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“The Third Ireland”: Inheritance and Postcolonialism in Irish Crime Writing

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This article examines the ways in which contemporary postcolonial Irish crime writing is forging a unique and cultural-specific literary crime fiction tradition. The critics Nels Pearson and Marc Singer comment on the significance of postcolonial history and experience in influencing and shaping national bodies of crime fiction, stressing that “No contemporary critical account can overlook the formative roles that race, nation, and empire have played in the development of detective fiction”(3). Drawing on selected texts from the 2011 anthology *Down These Green Streets: Irish Crime Writing in the 21st Century*, edited by crime writer Declan Burke, I investigate representations of postcolonial perspectives in selected Irish recent crime writing through the prism of notions of inheritance and revision.(Note 1) Using contrasting textual methods, John Connolly’s essay “No Blacks, No Dogs, No Crime Writers: Ireland and the Mystery Genre,” and Jane Casey’s crime short story “Inheritance,” mark a new departure in Irish crime writing by self-consciously positioning themselves in relation to British and American dominant crime writing traditions, and forging new directions by interrogating ideas of literary, cultural, and material inheritance. I argue that by employing postcolonial perspectives engendered through autobiographical, critical, and fictional modes and strategies, the selected texts illustrate the ways in which Irish crime writers are developing culturally distinct modes of writing and critiquing crime fiction. My central focal point for these discussions is the question of inheritance and revision in postcolonial Irish crime writing, and their problematic relationship to cultural and literary tradition. In postcolonial contexts, ideas of legacy and inheritance are fraught with complications, and carry complex connotations of historical and cultural inequality

in terms of ethnicity, gender, and class.(Note 2) Such issues of inequality are central to postcolonial Irish crime writers,(Note 3) as they strive to articulate a departure from and transformation of the British and American crime writing traditions that have long dominated the literary scene.

The preoccupation with the politics of representation and contestation of the past by reimagining its power structures, whether in critical, theoretical, or creative terms, is a recurrent trait within the texts discussed here. Declan Burke, the editor of *Down These Green Streets: Irish Crime Writing in the 21st Century* , elaborates on the recent prominence of Irish crime studies and crime fiction, citing a number of differing reasons for this upsurge in visibility. He highlights the following events and developments:

Veronica Guerin's murder. The end of the thirty-year 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland. The economic boom of the Celtic Tiger, with its attendant greed and corruption. A country awash in cash and drugs. The rise and rise of criminal gangs, and soaring gangland murders. The declining reputations of the Church and the political, legal and financial institutions. (Burke 9)

This historical context is echoed, both overtly and implicitly, in the texts discussed here, reimagining the preoccupations of those traditions and replacing them with descriptions embedded in Irish geographies and realities that reflect the significance of inheritance as a motif in contemporary postcolonial Irish culture. In my examination of Connolly and Casey's texts, I focus on two areas of enquiry, namely the exploration by Irish crime writers of tradition and cultural legacy, and crime short fiction and its offering of a textual space in which to examine the theme of inheritance.(Note 4) Investigating these two texts, the article explores the cultural and literary priorities reflected in postcolonial Irish crime fiction criticism and short fiction,(Note 5)

looking at how these critical and imaginative texts position the emergent and buoyant body of Irish crime writing in relation to multiple traditions, and seek to define traits of Irish specificity and difference.

Challenging the Traditions

Questions of literary inheritance and tradition are central to Irish crime writing, and are intrinsically connected to the country's postcolonial condition, whether treated thematically in fiction or as part of critical reflection. John Connolly's essay, 'No Blacks, No Dogs, No Crime Writers: Ireland and the Mystery Genre', from *Down These Green Streets: Irish Crime Writing in the 21st Century*, centers on these issues. The position of Irish literature in postcolonial debates has often been the subject of scrutiny, as the critic Eoin Flannery notes. He states that "Ireland's location within debates on postcoloniality has always been—and will no doubt remain—contested, yet its inclusion is vital because of that very contestation" (Flannery 5). The postcolonial preoccupation with contestation, with positioning and reimagining Irish identity in critical, theoretical, and creative terms, is also a prominent trait in the texts discussed here. For our purposes, rather than offering a detailed comparative analysis between Irish crime writing and texts from British and American traditions with a view to identifying where Irish crime writing differs and departs from those traditions, I devote my discussion to examining the ways in which these specific selected Irish crime texts challenge or reimagine the literary traditions of those hitherto dominant cultures.

The title of John Connolly's essay, "No Blacks, No Dogs, No Crime Writers: Ireland and the Mystery Genre," itself overtly contributes to positioning the text in a politicized postcolonial context, by foregrounding the offensive and discriminatory language used to marginalize and dismiss particular social, racial, and ethnic groups—those whom, as Mark Scully states, are

“represented as undesirables” (159) by the dominant culture. The title of Connolly’s essay thus forms a crucial and intrinsic part of the essay’s postcolonial critique of class, race and ethnic inequality and its impact on literary and cultural production. The title of the essay offers a self-conscious reference to British discriminatory treatment of those groups of the population deemed inferior, using race and ethnic characteristics based on colonial position to do so. Garry Crystal states, “It was not uncommon to see signs in Britain during the 1960s proclaiming, “No blacks, no Irish, no dogs.” These exclusionary practices have also recently been described by Mary Higgins, an Irish emigrant to Britain, who recalls encountering signs saying “no blacks, no dogs, no Irish” on arriving in London in 1960 (O’Dowd). Mocking the terms and practices of exclusion and privilege perpetrated by Empire and employed to deprecate Irish individuals and collective in social contexts, Connolly links the phrase to the marginalization of Irish crime fiction in the literary scene. Such critical analysis of language and linguistic construction of hierarchically defined identities is central to postcolonial criticism, as well as to crime fiction. By connecting the phrase “No Blacks, No Dogs...” to Irish crime fiction in the second part of the essay’s title, John Connolly’s self-conscious reference to the discriminatory practices imposed on the Irish establishes a conceptual link between his essay and the preoccupations of postcolonial criticism. However, the title further expands this critique to include reference to the marginalization of Irish crime writing within the literary mainstream and conventional canon.

