

# INTRODUCTION

Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien

In August 1994, UK economist Kevin Gardiner, an employee of the US investment bank Morgan Stanley, coined the term 'Celtic Tiger', to liken Ireland's unexpected economic take-off to the successes of the Asian tiger economies (Gardiner 1994). As so often happens with attractive terms, it quickly became part of the lexicon, mainly because it was a flattering metaphor for the prosperity that seemed to flood into the Irish economy in the 1990s and the early years of the second millennium. Looking back with the benefit of hindsight, however, it is still seen as a time of prosperity and growth, definitely, but also of greed and of grand desires, a far cry from Robert Emmet's dream of an Ireland that had finally taken her place among the nations of the earth, at least in terms of material wealth. There were confident assertions that Ireland had confounded all existing economic theory and that, in the fashionable jargon of the period, growth would be exponential 'going forward'. Gene Kerrigan makes the point that in the mythology of the time, the culture of the entrepreneur was seen as all-pervasive:

Some time during the Celtic Tiger era, being in business became old-fashioned. There arose the concept of the entrepreneur – people with risk running in their veins, with minds hewn from solid blocks of ambition. You became an entrepreneur in the same way as you might have once become a poet – by declaring yourself to be one. (Kerrigan 2012, p.36)

This was an example of the new confidence that was to be found in Ireland, a confidence that stemmed from the belief that a new economic paradigm had been born. Even in 2008, when glimmers of doubt were being cast as to the ongoing viability of the Celtic Tiger, the Economic and Social Research Institute, an independent research agency, gave the following prediction in its *Medium-Term Review* from 2008-2015:

While our understanding of the key factors driving the economy has evolved over recent years, our view of its likely medium-term growth rate has not. The forecast for the growth in GNP over the period 2007-2015

is identical to what it was when we published the last *Review* in December 2005, an average of around 3¾% a year. (Fitzgerald et al 2008, vii)

With such positive economic figures being announced on an almost weekly basis, perhaps there was a feeling that there would be plenty of time in which to discuss the macro-strategy of how best to spend the wealth. In the meantime, conspicuous consumption and production were the norm, and property prices increased annually as overly generous tax-breaks were given to developers who, in turn, erected more and more buildings, shopping malls, apartment complexes and hotels. This process was seen as pro-cyclical in that tax-breaks were given to developers, who in turn borrowed more money to develop more properties, and the banks, in their turn, borrowed from European banks in order to have sufficient liquidity to maintain this cycle of lending for property development. The tax paid on the resultant property transactions meant the exchequer was awash with money.

Contextually, it is important to remember that in the 1980s Ireland had been in a deep recession, with savage cuts made to public services, hospital wards being closed down and infrastructural work at a standstill. Emigration served as an economic tool which helped to keep the country afloat, but there was little sense of economic buoyancy. Allied to a very conservative political system, with the two main parties Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael very much ideology-free zones, social liberalism in Ireland was not allowed to flourish; consequently the *Zeitgeist* of the late 1960s had never permeated the Irish mindset. The Catholic Church steered the moral conscience of Irish society through its hugely influential role in the realms of health and education. It controlled the vast majority of schools in the country, while maintaining a strong presence on the governing boards of most of the universities as well. Socially and culturally, therefore, 1980s Ireland was quite a stagnant place.

However, in the broader global frame, change was afoot. Ireland had joined the EEC in 1973 and from that point onwards, Ireland would benefit from the European structural funds to the tune of 17 billion euro. This money was mainly targeted at infrastructural development, the impact of which was to become most apparent during the 1990s. The influx of significant investment in the building and construction sector, with the aim of providing a more sophisticated road and rail network, was the stimulus that kick-started a more consumer-driven culture. Another major turning point was the English pound leaving the European Exchange Rate mechanism in 1992. This placed severe pressure on the Irish punt, which forced the Irish government, on 27 January 1993, to devalue the punt by 10%. This caused conster-

nation in Irish financial circles at the time, but it had two long-term consequences. Firstly, a number of institutions and individuals who had seen the devaluation coming made a killing on trading of the currency in the financial markets, and this introduced the notion of speculation as a viable possibility for Irish financial institutions. Until then, it is fair to say that the Irish financial sector was quite insular, being governed by a sense of probity and conservatism in terms of global investment. Having long been in the giant shadow of the City of London financial services industry, it would take time for the Irish sector to come out into the light: devaluation was a significant initial factor in that process.

