

# **RTPR463068**

*Queries*

Eóin Flannery

**Dear Author**

**Please address all the numbered queries on this page which are clearly identified on the proof for your convenience.**

**Thank you for your cooperation**

- Q1** Please check the edit in this sentence 'In his critique of Celtic Tiger Ireland, which is alluded to above. Thank You.
- Q2** Please check this sentence for sense 'It is the past as Utopian resource'. Thank You.

## Eóin Flannery

### Ireland, Empire and Utopia: Irish postcolonial criticism and the Utopian impulse

5

10

15

20

25

30

35

40

This article is a response to Bill Ashcroft's 'Critical Utopias', which appeared in this journal in 2007. In his earlier piece, Ashcroft offered a summary genealogy of the historical and literary historical links between Utopian Studies and Postcolonial Studies. While 'Critical Utopias' was a salutary intervention in this discursive dialogue between these two fields; by including the Irish case this article is designed as an extension to the geographical and historical limits of Ashcroft's piece. Therefore, my article offers a substantial outline of some recent work within Irish postcolonial studies and identifies the Utopian energies that sustain such criticism. Positioning Irish postcolonial critiques as differential, yet conversant, engagements with the processes of late twentieth century Irish modernisation, the article treats the issues such as: the philosophical and political subtleties of Edmund Burke; the civic republicanism of the United Irish movement; the imbricated political, cultural and social movements of the Irish Revival; the Socialist nationalism of James Connolly, as well as the recalcitrant local practices of counter-modern social formations mined by Connolly's proto-subalternist historiography. My 'Response', therefore, is intended as a supplement to Ashcroft's initial intervention, but also as a reminder that Ireland should not be easily elided from postcolonial debates, as it so often has been. Finally, the article has a particular focus on matters that pertain to the utopic in terms of the literary historical and the historiographical within Irish postcolonial studies, and will, one hopes, catalyse future interventions that might engage with other facets of Irish colonial history and postcolonial criticism.

### Keywords

Ireland; Utopia; postcolonialism; Marxism; Celtic Tiger; modernisation; Enlightenment; imperialism; Irish Revival; James Connolly

## Textual Practice

### A response

The idioms and the methodologies of 'Utopia' have always been explicit and implicit in both projects of colonial acquisition and expansion, and in the differential projects of anti-colonial theory and practice. Yet there has never been an adequate commerce of ideas established between the respective contemporary fields of Utopian studies and postcolonial studies. However, in a recent essay in this journal, the postcolonial scholar, Bill Ashcroft, attempted to bridge the theoretical hiatus between the two fields.<sup>1</sup> In 'Critical Utopias' Ashcroft essentially provides a literary critical mapping of how 'the Utopian' has figured in the literary art of Anglophone colonial, anti-colonial and postcolonial crucibles. Ashcroft's summary Utopian/postcolonial survey takes its theoretical impetus, naturally enough, from a conversation between Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno in 1964, in which Adorno adumbrates the repressed knowledge that each individual harbours of a possible Utopia – we know that a better *possible* world exists, but we are ideologically persuaded that the possible is actually the impossible.<sup>2</sup> In addition to foundational thinkers such as Bloch and Adorno, Ashcroft also enlists other theorists of the Utopian, including Herbert Marcuse and Fredric Jameson. The survey is not confined to theoretical utopias, however, as Ashcroft subsequently traverses a variety of historical times and spaces in divining traces of literary Utopian dynamism in colonial contexts. Invoked in this generous inventory are: Thomas More's originary *Utopia*; Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* – the latter two, of course, are representative of the Utopian colonial project, but are also read as texts that are capable of producing their own Utopian counter-narratives of anti-colonial resistance. In contemporary terms, Ashcroft straddles the Indian sub-continent; Africa and the Caribbean, specifically: Salman Rushdie; JM Coetzee; Edouard Glissant; Aime Cesaire; Derek Walcott; and Edward Kamau Brathwaite. Ashcroft's intervention is distinguished by its concentration on what are, putatively, canonical texts of postcolonial literary studies. And while the species of utopia canvassed by Ashcroft is one that seeks to undermine the naturalised centrality of 'History' as discourse, there is an implicit assumption in such a parade of writers of a 'postcolonial History', or 'postcolonial Tradition' within its literary branch. Regardless of this initial point of contention, the virtue of Ashcroft's essay is its dedication to the necessary relevance of Utopian literary critical; literary historical; and historiographical strategies to debates within postcolonial studies. Yet, as I have indicated, in this speculative initiative by Ashcroft these critical strategies seem to be predominantly confined to literary horizons and there is little engagement with neo-Marxist critiques within postcolonial studies itself. These features may be consequences of the fact that the range of Utopian theorists referred

to may be foundational, but it is not extensive. While the employment of Bloch is naturally instructive and a contemporary Utopian critic such as Tom Moylan is summarily cited, there is no reference to seminal figures within the Utopian field such as: Lyman Tower Sargent; Ruth Levitas;  
 85 Darko Suvin; Lucy Sargisson; Krishan Kumar; Barbara Goodwin; Gregory Claeys; Raffaella Baccolini and Vincent Geoghegan.

Finally, with respect to the postcolonial aspects of Ashcroft's piece; the essay commits a familiar error of omission, one that seems to have been redressed in many publications on postcolonial studies but that does  
 90 persist. The case of Ireland as either a Utopian, postcolonial or Utopian-postcolonial case-study is neither addressed nor alluded to at any stage. Such an oversight is disappointing given Ireland's protracted colonial history and its exemplary role as an early twentieth century pioneer in anti-colonial theory and practice. Furthermore, Ireland has a distinguished  
 95 history of Utopian writing, mythology and political philosophy, which would clearly enrich any discussion of the commonalities of the fields of Utopian studies and postcolonial studies.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of the present essay is to respond to Ashcroft's provocative critical alignment of the Utopian and the postcolonial, and to furnish necessary modifications and  
 100 supplements to the argument developed therein. With this in mind, my argument will accent the inherently Utopian cast of much of the recent and ongoing literary historical; literary critical; historiographical; and theoretical writing within contemporary Irish postcolonial studies. In providing an effective metacritical survey of these Utopian-postcolonial vectors in  
 105 Irish literary and cultural studies, this essay will address the implicated interdisciplinary projects that constitute the field of Irish postcolonial studies. The ensuing metacritique argues that not only are some of the major strands of Utopian postcolonial critique focused on interrogating the philosophical limits and lacunae of the contested legacies of 'Enlightenment'  
 110 thought; British imperial discourses; and bourgeois Irish nationalism, but they are also involved in tracking the Utopian energies of subaltern Irish nationalisms and in retrieving the work and reputations of Irish anti-colonial thinkers, writers and activists in light of contemporary international postcolonial theory and activism. At root, the discussion displays  
 115 the urgency with which postcolonial critics have approached, and attempted to appropriate, the Utopian dynamism of historical Irish anti-colonial thought and action in their own Utopian engagements with the prevailing political and economic conjuncture in Irish society. These projects are by no means homogenous and it is not to be concluded that they are easily woven  
 120 together as fractions of a sanctioned critical consensus within Irish postcolonial studies. They are representative of a viable critical mass within Irish criticism that accepts the legitimacy of Utopian imagination, and that has gleaned valuable lessons from the historiographical, often subalternist,

## Textual Practice

methodologies of international postcolonial studies. In sum, the present essay has a particular focus on matters that pertain to the utopic in terms of the literary historical and the historiographical within Irish postcolonial studies, and will, one hopes, catalyse future interventions that might engage with other facets of Irish colonial history and postcolonial criticism.

## Ireland and Utopia

In his polemical book, *The End of Utopia*, the American historian Russell Jacoby suggests that the Utopian ideals that once nourished intellectual dissent and activated movements for radical social change have been largely abandoned in a world that is content to doze in a state of blissful compliance and comfortable political apathy.<sup>4</sup> In this book Jacoby provides a general assault on the moribund nature of intellectual engagement with the presiding politico-economic conjuncture, particularly that pursued by those resident in the Western academy. In his estimation, the parameters of contemporary critical commentary have been foreshortened and there is no desire to overhaul radically the mechanisms of exclusion and inequality that are the trademark of the current world economic system. All of which, according to Jacoby, is an abdication of the Utopian responsibilities and possibilities of intellectual labour. As a series of intellectual projects that trades on its antagonistic relations to the homogenising dynamics of the historical and contemporary global capitalist system, postcolonial studies is emphatically implicated in Jacoby's polemic. As Jacoby argues: 'The dearth of economic and sociological analyses, the inflation of cultural approaches, the assumption that cultures fundamentally diverge, the failure or inability to consider the forces of assimilation . . . and the lack of any political vision or alternative'<sup>5</sup> are a depressingly familiar feature of contemporary intellectual debate. Without rigorous conceptual clarity, an economy of linguistic opacity has stepped in to fill the gap – an economy motored by the decentring modes of poststructuralist theories. And while the instability and elusiveness championed and practiced by 'theoretical' interventions can be adjudged as legitimate strategies of subversion in culturalist challenges to representational domination or elision, for Jacoby intellectual vacuity is the net result. In his conclusion, such tactical ambiguity does not embody any sense of subversion, but is characteristic of 'the timid conclusions, chalky language and toothless concepts'<sup>6</sup> of culturalist criticism. In the end, there is merely a cosmetic attempt to broaden the constituencies of participation and the terms of access to hierarchical wealth; an insidious domestication of dissent. Such a prospect constitutes a dereliction of a Utopian intellectual responsibility and stands as an aborted imaginative impulse.