Literary traditions, including those in genres such as crime writing, reflect but also problematize the cultural values and political priorities of Empire. “No Blacks, No Dogs, No Crime Writers: Ireland and the Mystery Genre,” writes back to the dominant British and American crime writing traditions by locating Irish crime fiction within a global literary landscape while insisting on the particularity of its particular postcolonial situation and location.

This process of writing back to dominant literary and cultural discourses is central to Irish postcolonial reassessment of crime fiction as a genre. As the critic Valerie Coghlan argues in another context, “The prevailing sense of alterity, the colonial residue, has undoubtedly been an influence on Irish writing, but in texts for adults, it has resulted in a certain amount of ‘writing back’—searching for and establishing identity through literature” (93). This quest for identity can also be seen in Irish crime writing. Connolly’s essay presents a discussion of the commonalities with American noir and British Golden Age crime fiction, while highlighting the cultural and literary specificity of Irish crime writing and the postcolonial historical and cultural context that has shaped it. The diversity and distinctiveness of Irish crime fiction is central to its postcolonial identity, according to Declan Burke. He highlights a number of factors, such as: “the obvious development of a distinct body of Irish crime fiction, is the sheer diversity of styles, themes and tones: historical fiction, high-concept thrillers, police procedurals, private eyes, comedy capers, gritty noir, postmodern investigation, paranoid conspiracy, serial killers, post-‘Troubles’ novels” (‘Crime Always Pays’). The critic Eoin Flannery echoes this view, stating that “Irish literary and historical studies seem to offer propitious material with which to explicate the temporal and spatial differentials of imperialism, anti-colonialism, and postcolonialism” (2). This new “distinct body of Irish crime fiction” singled out by Burke is postcolonial in form and content and developed in response to English and American tradition. Fintan O’Toole’s essay, “From Chandler and the ‘Playboy’ to the Contemporary Crime Wave,” also explores the literary and cultural factors behind the recent growth in Irish crime fiction. Like Connolly, O’Toole’s essay places the genealogy of Irish crime writing within the American noir tradition. The latter takes his starting point in Raymond Chandler and the hard-boiled crime writing mode. That the genre of crime fiction is being employed to make political as well as aesthetic points is a view

long held by critics. Scholars Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen argue that, “postcolonial literature [...] increasingly uses elements of crime fiction for, ‘social’ rather than ‘criminal’ detection,” employing “specific criminal acts to explore the state of a postcolonial nation”(8). As we shall see, this specific use of the genre is a central dimension of Irish crime writing, which challenges the meanings and settings of the genre tradition, and insists on the specificity of Irish concerns and locations, thereby reimagining traditional genre configurations and crime textual modes.

Connolly’s “No Blacks, No Dogs, No Crime Writers: Ireland and the Mystery Genre,” incorporates the author’s own autobiographical anecdotes as part of its critical assessment of Irish crime fiction.(Note 6) For Connolly, this genre-expanding strategy serves the purpose of invoking the central postcolonial themes of inheritance and history on both personal and collective levels. The mesh between the personal and the critical in Connolly’s essay is an important postcolonial strategy which contributes to situating him as the author and subject organically and authentically within the context and issues which he describes. Echoing this, in the assessment of postcolonial literature the critic C. L. Innes states, “postcolonial autobiographies are often written to portray the author as representative of his cultural group”(56). Rather than perceive himself or his work as separate from the problems of genre fiction marginalization which he examines, Connolly presents the situating of the self as a part of writing new Irish-specific modes of crime fiction into existence through the dual focus of location and inscription. This strategy echoes C.L. Innes’ insight that “Postcolonial autobiographical writing often plays a significant role in establishing the subject’s sense of location and belonging”(64). Central to the process of establishing a sense of belonging is the confrontation with tradition and history, which in Connolly’s essay is demonstrated through his

