is to analyse a particular event or trend from each consecutive year with a view to understanding Ireland's tortuous career through the late twentieth century, as the island struggled to come to terms with its independent status. So, we have chapters on the IRA's "Border Campaign" of the late 1950s; the O'Toole family's move to the working-class southside district of Crumlin; the Irish Army's peace-keeping experiences in the Congo; the advent of Irish television and the extended influence of legendary broadcaster Gay Byrne; J.F.K's state visit; the influence of the Christian Brothers order on Irish education; the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Rising; the growing influence of popular culture, and especially popular music; the "contraceptive trains" and the ongoing moral panic relating to sex in Irish life; the commencement of "the Troubles"; and so on.

As someone of a similar age to O'Toole (he is three years older) and from a similar working-class southside background, I read this material with a frisson of recognition: in fact I'm deeply familiar (as with *Time Tracks*) with the general milieu described in his book. I too was obsessed with English football and English popular music; I lived in almost constant fear of random violence on the streets and in the schools; I served mass for a number of years and nervously shared the sacristy with a variety of priests; and from the small south Dublin village of Firhouse I witnessed the commencement of the city's metamorphosis from minor provincial town to sprawling post-industrial metropolis.

O'Toole also writes forcefully about the sexual exploitation that was both open and endemic in Irish life right up until the 1990s. Describing his encounter with Archbishop John Charles McQuaid while serving as an altar boy at Saint Bernadette's Church on Clogher Road in Crumlin, he remarks that even as the cleric was stroking the heads and faces of altar boys (including the author), he was fully apprised of a nationwide network of paedophile clergy operating under his jurisdiction. One such priest was Father Paul McGennis, chaplain of the nearby Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin; another was Father Ivan Payne, McQuade's own choice (in February 1968) as McGennis's replacement. "Over the next six years", O'Toole writes, "Payne abused at least sixteen children there, almost all of them boys" (O'Toole "*We Don't Know Ourselves*" 166).

Over three days in July 1971, I developed a condition called osteomyelitis, a bone infection caused by bacteria or fungi which in children usually affects the arms or legs. One Saturday night I was admitted to Our Lady's Children's Hospital with a temperature of 104°; the following morning

I underwent an operation which saved (certainly) my leg and (possibly) my life. I spent the next eight weeks (practically the entire summer holiday period) recuperating on a four-bed ward that I shared with a constantly changing roster of ill boys of a similar age.

Although I had many visitors during my convalescence – neighbours, schoolfriends and extended family – what I chiefly remember is that my father visited the ward every single night of my stay. I checked this subsequently with my mother, and she assured me such indeed was the case: he *was* there every single evening after work. Over the years since, this fact has always perplexed me. Not untypically of working-class Dublin fathers, mine was a fairly remote figure during early childhood. I recall he encouraged my interest in football, but apart from that he was by and large absent from the day-to-day life of the home which, as in so many twentieth-century Irish households, was predominantly a female domain. I was devastated when my father died in a car crash in October 1974, but only learned later, from my mother and siblings, of his profile as a functioning alcoholic, and his generally poor reputation in the wider family circle.

But how to reconcile this with his appearance at my bedside in that dreary hospital ward every evening over the summer of 1971? My surmise is that he and his drinking buddies were aware of the reputation of the hospital as a centre for clerical criminality, and that his presence was intended as a means to let hospital staff (both medical and clerical) know that I wasn't unprotected. I've since discovered that a strong anti-clerical strain ran through my father's working-class background; that he was a Dublin Labour man who had spent time in Birmingham during the 1930s and the early years of the Second World War; and that he disdained the influence of Fine Gael "fascists" on the one hand and Fianna Fáil "culchies" on the other. Although only a "Corpo" (Dublin Corporation) bin-man, he was not (so I imagine) going to leave any son of his to be preyed on by the likes of Father Ivan Payne.

I don't know if this account is true; and I don't know if my father's actions at that time saved me from a fate suffered by a distressingly large number of my contemporaries. I don't know how many, or if any, of the boys with whom I shared a ward in the summer of 1971 may have been abused. But I do know that to be thrust retrospectively into Irish history in this manner has been unsettling. It has brought history home, so to speak, in a way that even a long career spent reading and writing about modern Irish history cannot and could never. History is one thing when you read about it, entirely another when you live it. It's also sensitised me to what might be described as "the aesthetics of permanent crisis" – by which I mean the relentless insinuation of moral and emotional insecurity into the lived reality of everyday experience.