The content and tenor of Jacoby's argument seem apposite to recent historical and theoretical appraisals of Ireland's colonial and postcolonial histories, as well as to assessments of Irish social and economic histories since the 'immaculate conception' of the Celtic Tiger economy, and its attendant boons and burdens. As Peadar Kirby has argued in his essay 'Contested Pedigrees of the Celtic Tiger', the phenomenon of the Celtic Tiger has been readily seized as an object ripe for narration; for strategic employment within certain legitimate hermeneutic codes.<sup>7</sup> Kirby's meta-historical interrogation of the Celtic Tiger's pedigree highlights the extent to which this period in recent Irish social and economic history has been seized for narrative justification. The economic vigour that has been, and remains to a lesser degree, has unquestionably brought unprecedented fiscal wealth to many social constituencies to which it would have been here-to-fore unknown. But, as Kirby concludes, the same wave of economic buoyancy has served to exacerbate the gap between those with relative wealth and those in relative poverty. While the financial largesse of the Celtic Tiger period is often, crudely, popularly perceived as a Utopian arrival – an affirmation of the progressive tenets of liberal modernisation that were invested in by successive Irish administrations since the 1960s – as Kirby suggests, these affective pleasures of desire and satisfaction are confined to sections of Irish society, while a whole raft of the population remains confined to states of anxiety and frustration. In the sense, the Utopian impulse belongs to the latter and has merely mutated into a hollowed-out repetition of the eternal present in the former. The Celtic Tiger has nourished a false convergent genus of desire – which is, in its truly Utopian guise, a heteronymous and quite specific mode of wish fulfilment. The present has been eroticised as the apotheosis of historical progress; there is no appetite for alternatives and under such dispensations, as the necessary faculties of Utopian desire are easily jettisoned. Kirby's critique belongs to a Blochian tradition of Utopian thought, which asserts the existence of the Utopian within despair – a longing that stretches out of the present towards an unseen, imagined future. A future that, as my discussion of the work of several of the leading Irish postcolonial critics urges, is significantly moulded by the energies of the past, or, as Raffaella Baccolini suggests in a Benjaminian reading of the relationship between the past and the present, which itself is reminiscent of that detailed in much Irish postcolonial writing:

The Utopian value of memory rests in nurturing a culture of memory and sustaining a theory of remembrance. These actions, therefore, become important elements of a political, Utopian praxis of change, action, and empowerment: indeed, our reconstructions of the past shape our present and future. Memory, then, to be of use

## Textual Practice

to Utopia, needs to dissociate itself from its traditional link to the metaphor of storage and identify itself as a process.<sup>8</sup>

205 While Kirby's essay primarily focuses upon the narrative schematisation of the Celtic Tiger period in Irish history, it is equally a version of the literary-critical methodologies that have been brought to bear on the histories of Irish modernisation under the auspices of postcolonial studies. Kirby specifically objects to Rory O'Donnell's narration of the history of the Celtic Tiger; he rejects the manner in which such narrative manoeuvring becomes part of a self-fulfilling prophesy, namely the celebration of the continued success of Irish modernisation.<sup>9</sup> In many ways, Kirby's critique is informed by the theoretical scepticism that is characteristic of many interventions within postcolonial studies. The 'image' of Celtic Tiger Ireland and its representation approaches the condition of a 'naturalised' system of semiotics – it is a brand, a product, a series of events that must be marshalled (narrated) in order to project and to protect a commodity. In his concern with how the Celtic Tiger is portrayed as the legacy of, and the ultimate testimony to, Ireland's subscription to capitalist modernisation, Kirby's work is allied to some of the most cogent critiques of the limitations of such a socio-economic trajectory. Not only does Kirby reference Luke Gibbons and Declan Kiberd, but he skilfully exercises their differential postcolonial readings of Irish culture to perform a convincing counter-argument to that canvassed by those commentators on Irish society who adhere to the modalities and the accruals of modernisation.

225 Under the aegis of this internally differentiated constituency, often referenced as 'revisionist', the 'past' is treated with a level of suspicion – it is ruthlessly narrated as contributive to, or as inhibitive of, the momentum of Irish modernisation. Similarly, the social and cultural institutions that are adjudged to have embodied outmoded or discredited social, cultural or political beliefs are subjected to unforgiving opprobrium in dismissive historical representations. Irish history, in this world-view, has been diachronically moving towards such a potential economic miracle under the watchful eye of the politico-economic forces of liberal capitalist modernisation. Equally, the economic uniformity, cultural convergence and social fragmentation that these vectors of social progress entail are necessary agents of the general prosperity that prevails. Kirby's anxiety is that the economic success that Ireland feasted upon for a decade, and that in truth is still evident despite recent downturns, bleaches the nation of any impulse towards a coherent sense of identity. With the historiographical and critical assaults on erstwhile social institutions, such as religion and nationalism as two major examples, now almost complete, and their relative banishment to nostalgia or historical exile, economic success now becomes the index of personal belonging and national identity. As a consequence any

resources, or will, towards egalitarian social transformation in Ireland become very difficult to sustain and in many ways are bribed out existence. The present conjuncture in Ireland evidences little or no will to equalise society; there is little motivation to re-imagine in any lateral political or cultural sense, as it is far easier to luxuriate in the transient benefits of economic wealth. Kirby's conclusion suggests that Ireland needs a transfusion of Utopian critique if it is to be lulled out of this consumerist concussion:

The resituating of the state in this era of neo-liberalism so that it becomes subservient to market forces fatally undermines its ability to embody a project of social transformation. This shift is clearly evident in the Irish case as the state is increasingly seen to serve the needs of an economic elite while neglecting the growing inequality that is undermining the cohesion of society.<sup>10</sup>

From a postcolonial perspective, then, how do such Utopian ideas and ideals cohere with the variegated historical, literary and theoretical projects of its field? Initially the Marxist heritage of postcolonial studies; the field's concentration on historical and contemporary systematic oppression and disenfranchisement; and the discursive and historiographical re-representation and retrieval of what are often termed 'subaltern' constituencies and cultural practices chime with the ethical and material spirit of Utopian thought. The imagination of a better future is very much bound up with the re-appropriation of the past and the unearthing of alternative historical practices and experiences. In the Irish case, Joe Cleary argues that the accumulated projects of postcolonial studies represent a critique of theories of modernisation, which, he argues, are at root latter day incarnations of the rapacity of imperialism and its own battery of legitimating narrative codes.<sup>11</sup> Cleary's own work is deeply influenced by Jameson and offers pessimistic readings of the social and cultural implications of Ireland's uncritical embrace of a form of capitalist modernisation and itself intersects with both the political spirit, and many of the arguments, dealt with below in my extended discussion of the Utopian impulses of Irish postcolonial studies. It is beyond the scope of this essay to address all of the divergent opinions expressed and emotions exercised in evaluating the relative merits and demerits of Ireland's economic wind-fall, but I do want to address this one strand of cultural criticism that pre-dates, but that is also synchronous with the period of Ireland's recent prosperity, namely postcolonial studies.