autobiographical approach. An example of this is Connolly's recounting of a personal anecdote from his childhood days. Describing his early encounters with books and reading, and with crime fiction, during his childhood reading experiences in his grandmother's library, Connolly reflects on how there never seemed to be any Irish crime writing on the shelves at all—it was invisible. During that time, Connolly argues, “the genre fiction that did find its way onto those shelves, whether crime or fantasy or romance, came from Britain and the United States” (40). It has been widely acknowledged that the British and American crime fiction traditions were dominant before the Second World War (Panek 144). However, it is from this twenty-first century position of relative invisibility and marginalization from the canon that Connolly retrieves and articulates what he considers to be specific and important in Irish crime fiction. Through a personal and self-reflective approach to the topic of inheritance, Connolly's essay employs an introspective analytical mode to investigate his own subjective and personal position in relation to the material and history he discusses. “No Blacks, No Dogs, No Crime Writers: Ireland and the Mystery Genre” opens with a description of the author's youth spent in his grandmother's home and his encounter with the world of literature which he experienced through her book collection. Connolly particularly recalls the traditional crime texts on his grandmother's bookcase and the literary traditions they reflected, of colonial literary inheritance and cultural legacy. He discusses these and other canon-enforcing books which his grandmother owned. Reflective of empire and western modes of knowledge, these included, among other things, an encyclopaedia and a book of popular science (39). Such canonical texts reinforce hierarchies of knowledge and style, including genre fiction from dominant literary cultures, as Connolly points out: “There was H.P. Lovecraft, but no Mervyn Wall; there was Stephen King, but no Bram Stoker; there was Ed McBain, and Agatha Christie, but no...”(40). Connolly's memories of his grandmother's library

and its canonical book contents are so vivid that they go beyond the physical existence of the house and its subsequent demolition many years later. He reflects on how: “Even now, a decade or more since that house was demolished, its contents dispersed or destroyed, I can still visualise some of the titles on those shelves” (39). Thus, Connolly’s essay raises the question of literary and cultural influence and its legacy within a postcolonial Irish context, and it examines the processes and strategies he and other authors have employed in order to negotiate inherited forms and traditions.

Such critical considerations are in themselves an important part of Irish crime fiction and its writing back to empire, articulating the problems and textual questions faced by individual writers and literary genres in reimagining literature. Commenting on the relative absence of Irish crime writing until late in the twentieth century, Connolly examines the formation of an American-British dominated crime fiction canon. He notes:

...during a period when crime fiction was becoming a major form of popular entertainment in the United Kingdom (in the form of Golden Age mystery, and the writers who subsequently followed) and in the United States (in its more streetwise, hard-boiled incarnation), Irish writers largely ignored such developments [...] until the twenty-first century. (Connolly 41)

Considering American noir crime fiction, this body of work, according to the critic William J. Nichols, reflects social and cultural developments specific to early twentieth-century American contexts. Nichols emphasises that

Alongside the development of free-market capitalism during the 1920s in the United States emerged gangsterism and organized crime, government corruption and collusion with big business, and urban violence and estrangement. 'Noir' fiction as well as film evokes the atmosphere of alienation that results from America's failed project of modernity and the disillusion with democratic ideals. (139)

Against this background of social inequality, the individualistic American private eye detective emerges as a flawed but heroic character, seeking to restore integrity. As Nichols mentions, the hard-boiled American private detective figure was first devised by crime fiction authors Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, and has since "been the moral guide for a changing society plagued by a lack of faith in justice and an absence of law" (Nichols 97). The phrase, "down these green streets" from the title of the anthology is a self-conscious pun on the well-known line "down these mean streets" by the American hard-boiled crime writer Raymond Chandler, taken from his essay "The Simple Art of Murder." In this essay Chandler equates the private eye detective with masculine individualism and situates his character in an urban realm full of dangers and threats, stating: "down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man." (18).

Chandler's "The Simple Art of Murder" has been extremely influential in defining the modern private detective of noir crime fiction, both in terms of its seductive individualist ethos and its allusion to the setting and atmosphere of noir stylistics.(Note 7) However, as the essay and short story examined in this article demonstrate, these tropes, features, and settings do not translate in a straightforward manner and are problematic both within postcolonial Irish literary production and feminist contexts. Commenting on the significance of urban settings in crime

fiction, O'Toole states, 'Crime fiction is a function of something Ireland didn't have until recently—large-scale cities' (359). The English Golden Age murder mystery also poses challenges for Irish crime writing. The critic Zach Dundas demonstrates how the "English country-house murder mystery [...] made the career of Agatha Christie and many other detective novelists [...] the country-house plot would become standard in the interwar golden years of British crime writing" (185). Outlining the main characteristic of Golden Age crime fiction, Stephen Knight states, "The setting of the crime is enclosed in some way [...] and the archetypal setting of the English novels (unlike most of the American ones) was a more or less secluded country house"(77-8). The form is typically associated with British writers such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers, and perceived as conservative in its outlook, preoccupied with eliminating disruption and restoring the status quo. Connolly sees the British Golden Age tradition as maintaining the establishment and the police as upholders of authority, whereas American hard-boiled tradition *is* indebted to the "lone cowboy of the western tradition"(47). He concludes, "Each springs from a very distinct process of engagement with the concept of law and order and the perceived nature of society"(46). Thus, against the urban criminality and the individualistic private eye of American noir and the class-ridden status quo of Golden Age detective fiction, contemporary postcolonial Irish crime writing seeks to foreground its distinctiveness and difference.

