

CONCLUSION

Across the preceding pages, I have sought to engage with existing discussions in both Irish Studies and in crime fiction studies, neither of which has yet made much of a home for the body of fiction considered here. It is particularly unfortunate that Irish literary scholarship has had so little to say about this genre, an absence that speaks directly to some of the field's blind spots and habits. A fuller engagement with these materials, not just here but in the critical works that will surely follow and that I hope can build on this volume, will do much to enrich our understanding of Irish crime fiction. This process will expand the wider critical frameworks of Irish Studies in productive ways, allowing it to speak to a fuller sense of Irish culture. Irish crime fiction has significant audiences at home and abroad, and both Irish Studies and crime fiction scholarship will benefit from addressing these texts and their relationships to those audiences.

Towards that goal, these chapters have traced different elements of the genre's belated but accelerated development in Ireland. This does not make this book anything like a linear history, however. Instead, though this book does attend to such matters, the focus here has been on providing a substantial survey that can start the process of synthesising further discussions.

In weaving this survey, this book has attempted to follow something of a moving target in the ongoing wave of Irish crime fiction. That wave has produced a remarkable amount of excellent crime fiction, to an extent without real precedent in Irish culture. New material continues to appear

at a daunting rate, not only with established series like those by John Connolly (who has just announced his sixteenth Charlie Parker novel, *The Woman in the Woods*, scheduled for 2018), Jane Casey (who has just moved to a larger publisher with her seventh Maeve Kerrigan book), Alex Barclay, or Adrian McKinty (who has just announced three more books in his Duffy series). This deep roster of established, active writers is in addition to the continually expanding group of newer writers, particularly women, Sinead Crowley, Kelly Creighton, Louise Phillips, and Liz Nugent among them. Faced with such an accelerated output, particularly one with for the most part scattered and isolated antecedents, no single study of Irish crime fiction can or should pretend to be fully comprehensive.

The reasons for this genre's seemingly sudden development in Ireland may perhaps clarify to some degree over time as more studies emerge, but any uniform consensus about those reasons seems unlikely. In this, Irish crime fiction has good company, as the origins and evolution of crime fiction in general remain very much under debate, exemplified in recent excellent works like Andrew Pepper's *Unwilling Executioner: Crime Fiction and the State* (2016), which offers persuasive revisions to standard accounts of the genre's genesis. Although they may account only in part for this growth, several contributing factors do carry some explanatory weight, whether they emphasise the socio-economic factors of the 'Celtic Tiger,' or the inspiration of 'Tartan Noir,' or the diversification of publishing models amidst corporate consolidations, or the ever-shifting tastes of the marketplace. These contributing factors are all the more difficult to pin down when the novels make such divergent uses of their contexts. Declan Hughes's first Ed Loy novel, *The Wrong Kind of Blood* (2006), for example, is set against the boom of the Celtic Tiger, and reflects in substantial ways on that era, but treats its characters as much more than ingredients in a pat allegory about a nation losing its sense of itself. Instead, as does the best writing considered here, the novel places its contexts and its characters in a sustained dialogue with each other, from which emerges a much deeper portrait of family, of community, and of the corruptions to which they give rise and by which they are undermined.

Amidst these competing explanations and eagerly heterogeneous narratives, a number of distinctive features stand out as recurring across the subsections of Irish crime fiction. One such feature emerges from Chapter 2 but echoes throughout the following chapters: early thrillers set in Northern Ireland, particularly during the Troubles, often seemed to rely on reductive binaries, not least in the distinction between politics and 'real

life.’ In recent decades, however, the best crime fiction from Northern Ireland is sharply attuned instead to the meanings that emerge from disjunction and contradiction, which in turn become the levers that move these books through insightful and empathetic narratives.

Indeed, familiarity and comfort with disjunction and uncertainty echo throughout much of the work examined in every chapter here, finding profoundly varying expressions on both sides of the border. This is most immediately apparent in the number of novels here that give the lie to assumptions about crime fiction *requiring* a conservative sense of closure and resolution. Instead of confirming those assumptions, these novels frequently end with a deep, abiding sense of uncertainty. Some of that unease – as in Alan Glynn’s work, or Adrian McKinty’s – reflects a changing society’s persistent ambiguities and its complex political histories. Other modes, including the Gothic elements of French’s novels, or the supernatural and anti-rational strains of imagination in Connolly’s Parker books, add to this their own existential layers of unease and uncertainty.

Over the course of this book, an emphasis on uncertainty and disjunction emerges as one of Irish crime fiction’s underlying patterns. This, along with the effect of the island’s small scale on the kinds and shapes of crime narratives, is one of Irish crime fiction’s distinguishing features. This profound familiarity with uncertainty exemplifies what these novels can reveal in and about Irish culture, and is in turn central to Irish crime fiction’s contributions to the discussions surrounding contemporary international crime fiction.

FURTHER READING

Note: Crime novels are often republished in paperback or international editions with widely varying page numbers. In the following reading list, first editions are given and used wherever possible. Where a subsequent reprint has been used instead, the details of that reprint are also given. In all instances where a first and a later edition are listed, the later edition is the source for all quotations in the text.

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