



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy* by Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin

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common culture will develop. Often the well educated and hardest working from the Third World will want to come and live in the more affluent societies.

Many challenges will be presented to Irish society in the coming years by the arrival of thousands of men, women and children from very different backgrounds. Since these papers were given the agenda is changing as asylum-seekers are accommodated around the country and our cities and towns receive these newcomers. These papers give a well-researched perspective on some of these developments. As President Mary McAleese says in her foreword; "But it is embracing the human dimension of immigration that gives rise to the greatest challenge and the greatest opportunities. That means learning to see fellow/sister human beings as individuals with their own story to tell" (p ix). *The Stranger in Our Midst* can help bring about this kind of learning.

Frank Sammon S.J.

***Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*, edited by Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin. London: Pluto Press, 2002, pp.232.**

This compact and highly provocative edition is book-ended by quotations from the Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton, the inclusion of which firmly signals the discursive temper of the collection. The advent of an economically biased public sphere in Ireland has, according to the editors, circumscribed the potential for radical social thought in this country. The logic of the collection is guided by a fundamental desire to re-infuse cultural discourse with a socially transformative aspect. Each of the editors contributes a chapter, and both Gibbons and Cronin in particular strive to redress the iniquities of both revisionism and modernisation theory. The volume intervenes in the ongoing critique of Irish "modernity", following in the wake of Gibbons' previous publication, *Transformations in Irish Culture* and Conor McCarthy's more recent *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland 1969-1992*.

Irish postcolonial criticism has developed amid much invective from both revisionist literary critics and historians. They have divined a peculiar textual bias operative in postcolonial readings of Irish history and politics. This concise publication, therefore, goes some way in furnishing Irish criticism with a socially conscious corrective to the fore-mentioned textual bias, as it broaches topics such as, the media; film; religion; psychological trauma, and education. However, the discussions are firmly located within a discernible theoretical locus: the critique of the processes of an anti-egalitarian Irish modernity.

Joe Cleary recently pitted postcolonial theory as a suitable discursive opponent to the prevailing mode of modernisation theory and it is a paradigm directly accommodated by Gibbons in his essay, "History, Therapy, and the

Celtic Tiger". He contends, "[t]he postcolonial turn in Irish criticism...represents an attempt to extend the horizons of the local to distant and often very different cultures, beyond the comforting cosmopolitanism of the West."(104) Much of the chapter is a rehearsal of Gibbons' engagement within the dialectic between revisionist criticism and postcolonial studies, derived no doubt from the fact that Gibbons is a protagonist in the debate, and concurrently has been a consistent critic of the process of Irish modernisation. Gibbons diagnoses the Irish colonial experience as that of acute trauma, echoing both Moane and David Lloyd, and he encourages a constructive trans-geographical engagement with memory and tradition as a means of forging "new solidarities in the present."(105) These "new solidarities" extend from his previous counsel on the exigency for laterally mobile postcolonial criticism. Ireland's "Third World memory" should therefore operate within a polyvocal discourse of egalitarian "historically grounded cosmopolitanism."(100)

Michael Cronin explicates the temporal and chronological distortions of Irish modernity that have mutated Irish society into "a *tachocracy*- the general, headlong embrace of a world of accelerated space-time compression."(59) His thesis originates in a diagnosis of the manifest disenfranchising repercussions of "the chrono-politicisation of Ireland."(65) Space ceases to be "place" and the immaterial matrix of time becomes the single most valued property within global political economy. Cronin's intervention is a stimulating prefatory piece that could yield further practical and theoretical fruit if employed in conjunction with the works of either Henri Lefebvre or Edward Soja on the political constitution of "spatiality."

Geraldine Moane's essay, "Colonialism and the Celtic Tiger: Legacies of History and the Quest for Vision" is a refinement of her 1994 article on the psychology of colonial oppression. Moane, however, delineates an overly deterministic modular schema of colonial and postcolonial trauma and recovery. She exposes a series of definitive points of weakness and strength in the Irish national psyche that are attributable to Ireland's colonial history. Essentially, Moane constructs a postcolonial psychological profile of the Irish psyche in the light of our recent economic prosperity, and she engages with the notion of a potential postcolonial *mentalité* rather than solely on the architecture of colonial repression and native trauma. She does, however, adhere to the commendably egalitarian principles of the introductory editorial in calling for "new forms of social relations which are not based on domination and subordination."(122)

Similarly, Debbie Ging re-articulates Gibbons' earlier contention that "cross-cultural solidarity" does not perforce demand localised "cultural amnesia."(100) Specifically, she proposes that indigenous film making in Ireland can productively engage with non-indigenous art forms without compromising the integrity of localised or traditional cultural discourses. Ging detects an underlying deficiency in recent Irish cinematic productions,

contrary to its "First Wave" forebears, contemporary film makers balk at the task of questioning contemporary and traditional facets of Irish identity. By tracing this earlier critical engagement by film makers such as Bob Quinn, Pat Murphy, Joe Comerford, and Cathal Black, Ging identifies an increasing level of bland convergence in recent cinematic output. As such then, Ging canvasses a more culturally inclusive and historically sensitive cinematic representation. However, a notable "voice" that fails to register on Ging's cultural radar is the production of films in the Irish language; neither Ging nor any of her fellow contributors mention or even cite the *Oscailt* film making initiative. The potential cultural input of Irish language cinematic representation is shelved entirely, and indeed the broader issue of the language itself is a significant absence in the volume.

Reinventing Ireland is a highly politicised collection of essays, a feature that only adds to its import vis-à-vis the prevailing non-participatory countenance of much academic criticism. The editors have succeeded in garnering a profoundly enabling volume and they canvass a progressive perspective on cultural criticism. It is a breed of critical intervention that treats of culture as an active social agent and that exhibits "a materialist dimension" rather than "the aspirational idealism which bedevils particular kinds of cultural critique in Ireland." (208) Ultimately, then, the contributors are unified in issuing an egalitarian manifesto that demands social equality through an ethical and imaginative historiography as well as through a contemporary international solidarity.

Eoin Flannery.

***People Power? The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in the Northern Ireland Conflict*, by Feargal Cochrane and Seamus Dunn; Cork: Cork University Press, 2002, pp.194.**

Civil society displays fundamentally different characteristics in a divided rather than united community, yet still has enormous potential to affect the quality of everyday life. Much has been written about the political negotiations that led to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland but less attention has been paid to the involvement of community workers and non-governmental peace/conflict-resolution organisations (P/CROs). Following in the tradition of Fionnuala O'Connor's landmark contribution, *In Search of a State: Catholics in Northern Ireland* (1993), Cochrane and Dunn's research operates at the so-called track-two level highlighting the distinct contribution voluntary action can make to effect change but away from television cameras and newspapers.

The research, part of the International Study of Peace Organizations project funded by the Aspen Institute in Washington DC, examined organisations in areas of emerging peace processes. The authors were responsible for the Northern Ireland element, which also involved similar studies of South Africa and Israel/Palestine, and a brief comparative

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