In "No Blacks, No Dogs, No Crime Writers: Ireland and the Mystery Genre" Connolly explores some of the central strategies used in postcolonial Irish crime writing to depict Irish specificity. Examining the characteristics of British Golden Age tradition and American hard-boiled tradition, he finds that neither tradition has fitted postcolonial Irish realities due to the particular social conditions created by colonial rule and long-standing conflict. Postcolonial

Ireland, according to Connolly, has been, “secretive, defensive, intensely parochial, and unforgiving of its critics” (48). Equally, the settings typically preferred in American noir and English Golden Age traditions have not lent themselves well to the portrayal of Irish specificity and experience, Connolly notes. He points out that “Irish society, which was primarily rural by nature, was unlikely to accommodate the conventions of contemporary crime fiction without a struggle, despite its fascination with the secrets and foibles of others”(Connolly 45). Because of what Connolly describes as the need for Irish literature to “prove itself” and to be taken seriously, the relative lack of Irish crime fiction was a result of the nation’s need to deal with its colonial history and literary and cultural inheritance. As he states, “such an environment actively discourages experimentation with genre” (42). In his own creative practice as a crime writer, Connolly argues that for him, “the choice was either to import genre conventions from the UK or the US to an Irish context, which I felt was neither appropriate nor, indeed, interesting; or to apply a European, outsider’s perspective to those conventions” (44), with the aim of subverting or transforming them.

Connolly underlines the importance of cultural- and location-specific Irish crime fiction, rather than imported settings or modes, as part of its postcolonial literary strategy. Equally so Ireland’s specific political problems: “It’s entirely possible that one of the reasons why native crime fiction remained the exception in Ireland was that the period of its greatest growth elsewhere coincided with the height of the Troubles” (51). In its examination of crime fiction traditions, Connolly’s “No Blacks, No Dogs, No Crime Writers: Ireland and the Mystery Genre” articulates his reluctance to define Irishness in narrow terms, thereby demonstrating the postcolonial dilemma of political and cultural allegiances. The contemporary postcolonial preoccupation with revisioning master narratives through the process of transformation (Ashcroft

2) is a strong dimension in Irish crime writing, which is also highlighted in Connolly's essay. The relative recent visibility of Irish crime fiction is, Connolly maintains, closely connected to the colonial politics of Irish identity and culture (41). He compares the dearth of Irish crime fiction and own cultural traditions to a similar postcolonial "lack of confidence" in Australia (46), another country with a colonial legacy which affected its literature, including genre writing such as crime fiction. Connolly argues that Ireland has, "a certain amount in common with Australia, another country that struggled to establish its own cultural identity in the aftermath of direct British rule, and suffered from a similar crisis of confidence"(46). Arguing for the importance of articulating a unique Irish crime fiction, while also appealing to broader readerships (50), Connolly comments on the rise of crime within Irish society and the resulting changes to the way in which criminality is discussed and reported in fiction. He concludes that it is the end of terrorist violence which seems to have set Irish crime writers free, both in the North and the South, "to write mainstream crime fiction, but also to use crime fiction to explore the aftermath of decades of low-level religious and political warfare" (52). Emphasizing the constant presence of politically and religiously-motivated crime and violence, Connolly foregrounds the crucial role that Irish crime fiction now plays in negotiating these social and cultural tensions and in mediating overt as well as more indirect political content.

As we have seen, Connolly's use of anecdotal narrative strategies and autobiographical discourse illustrates the point made by the critic C.L. Innes that "Another strategy frequently found in postcolonial writing sidesteps entering into dialogue on the colonizer's terms by grounding the text in autobiography, starting from the self as the central point of reference"(56). Furthermore, underlining this point, the scholar Claire Lynch argues that contemporary Irish autobiographical writing and the short story are closely linked in both format and sensibility

(183). Both these forms, according to Lynch, are “ideal forms of writing to represent [independence] and the personal identity crises that went along with them” (1183). Connolly’s essay provides an important and poignant example of how recent critical analyses of Irish crime fiction, undertaken by crime writers themselves, provide much-needed insights into the priorities of Irish crime writing as it evolves alongside the national literature and culture it describes. This process suggests that, in an Irish postcolonial context, terms such as literary tradition and canon are malleable concepts which have the capacity to grow and change. The idea that crime fiction can serve as a vehicle for cultural and political criticism challenges conventional perceptions of the genre as merely providing light-hearted distraction. Equally, the scholarship engaging with the genre has shifted its focus, as Nels Pearson and Marc Singer propose. They state that “just as scholarship regarding the detective genre has shifted from examinations of formal devices to questions of socio-political engagement, interrogation, and transformation, so, too, albeit with complexity, has the genre itself” (Pearson and Singer 5). This emphasis on crime fiction’s transformative powers further underlines its importance in postcolonial and emerging national genre literatures, such as Ireland’s. Connolly’s essay uses crime fiction criticism as a textual mechanism through which to investigate the gender-political and national dynamics of literary representation and interrogate the meanings of crime, insisting on the connection between literary genre, cultural change, and crime. As we have seen, Connolly’s “No Blacks, No Dogs, No Crime Writers: Ireland and the Mystery Genre” reflects the postcolonial crime writer’s urgent need to engage with questions around the construction and representation of self alongside artistic and aesthetic preoccupations, thereby insisting on the postcolonial, national, cultural, and gender-political dimensions of genre fiction.