In his introduction to the recently published special Irish number of *Utopian Studies*, Tom Moylan, the editor, alludes to the often underappreciated fact that 'individual scholars have written about Utopian aspects of Irish culture'.<sup>12</sup> Moylan's point here explicitly refers to critics who have divined historical and literary historical traces of a Utopian impulse



## Textual Practice

within Irish culture. Enumerated on Moylan's Irish Utopian roll-call are critics such as Colin Graham; Luke Gibbons; Declan Kiberd; Carmen Kuhling; Ralph Pordzik; and Michael Griffin. While pressures of space do not permit Moylan to elaborate on the specifics of each of these scholars, it is sufficient that a well-established Utopianist, such as Moylan acknowledges the Utopian motives of some of the most progressive critical thinkers and practitioners in contemporary Irish studies. In addition, it is noteworthy that the majority of Moylan's named critics have been instrumental in both the formative stages and, the later, metacritical critique of Irish postcolonial studies. While many historians, literary critics, economists and sociologists in Ireland have, often legitimately, raised objections to the political temper, cultural methodologies or historiographical procedures of Irish postcolonial studies, the implicit Utopian roots and geist of this suite of theoretical and historiographical resources has never been fully explored. Moylan's 'Introduction' is both salutary, and overdue, in its diagnosis of the Utopian spirit of many of the interventions within Irish postcolonial studies. Indeed, to illustrate further the increasing timeliness of ideational exchange between the fields of Utopian studies and postcolonial studies within an Irish context, elsewhere Moylan consciously invokes a number of recent publications within the field of Irish studies, which bear the theoretical watermark of postcolonial critique. Detailing the agenda of The Ralahine Centre for Utopian Studies at the University of Limerick, of which he is director, in 2006 Moylan states:

Our project aims to stimulate research in all areas of Irish culture. And, as we discover the Utopian nature of each of our research objects, we will also seek to understand the role that social dreaming has played throughout Irish history, so that we can see more clearly how the Utopian, as opposed to the instrumental, process of 're-imagining' or 'reinventing' Ireland (to borrow from two recent titles) has brought us to where we are today and how it might affect where we might be going.<sup>13</sup>

As we shall discuss below, Moylan's intentions are vital elements of much recent postcolonial writing about Ireland; the Utopian impulse is both divined in previous moments of Irish history and it is deemed necessary to confrontations with the contemporary.

## Ireland, Empire and Enlightenment

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon outlines the underlying violence that marks the colonial encounter and that similarly structures

the relationship between the settler-coloniser and the native-colonised. He writes:

325            Their first encounter was marked by violence and their existence  
                 together – that is to say the exploitation of the native by the  
                 settler – was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and  
                 cannons. The settler and the native are old acquaintances. In fact,  
                 the settler is right when he speaks of knowing ‘them’ well. For it is  
330            the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence.<sup>14</sup>

The combined projects of Irish postcolonial studies are concerned with explicating that very process through which an Irish colonial ‘native’ was brought into existence; in other words, these heteronymous critical projects interrogate the political, cultural and economic discourses through which imperial modernity imposed itself on Ireland, and how it was forced to engage with, and in many cases obliterate, indigenous forms of ‘counter-modernity’. Fanon’s violence, enacted in this extract through military weaponry, is tracked within Irish postcolonial studies by scholars who strive to unearth, and to redeem, moments and patterns of Irish ‘radical memory’; alternative modernity and counter-modern ‘tradition’. The external imposition of imperial modernity in Ireland was a laterally traumatic experience, under which the cultural resources of the indigenous population were sundered or surrendered under the demands of a coercive colonial social programme. The cultural undergirding of Irish culture was consigned to history as a progressive and unrelenting teleological historical schema was grafted onto Irish society. The synchronicity of modernisation and imperialism is a primary concern of many Irish postcolonial critics and historians. The historical process of modernisation is not homogenous, but it does strive for homogeneity. Yet throughout the history of economic and political modernisation, there is always evidence of recalcitrance to its hegemony. Modernisation is not an inert state but an ongoing historical process that strives to achieve a sense of political and economic conformity. It is easy, then, to identify its shared interests with imperialism, which is underwritten by a similar accumulative desire. Indeed Saree Makdisi locates an explicit link between modernisation and imperialism at the end of the eighteenth-century and the beginning of the nineteenth-century, arguably the formative period of modern ‘high’ British imperialism. In Makdisi’s view:

360            Modernization can in this sense be understood as the purest form of imperialism; this conviction is based on the fact that modernisation ‘occurs at once in large-scale sweeps and bursts, but also in terms of the micrological, the quotidian...In effect, the project of

## Textual Practice

modernization begins at the very moment a new territory is defined as pre-modern.<sup>15</sup>

365 One of the dominant strains of Irish postcolonial thought in contemporary Irish criticism is concerned with exposing the ways in which imperial modernity, itself only one route out of Enlightenment thought, was made manifest in Ireland in the nineteenth century, and in teasing out the many ways in which a distillation of modernisation theory realised, and retained, its dominance in both the political and cultural management  
370 of Irish society, particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century. It is significant that Irish postcolonial studies has striven not only to reject a universal type of Enlightenment, granted it does bear ferocious critical ire for its Scottish variant, but has eagerly sought out traces of alternative Enlightenment thinking that is an aggregation of indigenous circumstances and international Republican principles. The multicultural solidarity  
375 divined in the cultural politics of these late eighteenth century projects has also been mapped onto the political and cultural terrain of twentieth century Irish society, in which modernisation theory and its advocates are deemed to have hitched their wagon to a similarly universalising and exclusionary social programme as that promulgated in the most limited forms of Enlightenment thought.

The renewed Irish interest in critiquing dominant strands of Enlightenment thought, most vehemently its Scottish declension, and in co-opting alternative versions of Enlightenment to postcolonial projects has been  
385 noted by the eighteenth century scholar David Denby. Denby's essay 'Ireland, Modernization and the Enlightenment Debate' engages with these very matters, and focuses on an important volume of essays co-edited by Gibbons: *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*.<sup>16</sup> The editorial consensus of this latter publication rejects the  
390 passive acceptance of liberal universal principles in Irish society, and adheres to a breed of cosmopolitan egalitarianism.<sup>17</sup> Denby usefully sets out the terms of the so-called 'Enlightenment debate' that is no longer confined to the precincts of moral and political philosophy but has been transported to the sites of postcolonial debate. It is worth quoting Denby  
395 at length in order to grasp the basic concerns of this debate and then to translate its relevance to current conversations in Irish cultural criticism. He begins: 'The term 'Enlightenment' can be said to operate as a token, a coded signifier, and, simplifying only a little, as something which calls upon us to take sides'. Facing off against each other in this ideological confrontation are those who support the underlying tenets of Enlightenment  
400 thought: 'the liberals and probably the Marxists'; and those constituencies that are opposed: 'the neo-Aristotelians, some of the communitarians and the ecologists, the postmoderns'.<sup>18</sup> Underlying these juxtaposing

ideological positions are contrary readings of the universalist rhetoric of the Enlightenment, and again this is usefully glossed by Denby:

405 What in one idiom can be read as universal human rights, demo-  
cratic sovereignty . . . a rational, scientific and secularizing approach  
to the planning of modern societies, and a belief that human beings  
can effect progress through such planning, can be rewritten in  
another language as an exploitative human domination over  
410 nature, an atomistic definition of the human individual which cuts  
people off from tradition and community . . . the 'Enlightenment  
project' has been so confident in the universality of its description  
of the human condition that it has had no compunction about  
exporting that model around the world, through colonization and  
now in the form of economic and cultural globalization.<sup>19</sup>

415 The validity of postcolonial critical approaches has been their consistent  
antagonistic stance against such cultural and political uniformity; postco-  
lonial studies, including its literary, historical and theoretical facets,  
impress the agency of the local and the marginal both in spatial-geopolitical  
420 terms and in the temporal sense of historical, archival and non-archival  
recovery. As Luke Gibbons, Kevin Whelan, and David Lloyd demonstrate,  
there are indigenous forms of modernity or instances of radical tradition  
that offer affective, and effective, affronts to the self-validating logic of  
narrow versions of Enlightenment thought. Nevertheless, as Denby  
425 argues subsequently it is self-defeating to merely reject the philosophical  
heritage of the late eighteenth century Enlightenment. Recourse to a  
purely relativist, postmodern system of ethics, aesthetics or historiography  
is equally narrow in its prodigious playfulness. And in this criticism Denby  
largely echoes with the postcolonial retrieval of valuable elements of  
430 Enlightenment thought in Irish studies. As will become clear there are dis-  
cernible affinities between Denby's conclusions and the most progressive  
contributions to Ireland's postcolonial Enlightenment debate. Specifically  
Denby suggests that 'in a context where historical and contemporary issues  
have become so explicitly entwined, historical writing must enable a dialo-  
435 gue between past and present, in which, among other things, the coherence  
and potentialities of the past, unclear to those who lived at the time,  
become clear to us with the benefit of hindsight'.<sup>20</sup> It is this school of post-  
colonial thought within Irish studies that I intend to address, an affiliated  
grouping that has disinterred 'elements of Enlightenment history which  
440 have been obscured or insufficiently emphasised' and has cast them 'back  
into full view as part of the contemporary dialogue'.<sup>21</sup>

The impacts of Enlightenment thought and those of imperially  
driven processes of modernisation on Ireland have been key concerns