Secondly, the reduced currency made Irish exports significantly more competitive and this resulted in something of an export boom. So from the early 1990s there was a lot more liquidity in the Irish economy, and construction and building had become very important aspects of Irish economic activity. In macro-economic terms, the trend was to espouse a neo-liberal economic model, which favoured light touch regulation and which saw the market as the key to regulating economic activity. In Irish politics, a new party, the Progressive Democrats, espoused this paradigm and began, with the aid of Fianna Fáil, to introduce a low tax, high-spend economic model with significant privatisation of public utilities. This meant more money in people's pockets and, with a huge increase in demand for houses and apartments, fuelled by the traditional Irish desire for home-ownership, the construction industry increased exponentially, and the Celtic Tiger was born.

Higher salaries meant that new apartment blocks, shopping centres, luxury gated developments began to dot the towns and cities of the country, while the gentrification of inner cities proceeded apace. Flexible financial and planning regulations, a low corporation tax, and a blind-eye turned to white collar crime and corruption between developers and planning agencies, provided huge opportunities for growth: 'the politicians kept the regulation light, they re-zoned like mad, they created tax-breaks' (Kerrigan 2012, 63). Irish property speculators, spurred on by the success they were enjoying at home, began to spread their wings abroad. Prestigious London properties were bought by newly-wealthy Irish, which resulted in the term 'CRISPY' (Cash Rich Irish Seeking Property) being coined. While their grandparents and parents may have slaved as navvies or construction workers to build the imposing buildings of London, the Celtic Tiger generation of Irish investors were now buying these buildings. At the height of the Celtic Tiger, the Irish gross domestic product was the second highest in Europe, and this led to a transformation in the self-perception of the Irish, who realised to their

satisfaction that they were no longer the poor relation of Europe or the colonised property of the UK.

To illustrate this paradigm shift, here is a (possibly apocryphal) story of one Irish property developer who walks into to the marbled foyer of an opulent Mayfair apartment block:

‘Who owns this place?’ he asks the doorman in the top hat.

‘Don’t know, Paddy,’ is the reply.

‘Well, you do now,’ says the Irishman and turns on his heel and walks jauntily away from his investment.

The almost non-existent regulation, generous tax incentives and the ongoing boom in the property market, facilitated by an aggressive banking system led by Anglo-Irish Bank, meant that in a sense Ireland had skipped the slow process of modernity, which involved the painstaking build-up of a manufacturing base, and instead had moved to the postmodern model of financial services, investment, and a seemingly never-ending property bubble.

However, this affluence proved illusory, and the sudden dramatic bursting of the property and building bubble meant that prosperity has been followed by austerity and the erstwhile Tiger is now a very bedraggled and scraggy metaphorical animal. This seismic shift has an exact date, 29 September 2008, when the chief executives of the Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Banks sought, and received, a financial guarantee from the Irish government, one that would also apply to Anglo-Irish bank, which at that point was perilously close to collapse. The results are well-known to anyone with even a passing interest in Irish affairs: there was a major run on the Irish banks, which were seen to have a liquidity problem, and bank debt was quickly turned into sovereign debt. The Troika arrived in Dublin and the bail-out – which three senior Ministers claimed they knew nothing about only days previously – was put in place. Ireland slipped into a sharp depression from which it has yet to re-emerge. Unemployment soared, along with tax increases, and empty semi-developed housing and commercial building sites became the concrete manifestation of an economy that was not experiencing the promised ‘soft landing’, but rather a startling crash-landing into recession. The mourning period had its own associated terminology, with terms like ‘senior debt’, ‘bondholders’ and ‘haircuts’, which in their turn became part of colloquial vocabulary.

Given the suddenness of this shift from prosperity to austerity, it is hardly surprising that there have been a number of books attempt-

ing to explain and understand this phenomenon in Irish life. Some of the earlier ones like *The Making of the Celtic Tiger: The Inside Story of Ireland's Boom Economy* (MacSharry and White 2000); *The Celtic Tiger: Ireland's Continuing Economic Miracle* (Sweeney 1999) and *Inside the Celtic Tiger: The Irish Economy and the Asian Model* (O'Hearn 1998), attempted to explain the reasons for the dawning of prosperity. Their common approach was to examine the economic factors which coalesced to bring about extremely vigorous growth in the Irish economy at this time, and the shared inherent assumption in all of these studies was that Ireland had hit on the right formula to stimulate rapid expansion: a young, educated work force, a low corporate tax regime, and an English-speaking population in a country with easy access to the European market. Ireland really appeared to have all the trump cards necessary for economic success. So, as budget surpluses continued unabated for a decade and a half, any initial incredulity gave way to a naïve belief that an economic miracle had taken place in Ireland, that emigration would be a thing of the past, and that dole queues would be replaced by longer lines at ATMs as salaries soared and consumer spending grew apace. From a socio-cultural perspective, David McWilliams' *The Pope's Children: The Irish Economic Triumph and the Rise of Ireland's New Elite* (McWilliams 2008), attempted to categorise the new generation of successful Irish people, coming up with particularly memorable classifications such as 'DIY Declan', 'Low GI Jane', 'Breakfast Roll Man', 'Yummy Mummy', 'Decklanders' and the 'HiCos'. All of these sobriquets were economically derived. It was as if economics had now become the master discipline and that Ireland was, in Fukuyama's terms, in the realm of a specific end of history (Fukuyama 1992), as we had traversed beyond the traditional cycles of economics and had moved into a new paradigm.