Jane Casey's crime short story "Inheritance," also from *Down These Green Streets: Irish Crime Writing in the 21st Century*, centers on the theme of inheritance and its significance in a postcolonial context, examining its meanings in terms of property, class, gender, and nationality from an individual subjective perspective. Casey's "Inheritance" portrays an opportunistic burglar named Anthony Gallagher who is outsmarted by his latest victim, Clementine Hardington, a wealthy but vulnerable old lady whose rural country house he attempts to rob. We follow Anthony's tribulations as he tries to con his way into Clementine's house by gaining her trust, but is forced to eat the food she cooks him and to stay the night in the dilapidated and freezing country house. The story vividly describes the implications of Clementine taking the would-be robber in, offering him shelter like the proverbial "good neighbor" described by Luke in the Bible.(Note 8) After finally fleeing with sacks of her stolen belongings, Anthony visits a fence called Ken to sell the stolen goods. However, Anthony is shocked and confounded to find that Clementine cannily replaced the valuable antiques he put into the sacks with everyday kitchen utensils and a lump of coal that jokingly alludes to the Christmas gift of choice for naughty children. At the end the reader is left pondering the seemingly lawless society depicted in the story and the fates awaiting the main characters. "Inheritance" presents a postcolonial revision of the British crime fiction tradition through its playful use of the country house setting, the location traditionally at the heart of British Golden Age crime fiction. Through its humorous but menacing subversion of the Golden Age convention of the country house and the social and cultural values associated with it, Casey's story dislocates the tradition from its colonial roots by translating it to a contemporary Irish setting. This postcolonial reimagining of the setting means that, rather than featuring a group of people and a detective identifying the criminal in an isolated and controlled setting, Casey's story focuses on the drama and mind games taking place between

just two central characters, Anthony and Clementine. These two characters seemingly embody colonial power dynamics, yet complicate any attempt at reading them as a straightforward victim-criminal dichotomy. Furthermore, by reversing the victim-perpetrator power dynamics of gender and colonialism through its two main characters, “Inheritance” interrogates the portrayal of Irish history and class.

“Inheritance” is narrated from the criminal’s (Anthony’s) point of the view, a move which encourages the reader to question the assumptions surrounding authority and perspective associated with conventional crime fiction and its validation of the status quo through a detective figure.(Note 9) This narrative strategy furthermore draws attention to the problem of defining crime and criminality in a postcolonial context. Casey’s assessment of the reader’s reliance on the protagonist and his perspective is echoed in Anthony’s thoughts about the importance of gaining his victim’s trust by appearing credible to Clementine, pretending his car has broken down and that he needs shelter for the night (141). The inevitable breakdown of that trust is the premise on which the story is based, as it plays with the reader’s expectations of what happens next and postulates a crime that we as readers are already imagining before it has taken place in narrative real time. “Inheritance” is all the more unsettling because there are seemingly no police, no authority to uphold law and order and protect the weak and vulnerable from those who would take advantage of them or hurt them. This leaves Clementine, the elderly woman, vulnerable and with only her own wit, cunning, and survival skills to fall back on to confound the thief. The absence of police intervention or even presence suggests a postcolonial society in trouble and in flux, where vulnerable individuals or groups become victims of opportunistic crime simply because they are not seen to represent a threat nor do they command any respect in the social hierarchy—they are easy pickings. The story’s central themes work to challenge

expectations of the genre, interrogate stereotypes of Irishness and postcolonial victim positions, and defy clichés of “the other”. These narrative and structural strategies are employed in Casey’s story to represent crime within a complex postcolonial landscape where these stereotypes are rejected and binary positions are interrogated. Clementine’s character challenges conventional social and cultural perceptions of elderly people as easy pickings for criminals, a somewhat stereotyped view which crime fiction often perpetrates.(Note 10) Casey’s “Inheritance” exposes the ruthless and opportunistic criminal activity based on targeting those perceived to be weak or vulnerable by gender and power inequalities inscribed in contemporary Irish social structures (Kincaid 41). In “Inheritance” we see a revisioning of that familiar narrative of colonial victimization, as the resourceful Clementine reverses the situation in an act of female survival and resistance. Furthermore, the story problematizes issues of ownership and agency through its subversive and disconcerting crime plot. Casey’s story thus foregrounds questions pertinent to postcolonial perspectives, such as agency, gender, and age inequality.

Through its title, “Inheritance,” Casey’s story foregrounds Ireland’s problematic relationship with identity and ownership, and urges the reader to investigate the implications of literary and cultural legacy and inheritance in a postcolonial context. The story furthermore illustrates the problematic nature and the gender-political dimensions of questions of ownership and family entitlement, issues of generational difference, and the social and cultural marginalization of old age. “Inheritance” examines the colonial relationship between colonizers and colonized in an intensely personal manner. This focus is further enhanced by the minimal cast of characters and the almost exclusive focus on the interplay between Anthony and Clementine. Clementine Hardington is of English upper-class land-owning family background and lives in an inherited country house passed down through the family. Although dilapidated,

her property and all the valuable artwork and furnishings within it reflect the privileged position she enjoys. Clementine's house features rooms full of valuable antiques passed down through the family, signifying colonial wealth and power. The description of her country house is seen from the point of view of Anthony the would-be thief, who, on first seeing the property, notes, "the house looked grander than he had expected. It was a foursquare Georgian box, grey stone like the gateposts. Five windows ran across the top [...] He was looking at wealth, generations of it, there for the taking"(140). The last phrase, "there for the taking," highlights the story's central theme of the problems of inheritance and entitlement when seen in a postcolonial context, as does Anthony's sudden questioning of his own motives: "In the drawing room he hesitated, suddenly struck by what he was doing [...] She sat there day in, day out, surrounded by the things that had been passed down to her by her family. Who was he to take them?"(150). As Anthony questions his entitlement to steal these emblems of the colonizing power's wealth, he soon reconsiders his misgivings, deciding that the inheritance and property rightfully belongs to the Irish and to him: "why shouldn't he? [...] why should she keep it anyway? "(150). Referring to the British colonials and their sense of entitlement, Anthony reflects, "There's a reason they've held on for so long"(156). As Anthony considers these issues of privilege, he ponders the question of his right to steal her belongings, but then quickly moves to justify his actions by arguing, "She wasn't really Irish" (150) Instead of questioning this problematic assumption about what constitutes true Irishness, Anthony sees himself as entitled to lay claims to this property himself, as a "proud Irishman" (150) Through this portrayal, Casey's story interrogates definitions of gender, class, national identity, and postcolonial agency.