III

Losing a parent at an impressionable age is an experience I share with fellow Dubliner Paul Hewson, also known as Bono, lead singer with the rock group U2. Hewson was fourteen when his mother died of a cerebral aneurysm on 10 September 1974; I was thirteen when, just under a month later, my father died along with two other men in a car whose driver was inebriated. Like O'Toole, Bono has recently published a memoir which includes extensive material on the experience of growing up as a working-class boy in Dublin in the 1960s and 1970s. (These books may have been long in the planning, incidentally, but it's interesting to note that they were both published in the shadow of COVID-19.) And as with *We Don't Know Ourselves*, I found myself reading *Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story* (at least, the opening ten chapters or so) in a mood of wistful and slightly uncanny recognition, as that hazy half-forgotten world of a half-century ago began to come into focus once more before my eyes.

This was a world of *Top of the Pops* and *Kojak* and *The Man from Atlantis*; of Charlie George and Malcolm Macdonald and George Best; of Cadbury's *Smash* and cornflakes and *Jamaica Ginger Cake* (best consumed with a pint of cold full-fat milk). It was a world of the Friday night Youth Club and the boot boy threat on the way home; of Ian Paisley and Bernadette Devlin and Gerry Fitt; of the chess club and the parka and *Major* cigarettes. Differences, too: unlike the Hewson household there was for us no colour television, no telephone, no stereo – we need always remind ourselves that "working class" refers not to a definition as such but to a spectrum of experience. As a teenager Hewson attended the progressive Mount Temple Comprehensive School in Clontarf on the northside, which was co-ed and non-denominational; I attended another product of the educational reforms of the 1960s: Tallaght Community School in southside Balrothery where (unlike Mount Temple) there *was* a uniform policy and there *were* priests and Christian Brothers roaming the corridors.

Every moment in history is "modern" to itself (this is what makes the ideas of late nineteenth-century "modernity" and twentieth-century "modernism" so strange in some respects); and every moment may be regarded as being in transition to a greater or lesser degree – transition between what was, what is, and what is in the process of becoming. Or rather: what seems to have been, what seems to be, and what seems to be emerging. Dublin in the 1960s and '70s was "modern" to itself, no doubt; but it was a world in which the bones of the past were clearly visible beneath the skin of the present, discernible in the architecture, the culture, the politics, the language, and the attitudes of everyday life. But how did these trajectories

align? How far were the future and the present determined by a past over which there was such contention?

And it was a world of music, of so many different styles and genres of music, about which everyone had the inalienable right to an opinion: throw-away pop blaring from the radio and the television; elder sibling records left over from rock's first glorious decade (even some "78s" from goodness knows where); ballads and traditional "ceilidh" music from Ireland's take on the international post-war folk revival; local heroes like Horslips and Lizzy and Rory and Van; a huge catalogue of easy-listening songs which our parents (including my father) would "croon" at parties when they had taken a few. And there was "serious" music which indicated that you were ready to take it to the next level: Bowie, Roxy, Sabbath, Purple, Floyd, with jazz, sucking on a foul-smelling Gitanes cigarette in the corner. Like Hewson's brother Norman, at some point I acquired a copy of a Beatles song book which besides lyrics and guitar chords included some surreal accompanying images; and with a guitar acquired for £15.00 for my fifteenth birthday from the record store in Rathfarnham Shopping Centre I learned every song in that book.

Music mattered deeply and desperately. It was a badge of identity, certainly; in the unforgiving world of teenage status, possessing a record by Yes or Jethro Tull said something vital about you as a person, as indeed did ownership of one by the Bay City Rollers. It had consequences. More than that, however, music pointed up the limitations of the "real world" – the grey, damaged city whose streets we walked and whose buildings we occupied. It offered an escape from the dysfunctional version of "modernity" into which Irish history seemed to be locked; and it operated as a series of portals to imagined worlds – extraordinary, colourful worlds where everything worked differently, and where every emotion, every relationship was supercharged with significance. I could not have articulated it at the time, but the truth is now clear: because of its unruliness, its wanton disrespect for "official" borders and boundaries, its viral defiance of any form of containment, music is the transcultural cultural practice *par excellence*.