## Textual Practice

for many Irish postcolonial critics; this has primarily centred around figures such as Seamus Deane, Gibbons and Whelan, each of whom has looked to illustrate the ways in which Irish culture and society was adjudicated to be deviant from the dominant strains of 'rationality' and, latterly, 'sociability' characteristic of enlightened social collectives. These critics are by no means uniform in their historical and philosophical convictions and/or sources, but each does look to exemplary figures in late eighteenth-century Irish society for corrective guidance in their respective postcolonial projects. Deane, in particular and characteristically, was at the vanguard of the philosophical resuscitation of the work of Edmund Burke, having completed his doctoral work on Burke at Cambridge in the late 1960s and subsequently employed Burke as a critical compass in much of his subsequent literary historical output. Equally, and as Conor McCarthy has cursorily demonstrated, Deane, and Irish postcolonial studies at large, owe a debt to the philosophical work of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, especially that of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin.<sup>22</sup> The critical pessimism of Adorno can be traced in Deane's dismissive view of imperial modernity as it impacted on Irish colonial society; the rational functionalism and the universalising dogma of individual sociability based on cultural similarity are primary among these critical targets.<sup>23</sup>

The watermarks of Burke's work are also evident in Gibbons' most recent work on postcolonial ethics and it is to Gibbons' work that I want initially to draw attention. Gibbons has taken Deane's lead and recuperated a version of Burke that is critical of the excesses of British imperialism, a Burke that offers philosophical guidance in the formulation of an egalitarian postcolonial moral economy based on differential solidarity. While Gibbons' major publication on Burke is a relatively recent venture, the spirit of postcolonial solidarity has been a consistent feature of his work for many years.<sup>24</sup> But Gibbons does not confine his philosophical mining of the late eighteenth century to the work of Burke; he also locates a resistant egalitarian cultural politics in the political, non-confessional agenda of the Republican United Irish movement. The United Irishmen represent a strand of what Gibbons has termed 'a postcolonial Enlightenment'; an Enlightenment that is supportive of indigenous cultures, one that respects the cultural currency of the so-called 'traditional' or 'obsolescent' societies.<sup>25</sup> Gibbons views the movement as a viable historical instance and source of cross-cultural solidarity based on civic, non-confessional Republican principles. The political and cultural accommodation offered by the United Irishmen is one that embraces the idealistic notion of an accessible civic public sphere. Combining an effective critique of Scottish Enlightenment thought with a Utopian and postcolonial investment in the cultural politics and ethics of the United Irishmen's project, he states:

485 New concepts of history, and related stages theories of development were among the most important contributions of the Scottish Enlightenment to Western intellectual culture. What is not often realised, however, is that in opposing progress to primitivism, and civility to barbarism, the Scottish intelligentsia were concerned to dispel the threat not only of a distant, exotic ‘other’, but also the savage on their native shore, in the form of Gaelic, Catholic culture.<sup>26</sup>

490 By way of contrast to such a prescriptive, stadial calibration of histories, cultures, and creeds, Gibbons posits the egalitarian impulses of the United Irishmen who ‘sought to embrace this despised social order, including it within their democratic vision of a new Ireland rather than relegating it to the fate of “doomed peoples”’.<sup>27</sup> There are overt Utopian dynamics behind the failed but enduring principles of United Irish egalitarian democratic principles, in Gibbons’ estimation, and it is plausible that such historical precedence can transfuse the convergent politics of contemporary Ireland. For Gibbons, the United Irish programme participates in the contemporary postcolonial interrogation of ‘the limits of the Enlightenment’.<sup>28</sup> As he concludes: ‘Part of the postcolonial (or postmodern) critique of the Enlightenment has been precisely its condescension, if not racist hostility, towards ‘native’ cultures: by gesturing towards new versions of cultural interaction and religious tolerance, the United Irishmen may be seen as pre-empting this critique but without rejecting the powerful emancipatory vision of the Enlightenment in the process’.<sup>29</sup>

505 In his major study of Edmund Burke, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics and the Colonial Sublime*, Gibbons attempts to establish a philosophical framework through which postcolonial solidarity or cross-colonial sympathy can blossom outside of the strict moral parameters of mainstream enlightened ‘modern’ philosophy. Traversing a range of political philosophy, visual aesthetics and Scottish Enlightenment political economy, Gibbons concludes that Burke’s writings on the sublime in his *Enquiry* coupled with the dual effect of his personal linkage to the native Catholic population in Ireland and Warren Hastings’ campaign of bloody imperial rule in India contribute to Burke’s modification of standard Enlightenment beliefs and is a tangible endorsement of an anti-imperial position. Burke’s work, for Gibbons, is not simply a crude rejection of the founding structures of this discourse, but constitutes a ‘radical extension of Enlightenment thinking’.<sup>30</sup> Gibbons’ advancement of Burke as an exemplar of this brand of alternative Enlightenment has international resonances in the work of Sankar Muthu, whose book *Enlightenment Against Empire* charts equivalent undervalued trajectories in late eighteenth century political philosophy and who concludes his book with resolutely postcolonial and Utopian sentiments by arguing that:

## Textual Practice

if a central reason to study the history of political thought is to gain the perspective of another set of assumptions and arguments that are shaped by different historical sensibilities and directed toward distinct political phenomena, and thus to defamiliarize our otherwise  
525 complacent political and ethical beliefs and priorities, then the study of Enlightenment anti-imperialism offers productive opportunities for such a task.<sup>31</sup>

Such directions have traditionally given way in accounts (both positive and  
530 negative) of the Enlightenment to more limited versions. Muthu's reclamation of Diderot, Kant and Herder is based on his conviction that their legacies as figureheads of the Enlightenment have been ill-served by its widespread condemnation as a philosophical resource for a universal morality, which legitimated vile colonial expropriation, genocide and disenfranchisement. In some ways, Gibbons strikes an equal blow for Burke in  
535 his work, voicing a more nuanced version of Burke's work, one that is amenable to radical historiographical and ethical projects under the rubric of liberatory postcolonial studies. The radical nature of Gibbons' Burke is evident in Gibbons' assertion that Burke's recalibration of the  
540 mainstream Enlightenment 'sought to arouse our sympathies not just for (corporal) violations of our human nature . . . but also for fundamental breaches of cultural integrity which addresses questions of cultural difference, and which thus challenge the parochial emphasis on 'sameness' which often passes for cosmopolitanism'.<sup>32</sup> The homogenising impulses  
545 of modernity, as diagnosed within postcolonial studies, therefore can take instruction from Burke's broadly inclusive sympathetic sublime 'which crosses cultural boundaries', and through which 'members of other cultures can be induced to feel a sense of moral outrage with an intensity not unlike members of the aggrieved society themselves'.<sup>33</sup>

550 Under the civilisational imaginary of the Scottish Enlightenment, there was little 'sympathy' for cultural 'others'; similarity and a communion of social standards was the accepted universal norm. Such a philosophical school demanded a renunciation of 'local' tradition and an amelioration or sundering of anachronistic social systems. The arrow of history was  
555 firmly pointed towards a preordained future and those communities that failed to keep step, or were incapable of keeping step, with its progress were either to be consigned to the oblivion of the past, or abstracted into the consolatory topographies of romantic nostalgia. Cultural difference, then, was not to be countenanced and sympathetic feeling, or moral  
560 outrage, were not transferable across these social borders. Yet as Gibbons amply outlines, Burke's newly hewn programme of anti-imperial social justice and moral solidarity provides a corrective to such exclusionary cultural politics. The sufferings of oppressed others, who reside in cognate

contexts of colonial occupation is central to this Burkean idea; the severity of suffering can be felt across oceans and continents and is a potential germ of anti-colonial resistance. As Gibbons concludes, alluding to the cross-continental reach of Burke's anti-imperial vision:

565

the logic of Burke's position is in fact to extend the ethical basis of the Enlightenment, bringing the imaginative reach of sympathy to regions excluded from mainstream Enlightenment thought. For Burke, this involved a profound, troubled engagement with the plight of colonized peoples whether in Ireland, India, or America, an extension of cross-cultural solidarity to those cultures that were doomed, according to Enlightenment theories of progress, to the dustbin of history.<sup>34</sup>

570

575

Gibbons' refraction of Burke's writings and political speeches in terms of early anti-colonial discourse were anticipated, to a degree, in Saree Makdisi's pioneering study of British Romanticism and empire in his 1998 book *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity*. Makdisi presents a powerfully argued critique of British imperialism, proposing that the counter-rational aesthetic impulses of Romanticism embodied signal affronts to the relentless spate of imperial modernity. Indeed for our present purposes, it is apposite that Makdisi focuses on Burke's contradictory relationship to the machinations, and logic, of Britain's imperial mission. Makdisi's reading of Burke's most famous intervention in the administration of British India, the trial of Warren Hastings, is figured in terms of a conjunction between Burke's political philosophy, his aesthetic writings and his ethics. For Makdisi, Burke's vigorous declamations of Hastings' administration of British holdings in India are wedded to his conceptualisation of the sublime, a point also raised in his study by Gibbons. Makdisi argues that Burke's emphatic 'differentiation' of India as a physical, cultural and moral 'Other' is best understood in terms of the sub-continent's sublimity; in other words, 'Burke's respect for the cultural difference of India is inextricably caught up with his fear of India'.<sup>35</sup> According to this argument, in Burke's view Hastings' great crime was not to be part of an exploitative imperial mission, but simply that his methods of administering that mission in India were excessive in their violences. There is no doubt, in Makdisi's reading of Burke, that the necessity for the imperial link was ever questioned by Burke; the Indian population is incapable of self-governance and consequently requires political and moral tutelage under the benevolent imperial order. The core of Makdisi's argument is that Burke's critiques of British imperialism were founded on his disapproval of *how* the empire was governed and never on the issue of whether imperial expansion was