The story presents multiple depictions of colonial privilege. Casey's description of a photograph of Clementine's father, Colonel Greville Hardington, confirms a stereotype of

imperial masculinity to Anthony as well as the reader—“Big moustache. Heavy jaw. Small eyes” (145). The collection of valuable antique guns that Clementine has inherited from her father, weapons which she also knows how to use, further emphasizes the impact of imperial physical power and violence. In his head, Anthony mocks Clementine’s upper-class English accent, exposing another outmoded marker of colonial privilege: “My *faw*-ther”(145). Casey’s story extends its critique of colonial exploitation of Ireland to the natural environment by depicting the many pseudo-scientific cases of fauna samples collected by Clementine’s forebears. The hallway in the house is filled with frames of insect specimens collected by Clementine’s grandfather, described as “a keen naturalist”(146). As the story humorously describes Clementine’s cooking of an egg-shell filled omelette for Anthony to sustain him, her hospitality becomes a parody of the mother-son relationship. The theme of food brings further allusions to Ireland’s historical past and echoes of the Famine. The motif of food in “Inheritance” serves as a reminder of a specifically Irish context of the legacy of famine and the role of the British, and remains a poignant indication of that historical trauma and its persistence in the present time through inherited structural inequality.

Through these complex and detailed representations, “Inheritance” reflects on the continued privilege afforded to the traditional upper classes, whose wealth is built on colonial power relations, acquired wealth, and land and property ownership. Casey’s story illustrates the parallel to the violence and oppression perpetrated by empire, through its representation of Anthony’s anger at the colonial exploitation of the Irish:

She and her family had had the best of everything through at least two Irelands: the one where they were on top of the heap [...] and the one where the proles suddenly had the power riding the crest of a wave of prosperity [...] And in the third Ireland, the new one,

the one where no one had a euro to their name, it was time to share out what there was.

(150)

This menacing undertone of violence becomes increasingly insistent when Anthony later in the story considers killing Clementine to prevent her from discovering his plan to rob her (152). His ominous rage is evident towards the end, as he realizes he has been conned by his victim, whom he had not believed capable of seeing through his lies, is described in strikingly physical terms: “He could feel the blood beating in his head, the rage pushing against the bones in his skull” (155). Clementine’s slyness and ingenuity is interpreted by Anthony and Ken, the fence he visits after fleeing her house to sell the things, as a sign of her aristocratic heritage and a reminder of a colonial and class system which has left its deep traumas and persistent scars. The story’s foregrounding of questions of land and property is used to problematize issues of entitlement, thereby echoing a long Irish history of inequality and injustice imposed by British rulers.

Clementine’s house and property are symbols of this problematic colonial legacy. The story’s opening description of the property illustrates its faded grandeur and imposing nature, but also stresses the now dilapidated nature of the building and its surroundings, pointing to the loss of colonial privilege and status. Although the stone gateposts still remain and are suggestive of an air of permanence and solidity, this toughness is belied by the shabbiness of the fabric of the building itself: “the gates themselves were long gone, and the lodge beside them was dark and shuttered, derelict” (139). The narrative walks the reader through the gates to the property towards the door at the opening of the text, walking in the thief’s shoes, following Anthony’s desiring gaze as he peers through the window of the old country house, shielded by the darkness of the surrounding night. Placed in the position of a voyeur, the reader and thief do a mental inventory of all the valuables inside. Casey uses Anthony’s justification that all this wealth is the

result of a history of colonial exploitation of the land and its people—“He was looking at wealth, generations of it, there for the taking” (140)— to disrupt the reader’s expectations of crime narratives. “Inheritance” thereby confounds the reader’s expectations of the good guys and bad guys so frequently encountered in crime fiction, proposing instead a crime fiction landscape far murkier and complex in its indeterminacy than the straightforward victim-criminal dualism often presented in the traditional configurations of the genre.

Casey’s “Inheritance” uncovers this history of Ireland and colonialism in phases, deliberately playing on the different connotations of the word and its individual and collective implications, in terms of class, gender, and colonial status. The story portrays this through an image of a succession of different “Irelands” which are representative of phases in Irish history. The idea of a numbered line of consecutive identities questions the notion of historical progress, but also underlines the insidious ways in which history tends to repeat itself and replicate comparable oppressive dynamics in its various manifestations of national identity. Thus, through the material history of the inheritance, we see two first Irelands where the old lady’s family were “top of the heap” (Casey 150) and acquired all their wealth, and then the second wave where they managed to hold on to their riches and class and social status during tumultuous times. Anthony rationalizes his crimes by referring to Ireland’s financial crisis during the recession years: “And in the third Ireland, the new one, the one where no one had a Euro to their name, it was time to share out what there was” (Casey 150). Yet, at the end of the story, the reader discovers that Anthony has been tricked, outsmarted by the wily Clementine, who has defied the gender and age-related stereotypes imposed on her and replaced the valuable contents of the bundles he had filled with antiques with worthless junk and trivial objects from round the house.