This was the world in which, in the *annus mirabilis* of 1977, punk rock exploded. There followed an extraordinary five years of "New Wave" in which popular music was re-imagined for a generation stranded (had they known it) between world views and cultural moments. Punk was not a music of contemplation or reflection: it was a music of the streets and the pub and the barricades, a music of crisis. My Hallelujah moment was hearing "White Riot" by the Clash, dropped by an overly-ambitious amateur DJ at the Christmas School Party in December 1977, much to the alarm and annoyance of the supervising staff. What was this? What were these maniacs singing about, how did they make that wall of noise, and why had I never heard it on mainstream radio? Like teenage boys the

world over, suddenly it seemed vitally important that I join a band in order to immerse myself in this world as quickly and as fully as possible.

And that's where Mr Hewson and I part ways.

There's a theory (with cultural, philosophical and neurological dimensions to it) that the music one encounters during the later teenage years comes to represent the normality against which all other musical experiences are measured (Jakubowski *et al*; Loveday, Woy and Conway). I hear this: the music comes and goes, but somehow in my head it's always December 1977 and the song is always "White Riot". At some level, I still want a riot of my own.

IV

From the personal to the professional.

Nearly thirty years ago I was engaged in the research that would form the basis of my PhD thesis. The project was eventually titled *Decolonisation and Criticism: The Construction of Irish Literature*, a monograph version of which was published by Pluto Press in 1998. The research was an attempt to bring some of the ideas emerging from contemporary postcolonial and poststructuralist theory to bear on the field of Irish Studies. It was a heady time for the field, when the confluence of "Derry and Derrida" (in the words of the late Seamus Deane) infused the study of Irish cultural history with tremendous energy and vitality. In the twin shadows of the Celtic Tiger and the Peace Process, there was a sense that criticism *mattered* – that the debates relating to Irish cultural history were locked into real-time events and real-life experience.

The informing method of *Decolonisation and Criticism* was to consider the relationship between literary discourse (sometimes regarded or referred to as the "primary" text) and the great variety and extraordinary amount of secondary critical discourses that the *idea* of literature has generated throughout the modern era. This covered practices such as formal literary criticism of the kind with which most readers will be familiar – writing articles and chapters and books and so on. I'm referring here to a kind of discourse that takes place under the auspices of institutions such as universities and academic publishing houses. And then of course there's all the other practices – all the other ways in which judgements of value and worth and functionality are generated in relation to literary discourse: book festivals and book clubs, literary prizes, public reviews, bookshop provision, curriculum design, public media, alternative media adaptations (television, film, radio, audiobooks), and so on.

My point at the time was that the relationship between literary and critical discourses was in some important senses an echo of the relationship that postcolonial theory postulated between colonial power and

those decolonising agents and practices which opposed colonialism. In poststructuralist mode I pointed out that, because it shares its mode of expression – written text, textuality – with its object, literary criticism offers a particular instance of the "dangerous supplementarity" that Derrida discovered operating at large throughout western history (141–64). Criticism, in short, was, and always has been, a discourse in crisis (the words are etymologically linked). One of the source thinkers for poststructuralism explained: "the notion of crisis and that of criticism are very closely linked, so much so that one could state that all true criticism occurs in the mode of crisis". The person who wrote these words was Paul de Man (8), whose own deeply problematic profile as a Nazi collaborator seems to exemplify the idea that all critical discourse is always conceptualised and formalised under the sign of crisis.

If criticism is haunted by crisis, then Irish criticism is doubly so – or so my research of three decades ago led me to conclude. In *Decolonisation and Criticism* I argued that, comprised of a dispersed array of influences (including eighteenth-century Celticism, nineteen-century romanticism, and early twentieth-century modernism), Irish Studies emerged during the political crisis of the 1920s; and, typically, of all cultural practices conceived under the influence of colonialism, it had continued to bear the imprint of that political and cultural crisis into the present (that being the 1990s). There was nothing particularly novel about this point: everyone knew that Ireland had produced an unrivalled collection of literary figures during the modern era – that pantheon of dead white guys whose names were reverently recited whenever two or three students of Irish cultural history were gathered together. What it had *not* been able to produce was a cultural critical tradition worthy of those figures. Irish cultural criticism tended to be conflicted about its object and anxious about its methods; conflicted about the language in which it operated (English) and highly anxious about the geopolitical entity (Ireland) in whose name and under whose auspices it carried out its work. The typical gestures of the critical mind – describing and defining and evaluating and so forth – were always particularly fraught in Ireland, weighed down by the baggage of previous descriptions and definitions and evaluations. Irish literary criticism was assailed on the one hand by the genius of its object, and on the other by the brittleness of its own identity.