580

585

590

595

600



## Textual Practice

a morally objectionable matter in and of itself. While Burke was sensitive to the existence of pronounced differences in the moral and cultural patterns of British and Indian societies and insisted upon the fact that these specificities should be respected, there is a sense in Makdisi's case that the superiority of British civility is always assumed. Nested within Burke's writings on British imperialism there is a discernible trace of generosity towards the colonial 'other'. While the colonial mission is taken for granted, Burke does betray a radical sympathetic urge towards under the shadow of this mission. It is at this point that we can divine some convergence between Makdisi and Gibbons, and their respective versions of the 'colonial Burke'. Yet Gibbons is insistent in his espousal of Burke as a precursor of contemporary postcolonial ethics, while Makdisi concludes that Burke's attitude to Britain's oppressed colonial subjects was one that was marked by an abiding contradiction. He concludes:

615  
620  
625  
630  
635  
640  
645  
650  
655  
660  
665  
670  
675  
680  
685  
690  
695  
700  
705  
710  
715  
720  
725  
730  
735  
740  
745  
750  
755  
760  
765  
770  
775  
780  
785  
790  
795  
800  
805  
810  
815  
820  
825  
830  
835  
840  
845  
850  
855  
860  
865  
870  
875  
880  
885  
890  
895  
900  
905  
910  
915  
920  
925  
930  
935  
940  
945  
950  
955  
960  
965  
970  
975  
980  
985  
990  
995

Burke's impassioned . . . speeches on India are characterized by an underlying tension between, on the one hand, his universalistic claims about the trans-cultural and univocal 'nature' (and hence 'rights') of humankind; and, on the other, his repeated invocation of a version of polygenesis as well as the contemporaneous scientific . . . concepts of preformationism and anti-mutationism, according to which 'improvement' in level and status, whether for species, for individuals, for societies, or for classes, is impossible.<sup>36</sup>

625 Through this comparative positioning of Gibbons' and Makdisi's respective versions of Burke's ethics, politics and aesthetics, we can conclude that Gibbons' Utopian configuration of a 'postcolonial' Burke does not go uncontested. But equally, it demonstrates the necessity of bringing *Irish* postcolonial and *Irish* Utopian readings into established, and often dominant, interpretations of histories of colonialism and Utopianism; processes which can allow for productive, and enabling mutual trade and/or tension.

## Revival, rising and Utopia

635  
640  
645  
650  
655  
660  
665  
670  
675  
680  
685  
690  
695  
700  
705  
710  
715  
720  
725  
730  
735  
740  
745  
750  
755  
760  
765  
770  
775  
780  
785  
790  
795  
800  
805  
810  
815  
820  
825  
830  
835  
840  
845  
850  
855  
860  
865  
870  
875  
880  
885  
890  
895  
900  
905  
910  
915  
920  
925  
930  
935  
940  
945  
950  
955  
960  
965  
970  
975  
980  
985  
990  
995

In his critique of Celtic Tiger Ireland, which is alluded to above, Kirby Q1 juxtaposes the contemporary economic success with the lateral dynamism of the Irish Revival at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Kirby exposes what he believes is an essential shallowness inherent to many of the contemporary celebrations of the recent time of economic prosperity. And in his analysis, he is dismissive of the alleged achievements and legacies of the contemporary 'revival' in comparison with the earlier period of social transformation:

645 What characterised Ireland's invention in the period 1890 to 1920 was a strong civil society, mobilised in a rich variety of social, political, cultural and economic organisations promoting through vigorous political means the building of an economy based on native capabilities and resources to serve the good of society at local, regional and national level and creating a rich and inclusive 'imagined community' to which the majority could, with pride, owe allegiance.<sup>37</sup>

650 For Kirby, the earlier period is distinguished by its adherence to a suite of egalitarian Utopian principles, which underlay the anti-colonial nationalist trajectories of many of these social and cultural movements. Informed by a sense of crisis, these enterprises invested heavily in creativity in all spheres of social, cultural and political imagination. Yet by way of undistinguished comparison, 'the resituating of the state in this era of neo-liberalism so that  
655 it becomes subservient to market forces fatally undermines its ability to embody a project of social transformation'.<sup>38</sup> In contemporary Ireland desire, that necessary ingredient of Utopian thought and action, has been usurped, blunted or crassly satiated. The absence of radical Utopian impulses in contemporary Irish society is a failure of both form and content – we are  
660 satisfied to subscribe to the mechanisms of and to the daily material rewards accrued within this system. And for Kirby that heralds nothing more than a complacent acquiescence with inequality and social disfunction.

It is instructive that he should invoke the economic and cultural creativities of the Irish Revival period as exemplary of what he terms 'native capabilities and resources' as a counterpoint to his lament for the dereliction of  
665 Utopian social imagination in contemporary Ireland. And it is to this period that we turn now – a period retrieved and celebrated in much greater detail by Declan Kiberd and PJ Mathews as one of neglected social possibilities by the post-Independence Irish Free State, but one that was infused with radical  
670 Utopian energies in its prime, and that retains such exemplary Utopian dynamism. My focus in this section is on another strain of Utopian retrieval within Irish postcolonial studies. While, as we have noted, the discussion thus far has spotlighted an array of unrealised potentials, this section deals with Utopian impulses that did yield concrete and enduring results –  
675 moments of Utopian purchase – within the social reality of Irish political, economic and cultural life, some of the legacies of which are still evident in Irish society and others that have, lamentably, been neglected. Specifically, we will address the work of Kiberd and Mathews, both of whom configure their critiques of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Irish society in  
680 resolutely postcolonial, and, it seems, Utopian, terms. Most explicitly, both critics treat the period of the Irish Revival of the 1890s and early decades of the 1900s as a time of intense and profitable Utopian imagining and activism in Ireland.

## Textual Practice

While Kiberd's work has alluded more generally, if over a longer time-frame, to the richly Utopian cast of the skein of social movements that were active during the Irish Revival, Mathews' work has provided a singular, focused assessment of these projects. Mathews' *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Fein, The Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* is, as the title evidences, a materialist argument that each of these movements were never mutually exclusive, but were part of a broad Utopian energy that informed Irish political, cultural and economic life at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Mathews' assessment asserts its materialism overtly and it is unmistakably postcolonial in its exposure of the anti-colonial and nationalist enterprises of the Revival. But equally he lauds the tenacious Utopianism of each of the projects as singular undertakings and as collective, or at least imbricated, exercises. Indeed Mathews' postcolonial methodology intersects considerably with John McLeod's recently coined agenda for postcolonial studies. In his editorial to *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, McLeod argues:

To enter into postcolonial studies is to engage in a self-conscious process of contestation; it is to contend often with both the *form* and *content* of prevailing knowledge . . . It is a concept which helps us to frame and ask questions from a particular, interested vantage, and which secures a Utopian ethics at its heart.<sup>39</sup>

Such a manifesto for postcolonial studies is reflected in both Mathews' and Kiberd's engagements with the Irish Revivalist movements. Both are keen to redress the neglect and distortion of the Revival's achievements in post-Independence historical accounts, and both stress the Utopian imagination of the earlier period in its 'revival' and creation of viable economic and cultural forms. Their contiguous critiques underscore the disingenuous ways in which the combined enterprises of the Irish Revival were processed in later historical and literary historical renditions of the period – renditions that tarnished or obscured the fertile Utopian heritage of Irish anti-colonial nationalism and, it seems, impoverished the reservoirs of social imagination in Ireland up to the present day. In fact, the Utopian and combative nature of McLeod's version of postcolonial studies seems fitting to the entire range of Utopian postcolonial projects undertaken in recent Irish postcolonial critiques.