In articulating these questions surrounding inherited wealth and status within a postcolonial Irish context, Casey's "Inheritance" echoes the point made by the critic Andrew Kincaid that "In contemporary Celtic noir the ongoing tensions of modernity [...] are re-examined" (40). In Casey's dark short story about "the third Ireland," themes of crime and criminality achieve further complexity when related to these issues surrounding ancestry and legacy, thereby highlighting a complicated, contradictory colonial relationship. According to Andrew Kincaid, such changes are significant, not least in a crime fiction context. He argues that "No society has been so exposed to the rise and fall, the wonders and disillusionment, of fast-track capitalism as Ireland" (Kincaid 47). The resulting tensions and problems have found expression in Irish crime writing, as Paula Murphy points out, highlighting the "ruthless greed and ambition" that the boom times brought. These insights reflect John Connolly's argument regarding the capacity of crime fiction to investigate and critique social and cultural conditions. He proposes that: "crime fiction is not merely engaged with the society from which it comes but is representative of it" (Connolly 48). The idea that crime fiction can serve as a vehicle for cultural and political critique challenges conventional perceptions of the genre as providing escapism and mere entertainment. Casey's "Inheritance" illustrates and magnifies the struggle over history and who "owns" it, how to write back to that history, and what is valued or deemed to be valuable, symbolized by the stolen goods that are swapped with what is assumed to be worthless kitchen utensils. As the hierarchies and values of the past are contested in Casey, so the values and identities of the future are also placed under scrutiny. The thief Anthony is not a Robin Hood-type heroic figure hoping to take from the rich and give to the poor for altruistic reasons, and his agency is in itself limited. "Inheritance" questions and challenges the one-dimensional definitions of victim-criminal, demonstrating that these distinctions, although still

frequently reinforced by crime fiction's narrative conventions, cannot justify the wrongdoings of the present. Casey's story demonstrates how crime fiction can be used to explore and critically analyze a complex and evolving postcolonial society and the crime fiction it produces.

"Inheritance" demonstrates the capacity of crime fiction to offer social and cultural critique, used here to interrogate the positions of victim and oppressor, and to interrogate constructions of agency and power within a postcolonial context.

The deadpan humor of "Inheritance" conceals a more serious reflection on the different historical eras of Irish history. The story treats the topic of intergenerational relationships and change, through the confrontation of different generations presenting opposing social and cultural values and norms. As the narrative draws towards its closure, it reinforces the theme of inheritance and legacy, with Anthony considering his options in the face of Clementine's ability to use the gun and shoot him should she need to defend herself and her property. He considers: "That was as much her legacy from her ancestors as the crumbling stones of the house, the acres of boggy parkland, the fine art and furniture and woodworm and all" (156). The ending of "Inheritance" is deceptive, because although Clementine succeeds in tricking Anthony the first time around, a troubling sense of foreboding remains, suggesting that, for the aging Clementine, her victimization is inevitable, a proposition which further underlines the fact that patriarchal power structures of dominance and violence remain at the heart of postcolonial crime fiction. As Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen state in their examination of postcolonial crime fiction, what can be observed is that "the social order is no longer restored, but questioned through alternative notions of justice"(5). Casey's complicated short story demonstrates the appeal of Irish crime fiction in all its variety, grittiness, and wit, illustrating perfectly the important role that literary language plays in modifying and challenging crime writing traditions. "Inheritance"

illustrates the short story genre's capacity to innovate and experiment with crime fiction traditions and the certainties it has established through certain characterization, plot, narrative structures and, importantly, cultural, symbolic, religious, and political values (Beyer, "Bags" 38). Casey's "Inheritance" echoes Connolly's insight in his essay "No Blacks, No Dogs, No Crime Writers: Ireland and the Mystery Genre" with regard to the reluctance and scepticism seen in Irish crime writing and wider culture towards the police and authority figures. In contrast to conventional crime fiction, Casey's story deliberately lacks any form of police or detective involvement. Instead, in the heartless contemporary Irish society she portrays, the victims of crime are abandoned and isolated.

The Postcolonial "Green Streets"

Using the title of Casey's "Inheritance" as a conceptual focus for exploring postcolonial echoes in Irish crime writing, we have examined some of the contemporary social and cultural challenges Irish crime writers face and investigated their creative efforts to recast those literary traditions which previously marginalized those specifically Irish modes, themes, settings, and experiences. The history that marshals this complex body of literature is in constant movement and transition, and that sense of mobility is echoed in the texts examined here, most poignantly illustrated by Casey's reference to the historical phases and driving dynamics of the "three Irelands." Through their use of contrasting literary forms, Connolly and Casey articulate postcolonial Irish perspectives through crime themes that center on ideas of inheritance and history. Connolly and Casey use these themes to energise their writing back to empire, and to generate discussion of the crime writing traditions that have traditionally used symbolic locations (such as the American city and urban noir) and British country house (cosy mystery) to ground themselves in dominant assumptions and values. John Connolly's crime fiction criticism

vigorously engages with the project of negotiating a diverse and changing cultural landscape characterized by diverging definitions of postcolonial Irishness. Such complexities challenge any straightforward notion of a relationship of postcolonial Irish dependency upon the tropes and modes of American hard-boiled or Golden Age inspired British crime writing traditions. Rather, both Connolly's and Casey's texts reflect a remarkable diversity and originality of content which is further underlined by their use of Irish settings and cultural specificities. Such stylistic and thematic interventions are important aspects of Irish reimaginings of the crime fiction tradition, and constitute powerful postcolonial interventions which insist on the validity and uniqueness of Irish crime writing. Thus, as we have seen, Irish crime fiction locates itself in relation to both American and British tradition, but positions itself as a distinct but diverse body of literature in an increasingly complex literary field. Nels Pearson and Marc Singer argue, critical opinion of crime fiction has changed:

...from seeing the detective novel as a reflective or paradigmatic narrative to seeing it as a locally engaged, formally diverse, and discursively productive text—is due partly to the proliferation and diversity of crime fiction in contemporary literature [...] from its inception, the detective genre has been intrinsically engaged with epistemological formations [...] produced in encounters between nations, between races and cultures, and especially between imperial powers and their colonial territories.(3)

Irish crime fiction affords a space to interrogate colonial categories and an opportunity to move beyond and transcend these by developing new links and connections to both past and future.

The anthology, *Down These Green Streets: Irish Crime Writing in the 21st Century*, which includes Casey's story and Connolly's essay, is a milestone publication and signifies an important step in the process of the evolution of Irish crime fiction in the postcolonial era. By

linking crime fiction criticism, autobiography, and fiction, the anthology overall elicits exploration of Irish specificity, revisioning postcolonial and literary identities on the levels of thematic content, geographical and religious identifications, and literary and linguistic manifestations.

In this article we have examined how the complex relationship between the culturally and nationally specific traits of Irish crime fiction and the tradition is examined, as the genre evolves and responds to the felt urgencies of contemporary postcolonial times. However, Irish crime fiction is also responding to past traditions, and is doing so by seeking to reinvent the generic conventions and formula, thereby reshaping its relationship with those traditions from a postcolonial perspective. Burke's use of the color "green" in the book's title refers to the hue symbolically associated with Irishness (Ranelagh 96), thereby highlighting specific cultural and national associations of postcolonial Irish literary production, and drawing attention to an emerging Irish crime fiction tradition. While referring to the previous traditions of the American "mean streets," contemporary Irish crime fiction is forging new directions for itself by following the Irish "green streets" of ongoing exploration of the genre and its possibilities. The motif of the "green streets" invokes instantly recognizable imagery traditionally associated with Irish identity, yet also problematizes the idea of Irish identity as a fixed category based on a historical notion of a colonized space. This question is explored through the prism of inheritance and history by Jane Casey, whose story brilliantly questions and undermines the stereotypical positions of victim and perpetrator so often seen in crime fiction. Similarly, Connolly's essay resists the idea that Irish crime fiction is headed down the same "mean streets" as the American noir tradition. This concern with Irish specificity is part of a postcolonial acknowledgement of and commitment to the richness and significance of home-grown literature that represents and

reflects Irish locations, characters, and idioms. As Eoin Flannery argues, “Irish culture has a central role to play in the development of postcolonial studies”(9). The words “the third Ireland” foreground precisely the processes of historical change and revision explored by both Connolly and Casey, but they also serve to remind us of the complexities of postcolonial historical representation and the importance of history as a theme in Irish literature. The questioning essay by Connolly and the powerful short story by Casey are primary examples of how Irish crime writers are mapping out new territories within the “green streets” of Irish postcolonial textual spaces.

Notes

1. The quotation in the title is taken from Casey (150). My use of the word “inheritance” also acknowledges the title of the story by Jane Casey discussed here.
2. See for example Filippo Menozzi’s insightful book on postcolonial custodianship.
3. Rosemary Erickson Johnsen also discusses Irish crime fiction and postcoloniality. See Johnsen, page 121.
4. The authors of this book and the book itself were also at the center of an Irish Crime Fiction event held at Trinity College, Dublin, on 23-24 November 2013. See Phillips.
5. The anthology itself encourages further exploration and research through its content and presentation, as part of its multi-faceted engagement with Irish crime fiction in postcolonial times. It is structured in such a way as to invite both readers and scholars to discover the richness of contemporary Irish crime writing. The author and editor of the volume, Declan Burke, states elsewhere in his comments on the structure of *Down These Green Streets: Irish Crime Writing in the 21st Century*: “The book takes a chapter-by-chapter approach, with each chapter and author discussing a different facet of Irish crime writing.” (“Crime Always Pays”) Laura Root also comments on this exploratory dimension, as she notes the “thorough bibliography at the end of the book, with ample information for anyone interested in following up any tantalising snippets of works given in the essays.”
6. The critic Marlene Kadar suggests that “life writing includes more than just life stories, and it has the potential to cross genre boundaries and disciplines” (152). Also cited in Beyer “Life of Crime.” I also discuss the use of autobiography as a prism for articulating crime fiction criticism in Beyer “Life of Crime”, in relation to the memoirs of women crime writers.

7. Examples of critics quoting this Chandler passage include John Cawelti (168).
8. See Luke 10: 25-37.
9. I also make this point about the crime fiction short story and narrative perspective in “Bags,” page 46.
10. The British-Asian author M.Y. Alam’s 1998 novel *Annie Potts is Dead* presents an example of this type of portrayal of aging, gender, and vulnerability to crime.

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