V

I've suggested that all critical discourse operates under the sign of crisis; at this point I would like to suggest that the Irish engagement with revisionism and postcolonialism since the 1970s has consolidated and foregrounded that sense of crisis. An intellectual crisis occurs when antagonistic agents

struggle to find common terms of reference with which to conduct their debates. And this is precisely what happened in Ireland during the period of the so-called Celtic Tiger, when scholars battled over the very terms in which any exchange relating to Irish identity and Irish history could be sensibly articulated. Of course, in some ways this is not at all uncommon: once upon a time, when critical theory was all the rage in the humanities, people were very fond of quoting Michel Foucault's dictum from his essay "The Order of Discourse" that "discourse is the power which is to be seized" (53). What else are the contentions between revisionists and anti-revisionists, and post-colonialists and neo-nationalists, but an attempt to seize the terms of discourse?

It's a truism to observe that the metaphorical "battles" for Irish identity waged during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were shockingly concretised by the events of 1916, the War of Independence, and the Civil War. It seems to me that the decades since the Irish culture wars of the late twentieth century have witnessed a similar pattern, in which the metaphor of "crisis" has been rendered shockingly real and immediate. Again, I allude to a series of developments with which the reader will be no doubt familiar. The financial crash of 2008 led to the demise of the Celtic Tiger, the normalisation of austerity, and the corrosive loss of faith in Irish public life. The ongoing scandal (or series of scandals) relating to pastoral care – in particular, the series of appalling revelations relating to the historical mission of the Catholic Church in Ireland – has been traumatic, to say the least. Very few people of that pre-Tiger generation (myself included) have not been touched in some measure or degree by that scandal.

It was in the face of these brutal realities that the theory wars of the 1990s and 2000s began to seem to me inadequate in a number of respects. Certainly, it was possible to diagnose Ireland's parlous economic record, as well as its egregious social care record, as, in some senses, symptoms of the traumatic process of decolonisation. History shows us that Britain always regarded Ireland as being unable to keep its house in order – either economically or morally – and now here was proof: the children of the revolution repeating the sins of their parents. By the same token, revisionism could invoke the unhealthy state-church liaison that filled the power vacuum after the Treaty, while also pointing out that any self-regulating institution (such as the Catholic Church) arrogating so much social influence to itself was bound to be corrupt.

Such interpretations are certainly valid. Being "valid", however, seems a little beside the point in the face of crises of the kind and magnitude that I alluded to earlier. It's as if we were attempting to complete a complicated theory puzzle while the object itself – Ireland – was disintegrating all around us.

VI

I'm reaching here for a discourse in which the previous sections might somehow be linked: a position in which personal memory and professional analysis may be brought together under the sign of crisis. I do so because it seems to me that "crisis" has become the defining characteristic of "the new normal" within which we all find ourselves operating all the time. This "new normal" describes a difference in *kind* rather than of *size* or *amount* or *degree*; and it has been generated by a series of events and practices that have accumulated in the half century since my childhood, and the quarter century since the publication of *Decolonisation and Criticism*. Any list would have to include the crash of 2008 and the demise of the Celtic Tiger; Brexit, which, as an Irishman living in Britain, I regard (along with over half of the voting population of the UK) as an unmitigated economic and political disaster; the rise of political populism, embodied in two of the most inept and self-serving leaders the world has probably ever known; the advent of Artificial Intelligence, which to my understanding represents the single most potent threat to the humanities (perhaps to human civilisation) in history; the emergence of COVID-19 and the devastating impact that the pandemic continues to have on the economic and political stability of the world; and the ongoing (as I write in 2023) wars in Ukraine and Palestine, which seem to have plunged us back into an age of Cold War politics which most decent people hoped had disappeared for ever.

Most of all, however, I think of environmental crisis, and of our extraordinary ability to carry on as if this were simply an old-style isolated, containable "issue" – that, with a bit of tweaking here, and a little adjustment there, everything, in the words of the poet Derek Mahon, is going to be all right. The fact is that scientists from many different disciplines continue to assure us that such is not the case: that without pro-active intervention, everything is most definitely *not* going to be all right. The kind of doublethink that enables us to ignore, even to extend, environmental damage seems to me to represent a kind of collective psychosis and reminds me of a proverb I encountered when living in Spain many years ago: take what you want, and pay for it.