Mathews opens his account of the Irish Revival with an unalloyed declaration of his intentions – which largely centre on the contention that there has been a large degree of misrepresentation and miscomprehension in previous accounts of the period:

The broad aim is to open up the early productions of the Irish theatre movement to the discursive and material complexities of their

historical moment and to explore the degree to which they were influenced by, and in turn influenced, the dynamics of the Irish Revival. Central to this manoeuvre is the belief that the early Irish theatre initiative can be usefully understood as an important ‘self-help’ movement that has much in common with comparable projects such as the Gaelic League, the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS) and Sinn Féin . . . The purpose of this book is to recover these connections and reveal the degree to which a progressive self-help ethos was subscribed to across a range of cultural and social initiatives during the Irish Revival.<sup>40</sup>

In an effort to rescue the Irish theatre movement, and its pioneers, Yeats, Synge, Gregory, Martyn *et al.*, from the consolations of the abstract, the mystical, the esoteric, Mathews views this theatrical movement as clearly in tune with and contributive to the more ‘material’ self-help activism of the period. At a general level, Mathews positions the aggregation of social and cultural projects as testimony to an Irish declension of what Paul Gilroy has theorised as ‘alternative modernity’.<sup>41</sup> These variegated, yet interlaced, projects ‘were not achieved by adopting colonial models of modernization’, but were fashioned by an understanding that the so-called traditional does not translate as ‘anachronistic’ or ‘dormant’, or ‘obsolete’ – contrarily, tradition is comprehended ‘as a stimulus towards innovation and change rather than a barrier to it’.<sup>42</sup> Mathews’ introductory comments invoke a range of theoretical and historiographical intersections: from the internationally postcolonial in Gilroy to the ‘nationally’ postcolonial, Lloyd and Whelan, with respect to the notion of the alternatively modern; and to recent Utopian writing on memory and social change in the work of Baccolini and Elspeth Probyn. But equally the exchange between the past and the present that was such a dynamic feature of these social movements partakes of a radical Utopianism. These initiatives, as Mathews outlines, seek nothing less than the wholesale structural re-imagination of Irish society in its cultural, social and political forms and strove to negotiate such change in natively produced Utopian idioms.

What was witnessed in the evolving ‘self-help’ culture in Ireland during the 1890s was an imaginative alternative to such formal political stasis. Again Mathews highlights the dynamism of these projects as they turned to local, traditional resources as assertions of renewed political agency and cultural empowerment. In his view:

Central the endeavour was the realization that the Irish had accepted London as the centre of culture and civilization for too long and that the time had come for the Irish people to regenerate their own intellectual terms of reference and narratives of cultural

## Textual Practice

meaning . . . [and] it is hardly surprising that the revival would eventually produce a movement which would take the self-help ethos to its most radical conclusion by advocating an alternative politics.<sup>43</sup>

765

While the precise species of ‘alternative politics’ that would emerge as a legacy of this series of social endeavours has, itself, been fiercely contested, ‘[with] the development of the national institutions and the emergence of a new wave of nationalist newspapers, an infrastructure was put in place which allowed the “imagining” of the Irish nation’.<sup>44</sup> Here Mathews consciously alludes to Benedict Anderson’s conceptualisation of the imaginative fabrics of national identities, but, in fact, Mathews extends his narrative and, in distinction to Anderson, Mathews believes that it was a conjunction of nationalist newspaper publications together with the birth of the national theatre movement that furnished the public and the performative spaces of the imagination of Irish national identities. Crucially, these combined phenomena house discernible Utopian energies, and in many respects cohere with Valerie Fournier’s assessment that ‘Utopianism is not a blueprint for a ‘perfect society’ but may be better conceptualised as a movement of hope. It undermines dominant understandings of what is possible and opens up new conceptual spaces for imagining and practicing possible futures . . . it is about opening up visions of alternatives rather than closing down on ‘a’ vision’.<sup>45</sup> The mobile, generative forces of Utopianism clearly manifest in the series of cultural, social and political movements addressed by Mathews. They were imaginative, interrogative and pioneering – each pulses with desire and hope for change, much perhaps nascent and prospective. In Mathews’ case the Utopian projects of the Revival are intimately bound up with pursuit of a national identity – yet such was the multifaceted nature of that series of projects that no single strain of Irish identity gained unilateral consensus. The variously consonant and dissonant voices and projects of this Utopian nexus compete, inform and challenge the formulation of Irish identity; projects which are, of course, at root Utopian in their energies, if ‘not explicitly utopias themselves’.<sup>46</sup> And, as we have established, this was not an Irish identity that simply leeches its conceptual and practical framework from British precedents. As Mathews outlines, both modern social and cultural practices – farming; theatre, journalism; and education – were fastened to ‘traditional’ native Irish practices in such a way that a historically informed present might mould an alternative route(s) to a modern Irish society. Re-iterating his presiding contention, Mathews draws our attention to the urgency of grasping the *material* impacts of the cultural quarters of the Irish Revival and the extent to which the entire Revival movement proffered a viable

800

alternative politics during this period. The intimacy of British colonialism, the proximity of the colonial mainland and the penetration of its exercises created the conditions for such Utopian thought. Frontiers and borderlands that are coloured by conflict, occupation, usurpation and oppression demand a Utopian politics to imagine beyond such proximate threat. And Mathews' postcolonial reading of the Revival period is a signal intervention in the reclamation of such Utopian energies that were characteristic of the combined Irish nationalist movements. As he concludes:

805

810

One of the most remarkable features of this period is the extent to which the dynamic energies of a loosely aligned self-help revivalism emerged as an alternative sphere of influence to the realm of crisis-ridden parliamentary politics . . . [these] activities were inherently political and played an important role in Irish decolonization.<sup>47</sup>

815

The very title of Kiberd's seminal postcolonial intervention, *Inventing Ireland*, invokes the idea of the Utopian; it bespeaks a *process* of imagination, of industry and of movement, just as Fournier gestures to above. And in his diverse, and copious, readings of the literary and cultural twentieth century in Ireland, Kiberd charts the multifarious Utopian 'inventions' in literary form and content across the entire landscape of the literary canon. In particular, Kiberd asserts the remarkable cultural Utopianism of the Revival period, as well as that of Wilde the proto-modernist and of Joyce the postcolonial modernist. Kiberd, in a sense, performs an act of recovery and redress in his readings, which are significantly pitched against the political and cultural orthodoxies of, first, the Counter-Revival, and second, the more contemporary literary historical and historiographical work of revisionist literary critics, historians and journalists. Characteristically, asserting the aborted legacies of the Utopian dynamisms of the Revivalists, Kiberd contends that:

820

825

830

In 1922 the urges of national possibility froze, with the country's teachers cast as curators of a post-imperial museum, whose English departments were patrolled by zealous custodians anxious to ensure that nothing changed very much. Down the corridor, many curators of the postcolonial Gaelic museum, known as the Irish Department, made equally certain that no radical revisions occurred, no compromising contacts with other cultures.<sup>48</sup>

835

840

There is a degree of facetiousness to Kiberd's remarks in this extract, but, regardless, the spirit of his conclusion contributes to, and draws upon, widely held criticisms of the conservative mind-sets and social programmes of the newly independent Irish Free State. In telling contrast to the richly

## Textual Practice

assimilative practices of the Revival period, this era of new found national independence sanctioned little beyond insularity. Defence became central rather than imagination; consolidation superseded creativity. In Kiberd's assessment the provocative Utopian energies of the nationalist movement were squandered in a surge of conservative stability. The cultural and political creativity of a raft of Irish writers and activists, it seems, was disowned and there was a lateral failure to exploit and build upon the momentum of this branch of Irish Utopianism. Emblematic of this field of Irish Utopianism, in Kiberd's survey, are many of the canonical figures of twentieth century Irish writing, including Yeats and Joyce. Their cultural documents and practices symbolise the unyielded possibilities referred to above by Kiberd.

All of the foregoing material is, as we have outlined, qualitatively Utopian in its differential relation to Ireland's experiences and legacies of British imperial modernity. And as if to confirm such a trend, Cleary recently concluded that within Irish Studies:

Postcolonial studies. . .while broadly internationalist in its outlook, has been dispositionally more sympathetic to the radical republican, republican socialist, and other dissenting minoritarian elements in Irish history . . . for postcolonialists, the recovery of the memory of radical struggles in the past is an important element of any commitment to building contemporary modes of social consciousness and social analysis that extend beyond the limits of nationalism.<sup>49</sup>

As we have seen, each of the interventions strives to underscore the Utopian trajectories of past moments in Irish history and, implicitly, attempts to resurrect such Utopian energies in the present. As Cleary notes, and as Whelan terms it, Irish postcolonial studies is infused with a commitment to the Utopian possibilities of 'radical memory' – a concept that has been given lateral applications in recent Irish postcolonial scholarship. Rather than broaching the past as a calcified showcase of continuous failure and defeat, such 'radical' memorial Utopianism visits the past as a vivifying repertoire of political, cultural and ethical options in the present and towards the future. In Whelan's terms 'radical memory deployed the past to challenge the present, to restore into possibility historical moments that had been blocked or unfulfilled earlier'.<sup>50</sup> And in keeping with Kirby's dim view of the prevailing conjuncture in which Irish society finds itself, to which it has firmly subscribed to, interventions that compel Irish studies to travel in these imaginative critical directions seem all the more pressing. Crystallising the Utopian animus of these rememorative strategies at a general level, and drawing on Bloch, Vincent Geoghegan's conclusion resonates with the Utopian assertions present in Irish postcolonial studies:

885 Much political contestation is already driven by group and individual  
memories, and these memories fuel the various alternatives proposed  
. . . These memories provide much of the raw material for the vital  
Utopian dimension of their politics. To the extent that these mem-  
ories reveal shared values and experiences, the basis is established for  
the assertion of historical universals. It thus opens the door for a Uto-  
pianism which is grounded in the historically evolving memories of  
groups of individuals. The future, in this conception, is not a return  
to the past but draws sustenance from this past. Memory is the means  
890 in the present to ground the future in the past.<sup>51</sup>

In this spirit and to conclude this essay, I want to consider the historical  
figure whose writings and thought have been harnessed most recently,  
and most suggestively, within Irish postcolonial studies, and who can be  
895 stabled with many of the revivalist figures detailed in Mathews' study:  
the 1916 martyr, James Connolly. Indeed the centrality of Connolly to  
Irish socialist anti-colonial consciousness, as well as to mid- twentieth  
century international neo-colonial Marxist theory is boldly signalled by  
the biographer of Connolly's son Roddy, Charlie McGuire:

900 Connolly believed that it had been the British bourgeoisie that had intro-  
duced capitalism into Ireland, breaking up finally the last remnants of  
the old Gaelic communal system, and that it continued to profit in  
the present day from exploitation of Irish resources and from the  
905 labor power of Irish workers. He believed that the capitalist economic  
system was the real basis of British power and control in Ireland.<sup>52</sup>

For Connolly, Irish national freedom without socialism is a still-born idea;  
Ireland did not possess a dynamic, transformative bourgeoisie capable of  
910 radical social change. Rather the indigenous Irish version was dependent  
on British economic control, so, therefore, in Connolly's view 'nationalism  
without socialism . . . is only national recreancy'.<sup>53</sup> Such was the depth of Ire-  
land's coerced integration into the economics of British capitalist imperialism  
that a profound structural social revolution was required in order that Ireland  
915 realises genuine national liberty, both political and economic. In these senti-  
ments, we can see that Connolly's work is proleptic of later national libera-  
tionist theorists and also of subsequent Marxist thought on the insidious  
nature of neo-colonialism. Without conflating historical contexts, or geo-  
graphical specificities, ties might be made between Connolly's pioneering  
920 conjunction of national liberation and socialist democracy in his critique  
of colonialism and his anticipation of the inequities of neo-colonialism in  
an Irish context with figures such as Fanon; Mao; Nkrumah; and Trotsky.  
As 'the first theorist of neo-colonialism', the link he (Connolly) proposed



## Textual Practice

'between British capitalist penetration of Ireland, the nature of the social, economic, and political structures this created, and the consequences of all this for the Irish independence struggle anticipated by several decades the efforts of those who develop fully the theory of neo-colonialism'.<sup>54</sup>

925 Connolly's reclamation as an intellectual precursor of, and resource for, contemporary postcolonial theory, though, is not confined to its Irish variant. In his seminal survey of the field, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Robert Young invokes Connolly's work, and positions his thinking on the correlation between the national struggle and the socialist struggle against the materially exploitative mechanisms of imperial modernity in the same philosophical continuum as that of the most radical Marxist figures of the twentieth century, such as Lenin; Mao, Cabral and Guevara.<sup>55</sup> While Young's discussion of Connolly may be revealing, it is, nonetheless, cursory. Yet subsequent to Young's inclusion of Connolly in his extended genealogy of the radical historical informants of contemporary postcolonial studies, a number of significant pieces have appeared on Connolly in Young's journal, *Interventions*. Beginning with a special number on 'Ireland's Modernities', which included two essays that dealt with Connolly, and resulting with a special number dedicated to Connolly, 940 the journal has provided a forum through which Young's initial summary remarks have been elaborated upon by critics and literary historians from within the field of Irish studies.<sup>56</sup>

Primary among the recent efforts in the archival reclamation of this radical Utopian thinker is the work of the American scholar, Gregory Dobbins.<sup>57</sup> In a series of historically and theoretically rigorous publications, Dobbins has essayed the pioneering contributions of Connolly to early twentieth-century Irish nationalist and international Marxist thought; his proleptic anticipation of the work of mid-century anti-colonialists and national Marxists such as Fanon, Cabral and Guevara; his mining and problematisation of complacent and State-affirming notions of the Irish 'national' archive and the 'national tradition'; and canvassed the methodological relevance of Connolly's political historiography to critiques of contemporary Irish society and its own legitimating historical and cultural narratives. Dobbins' work is qualitatively different from 950 many of the other acts of historical re-representation discussed heretofore, but the methodology endorsed by Dobbins significantly intersects with that practiced in the broader field of Irish postcolonial studies. Indeed Dobbins' positioning of Connolly's legacy embraces both form and content in its explication of Connolly's radical anti-colonial critique of historiographical practice and in Dobbins' conviction that Connolly himself represents a mis-construed figure within histories of Irish anti-colonial nationalism and the Irish labour movement. In effect, 'Connolly's work has been forced to fit into pre-existing categories which elide or obfuscate 960

the complexity<sup>58</sup> of his work. Typically, Connolly's legacy has been tethered to a narrowly conceived, and discredited, strand of romantic Irish nationalism, a fact which has obscured his deft theoretical negotiation of the politics of the local and specific (Irish nationalism) and the politics of the international and the structural (Marxism).

So if Connolly's revolutionary thought has been eclipsed and/or disfigured in twentieth-century historical accounts of Irish nationalist history, what is there to recommend a corrective re-appraisal of this thought? How can Connolly's early twentieth-century national Marxism inform contemporary readings of Irish colonial histories, and in what ways can such thinking pressurise the dominant modes of social policy and programming in Ireland today? In opening up such prospects, we might turn, initially, to David Lloyd, who, it seems, has seized upon Connolly's, and, of course, Dobbins', works as evidence of, even corroboration of, his previous, and ongoing, work on the narration of Irish history.<sup>59</sup> For Lloyd, Connolly is the exemplary historian of Irish subalternity, the diviner of the fragmented pulses of Irish counter-modernity, which Lloyd has theorised so effectively, but has been reproached as lacking empirical or historical substance. In Connolly, Lloyd's theoretical Utopianism seems to have located a historical precursor:

Connolly. . .discerns in the attachment of the Irish working classes to a past form of social organization a mode of resistance to colonial capitalism that can form the basis of a radical social movement rather than an obstacle to be removed by the passage through prescribed stages of modernization. In this he anticipates many of the ways in which subaltern historiographers and postcolonial theorists have critiqued the developmental progressivism that informs not only imperial ideology but also nationalist movements.<sup>60</sup>

In this extract, Connolly is further co-opted into the field of postcolonial studies; Lloyd advances Young's summoning of Connolly into the field with the added affiliation of the Indian subaltern studies collective. Just as Lloyd, Young, Dobbins and others attempt to wrest Connolly from a tapered historiographical valence within revisionism, Connolly was acutely aware of the value and the need to research and to voice the unheeded political and cultural formations of pre-colonial Irish history. Not as bland forms of regressive nationalist propaganda or consolatory nostalgia, but as expressions of enduring cultural difference, which could provide 'a ground for further radicalisation and the possibility of imagining alternatives without . . . having to pass through the homogenizing stage of modernization and rationalization'.<sup>61</sup> It is a Utopian historiographical practice that depends on the excavation of the past, of memories in the service of new political and ethical constellations. As Moylan maintains this

## Textual Practice

rememorative axis within Utopian thought is crucial; for him ‘another important element in the Utopian method is *memory*, in particular that form of memory that is productive rather than consoling and disempowering’.<sup>62</sup> The past can yield enabling lessons, which are corrective of the diachronicity of imperial historical narratives. The past, as we have consistently seen, retains catalytic Utopian energies and ‘the recognition of, and reflection on, past struggles can inform the contemporary process so that it becomes imbued with an educated grasp of previous campaigns even as it proceeds with the work of negation, re-vision, transformation’.<sup>63</sup>

Both Dobbins and Lloyd present Connolly as a pioneer in what have become the methodologies of postcolonial historiography within Irish postcolonial studies. Connolly’s proto-subalternist historiography partook of the Utopian ‘radical memory’ outlined above by Whelan. For Dobbins and Lloyd such work of reclamation is both historiographically inclusive and politically subversive, and represents a valuable trace of resistant Irish Utopian memory. Of equal value is Dobbins’ belief that while Connolly’s work is both exemplary and instructive in its relation to Irish postcolonial studies, it is also seen as a potential informant of critical discussions on the economic and cultural imprints of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ years. Though in this respect Dobbins is keen to assert that Connolly’s work is very much of its time and should not be seamlessly transplanted onto the contours of contemporary Irish political debate. Nevertheless, the combative historiographical methodologies pioneered by Connolly can be considered Utopian in their own time, but also as available Utopian resources in our time too. Contemporary retrievals of Connolly’s legacies and examples are patently Utopian in their own right. As Dobbins speculates:

The critical rediscovery of Connolly began not only after the advent of postcolonial theory in Ireland but also after the emergence of a full-blown globalized economy in Ireland during the period of the so-called Celtic Tiger. It is reasonable to wonder whether the recent re-articulation of Connolly’s theoretical interventions is in part motivated by opposition to the newly dominant neoliberal values of the Celtic Tiger.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

In this ‘Response’ to Bill Ashcroft, we have discussed the historiographical and literary historical retrieval office Utopian potentials within Irish cultural and political history by contemporary postcolonial critics. Largely, such critics take a pessimistic view of the Irish experience of British imperial

1045 modernity and conclude that Ireland's interface with the processes of social  
and economic modernisation in the nineteenth century were characterised  
by the experience of trauma, dislocation and disenfranchisement. In other  
words, modernisation under British imperial rule was grafted onto Irish  
1050 society by an externally based occupying force. In this strand of postcolonial  
critique, a range of resources are reclaimed as unrealised potentials and as  
potential informants of contemporary postcolonial interrogations of the  
current politico-economic conjuncture. Spanning the philosophical and  
political subtleties of Edmund Burke; the civic republicanism of the  
1055 United Irish movement; the imbricated political, cultural and social move-  
ments of the Irish Revival; the Socialist nationalism of James Connolly, as  
well as the recalcitrant local practices of counter-modern social formations  
mined by Connolly's proto-subalternist historiography, it is evident that  
the Utopian agents unearthed by postcolonial critics are both copious and  
highly differentiated. This suite of postcolonial critiques constitutes a  
range of unrealised potentials, as evidence of the persistence and viability  
of 'radical memory'. A situation where the past is no longer a burden in  
the present, nor is it quarantined from the present, but is a spur to innovation  
and imagination in political, social, cultural and ethical fields. It is the past as **Q2**  
1060 Utopian resource. In fact, as Kirby's argument above details, there is an acute  
need for such historical and philosophical Utopian thought in contempo-  
rary Ireland, wherein political apathy and assent have become the norms. The  
value of the Utopian strain within Irish postcolonial studies is precisely its  
impatience with the prevailing conjuncture of political and economic inter-  
1065 ests. In this sense, all of these critical endeavours are energised by the 'funda-  
mental dynamic of . . . Utopian politics (or of any political Utopianism) . . .  
[which] aims at imagining, and sometimes even at realizing, a system radi-  
cally different from this one'.<sup>65</sup> As is clear, Ireland's histories of Utopian,  
colonial, anti-colonial and postcolonial theory and practice are vital infor-  
1070 mants of and participants in any future debate on the possible historical  
and/or contemporary transactions between Utopian studies and postcolo-  
nial studies. My 'Response', therefore, has been intended as a supplement  
to Ashcroft's initial intervention, but also as a reminder that Ireland  
should not be easily elided from postcolonial debates, as it so often has been.

1075

*Oxford Brookes University*

### **Acknowledgements**

1080

The author would like to record his gratitude to Professor Tom Moylan, Ralahine Centre for Utopian Studies, University of Limerick, Ireland, for his helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

## Textual Practice

### Notes

- 1 Bill Ashcroft, 'Critical Utopias', *Textual Practice*, 21.3(2007), pp. 411–431.
- 2 Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenberg (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 4.
- 3 For a summary introduction to Ireland's Utopian histories see, Tom Moylan, 'To Stand with Dreamers: On the Use Value of Utopia', *The Irish Review*, 34(2006), pp. 1–19; and ed. Tom Moylan, *Utopian Studies – Special Issue: Irish Utopias* 18.3(2007), *passim*.
- 4 Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
- 5 Jacoby, *The End of Utopia*, pp. 55–56.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- 7 Peadar Kirby, 'Contested Pedigrees of the Celtic Tiger' in Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin (eds), *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), pp. 21–37.
- 8 Raffaella Baccolini, 'Finding Utopia in Dystopia: Feminism, Memory, Nostalgia, and Hope' in Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini (eds), *Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 172.
- 9 See Rory O'Donnell, 'Public Policy and Social Partnership' in Joseph Dunne, Attracta Ingram and Frank Litton (eds), *Questioning Ireland: Debates in Political Philosophy and Public Policy* (Dublin: IPA, 2000), pp. 187–213.
- 10 Kirby, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
- 11 Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day, 2006).
- 12 Tom Moylan, 'Introduction: Tracking Utopia in Irish Culture(s)', *Utopian Studies – Special Issue – Irish Utopias*, 18.3(2007), p. 295.
- 13 Tom Moylan, 'To Stand with Dreamers: On the Use Value of Utopia', p. 16.
- 14 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 28.
- 15 Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 182.
- 16 David Denby, 'Ireland, Modernization and the Enlightenment Debate', *The Irish Review*, 31(2004), pp. 28–39.
- 17 Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin, eds., *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).
- 18 Denby *op. cit.*, p. 29.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 See Conor McCarthy, 'Seamus Deane: Between Burke and Adorno', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 35.1(2005), pp. 232–248.
- 23 Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- 24 For example see his 'Unapproved Roads: Ireland and Post-colonial Identity' *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), pp. 171–180 and

- ‘Guests of the Nation: Ireland, Immigration and Postcolonial Solidarity’ in Meaghan Morris and Brett de Bary (eds), *Race’ Panic and the Memory of Migration* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2001), pp. 79–102.
- 1125 25 Luke Gibbons, ‘Towards a Postcolonial Enlightenment: The United Irishmen, Cultural Diversity and the Public Sphere’ in Clare Carroll and Patricia King (eds), *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), *passim*.
- 26 Ibid., p. 83.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 1130 29 Ibid.
- 30 Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 116.
- 31 Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 283.
- 1135 32 Gibbons, op. cit., p. 116.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid., p. 113.
- 35 Makdisi, op. cit., p. 106.
- 36 Ibid., p. 103.
- 37 Kirby, op. cit., p. 28.
- 1140 38 Kirby, op. cit., p. 35.
- 39 John McLeod, ‘Introduction’ in John McLeod (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 8.
- 40 PJ Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Fein, The Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), p. 2.
- 1145 41 See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), pp. 187–223.
- 42 Mathews, op. cit., p. 2.
- 43 Mathews, op. cit., p. 9.
- 44 Ibid, p. 10.
- 1150 45 Valerie Fournier, ‘Utopianism and the Cultivation of Possibilities: Grassroots Movements of Hope’ in Martin Parker (ed.), *Utopia and Organization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 192.
- 46 Lyman Tower Sargent, ‘Utopianism and National Identity’ in Barbara Goodwin (ed.), *The Philosophy of Utopia* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), p. 88.
- 47 Mathews, op. cit., p. 34.
- 1155 48 Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 561.
- 49 Joe Cleary, ‘Amongst Empires: A Short History of Ireland and Empire Studies in International Context’, *Eire-Ireland*, 42.1 and 42.2(2007), p. 43.
- 50 Kevin Whelan, ‘The Memories of “The Dead”’, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 15.1(2002), p. 60.
- 1160 51 Vincent Geoghegan, ‘Remembering the Future’ in Jamie Owen Daniel and Tom Moylan (eds), *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 31.

## Textual Practice

- 52 Charlie McGuire, 'Irish Marxism and the Development of the Theory of Neo-Colonialism', *Eire-Ireland*, 41.3 and 4(2006), p. 114.
- 53 Ibid., p. 115.
- 54 Ibid., p. 119.
- 1165 55 Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).
- 56 'Ireland's Modernities', David Lloyd (ed.), *Interventions* 5.3 (2003) and 'Post-colonial Connolly', Catherine Morris and Spurgeon Thompson (eds), *Interventions* 10.1(2008).
- 1170 57 Among Dobbins' published work on James Connolly are: 'Connolly, the Archive and Method', *Interventions*, 10.1(2008), pp. 48–66; 'Whenever Green is Red: James Connolly and Postcolonial Theory', *Nepantla: Views from the South*, 1.3(2000), pp. 605–648; and "Scenes of Tawdry Tribute": Modernism, Tradition and Connolly' in P.J. Mathews (ed.), *New Voices in Irish Criticism* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 3–12.
- 1175 58 Dobbins, "Scenes of Tawdry Tribute": Modernism, Tradition and Connolly', p. 6.
- 59 See David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993); and *Ireland after History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), especially pp. 19–36; 37–52; and 77–88.
- 60 David Lloyd, 'Why Read Connolly?', *Interventions*, 10.1(2008), p. 121.
- 1180 61 Ibid.
- 62 Tom Moylan, 'Realizing Better Futures, Strong Thought for Hard Times' in Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini (eds), *Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 217.
- 63 Ibid., pp. 217–218.
- 1185 64 Dobbins, 'Connolly, the Archive and Method', p. 51.
- 65 Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p. xii.

1190

1195

1200