The first clause registers an opportunity, the second an obligation and a debt.

So, my question becomes: how do these issues fit together? Firstly, that early lost world I share with Michael Cronin, Fintan O'Toole and Paul Hewson, a damaged world reaching desperately for a cogent temporality but hindered at every turn by its own past; a world in which danger lurked below every surface, and where music came to function as both consolation and escape route. Secondly, the mid-life honing of a professional

critical reflex, the identification of "crisis" as the animating ethos of criticism, and the search (increasingly forlorn as the years pass) for both a form and a language within which to explicate the textual records of the past. And finally, this current sense that insidious "crisis" is in fact "the new normal", as pervasive as the air we breathe.

Other questions follow: how does an academic practice born of and fully attuned to a discourse of crisis engage with this new moment of permanent (perhaps terminal) crisis into which we seem to have entered? Can the Irish critical tradition speak to our present moment in any way that's meaningful; can any national cultural project remain feasible – politically or ethically – at a time when the global agenda is so pressing? We took what we wanted, now the time to pay looms menacingly. Is it time for a rethink, or more radically a re-orientation of intellectual energy away from the crisis of the past to the crises – multiple and varied – of the present and the future? Memory, criticism, crisis: it sounds like the title of a research project. Or perhaps an epitaph.

VII

I'm not sure how this leaves me besides possessed of a vague anxiety with the way in which Irish Studies has developed as an institutional field or as an intellectual discipline. I accept that this is partly (perhaps predominantly) an effect of age and status and experience; I realise that having less of an investment in the field means that I am more amenable to the prospect of an end to business as usual. But for someone who has been working at somewhat of a tangent to the field for a number of years now, I observe its ongoing operation with a degree of frustration which at times tips over into alarm.

I don't have the space to undertake the kind of root and branch revision towards which I am vaguely gesturing in this short chapter. In very general terms I suspect it may involve acknowledgement of that transcultural strand which has always shadowed modern Ireland's obsession with its own identity. More urgently, it may also involve some kind of rapprochement between complementary "green" narratives: on the one hand the "emerald green" associated with one predominant strand of Irish cultural history, on the other, the "ecological green" which is addressed to the planet's distressingly fragile condition – a condition which only the most mendacious and myopic can continue to disavow.

Twenty-two years ago, three years after the publication of *Decolonisation and Criticism*, I suggested in a book called *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* that because of their shared concern with a wide range of issues, Irish Studies and the then still-developing field of ecocriticism would probably have a lot to say to each other. That conversation has been

enjoined in some measure; in particular, some of the work emerging from the Irish take on postcolonialism (especially in regard of its concern with issues of discursive space and environmental justice) has been instructive (Cusick; Potts; Wall; Wenzel). And it's true to say that there have been other impressive initiatives and interventions; the work of the late Tim Robinson, for example, offers a platform from which a truly transformative critical practice might spring. But with the enemy at the gates, so to speak, it's been disappointing to observe the relative failure of a widespread, deep-diving Irish ecocriticism to emerge.

This is all the more surprising when we consider the degree to which the idea of crisis is already embedded within the Irish critical imagination. Among other things, *Decolonisation and Criticism* offered an account of the way in which each generation of Irish critics was obliged to renegotiate the prospect of crisis in its own way, with reference to different theoretical models, employing a range of different languages and concepts. In the light of this, I believe that there are three potential modes in which a re-imagined Irish Studies could begin to re-orient itself more impactfully – towards its own past, certainly, but more pressingly towards a present moment in which it risks a kind of culpable redundancy.

Firstly, Irish cultural criticism should seek out and highlight the historical manifestation of transcultural "otherness" within the body of the Irish "real" – which is to say: those "processual" instances when the borders of national reality are transgressed or exposed in some way, and the social reality of Irish identity is (as a consequence) materially and ideologically reshaped. I'm convinced that the study of popular music could lead the way on this project.

Secondly, Irish cultural criticism should foreground its traditional engagement with a range of themes which resonate within an environmentalist context – themes such as environmental justice, the imagined spaces of the nation, and the historical idea of Ireland as possessed of a special relationship with nature. To do so would require: a) refocusing the country's geopolitical status; b) renegotiating the network of relationships within which it currently operates; and c) imagining a different future. In other words: a lot of work.

And finally, Irish criticism can seek ways to deploy its deep familiarity with the idea of crisis, born of long experience and extensive experimentation. This may not amount to a riot, but it would constitute a start.

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