There were of course books that argued that all was not well with Celtic Tiger Ireland, that it was built on faulty foundations and tended to benefit the rich more than the poor. Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin produced a compelling critique of what they viewed as the dominant neo-liberal approach to economics that encouraged people to believe that Ireland had never had it so good, that the country had a rosy future and that full employment and increased wealth would continue. *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy* (2002), remains one of the best interrogations of the comfortable consensus that developed between government, the media and business interests. This consensus held that anyone who opposed the current ideology was against progress, was rooted in the past, or was incapable of seeing the benefits to all of our exceptional prosperity. It is not without significance that the

one power block that might have been capable of putting forward a different vision, the Catholic Church, was itself in turmoil at this point in the wake of the on-going revelations about clerical abuse of children, and hence found it difficult to highlight social inequality and the dangers associated with unbridled desire for material goods. But then again, it was extremely difficult to fight against what were strongly ingrained myths. Kirby argued that the concentration of power in the hands of economic and political elites meant that there was a widespread positive reading of Ireland's miraculous 'reinvention' that was based on a fundamental misunderstanding, namely 'that the interests of the whole of Irish society are equated with the interests of those elites who are benefiting from this newly invented Ireland.' He continued:

But this reading has also taken on a power in its own right, promoting economic growth as an end in itself and equating social success with the enrichment and conspicuous consumption of wealthy elites. (Kirby 2002, pp.32-33)

It is clear now that Kirby's reading was accurate, but it was not one that found widespread support at the time. According to economists, Ireland underwent a major cultural transformation during the Celtic Tiger years, one that eagerly embraced globalisation and the ideals of Western capitalism. *Reinventing Ireland* viewed the close identification between culture and economic forces as a dangerous development, as it largely deprived dissenting voices of any real forum. In *From Prosperity to Austerity*, we probe a little further and ask why it was that our writers and artists, along with politicians, economists, academics and the media in general, failed to alert the public in an adequate manner to the dangers associated with the Celtic Tiger. Why was there no major novel, for example, that exposed what was really happening in Ireland at that time? Could it possibly have had something to do with the increased funding of the arts during this period, a support that made it more difficult to avoid being part of the consensus that held sway? It could be said that novelists like John McGahern and William Trevor had other interests and concerns than those of the Celtic Tiger era, but many of the younger generation eschewed engaging with what was a fascinating project: the artistic representation of a society in flux. Dermot Bolger deserves mention for his angry depiction of the 1980s, *The Journey Home* (1990), which laid bare the sordid relationship between politics and business and the havoc it wreaked on hapless citizens. For some reason, there is no equivalent fictional representation of the 1990s and beyond, apart from some references in the genres of crime fiction and chick-lit.

*The End of Irish History? Critical Reflections on the Celtic Tiger* (2003), developed a similar narrative to that of *Reinventing Ireland*. In the Introduction, Colin Coulter outlined just how difficult it was to get a public airing for a negative interpretation of what was really happening to Irish society during the Celtic Tiger years:

In striving to advance a systematically distorted vision of the era of the Celtic Tiger, mainstream commentators have conspired to conceal and defend the interests of that small body of individuals who have been the principal beneficiaries of the boom years. The orthodox reading of the turn that the Irish Republic has taken over the last generation should be regarded, therefore, as not merely intellectually feeble but politically reactionary as well. (Coulter 2003, p.18)

Perhaps the advent of austerity and the general disillusionment with the Celtic Tiger makes it easier for us to outline its main fault lines in this book. However, our aim is not merely to point out the obvious negative spiral precipitated by the years of inflated house prices and impressive government surpluses, but rather to show what impact these huge transformations have exerted on the Irish psyche. Why was it that the lonely voices that warned the economy was over-heating, that the concentration on construction was posing a danger to our fiscal stability, that there was no question of our having a 'soft landing', were not listened to? It undoubtedly was due to the cosy consensus that was being peddled by politicians and business leaders, aided and abetted by media outlets who saw their advertising revenue soar during these years, and a public that did not want to face up to the reality that the economic miracle was no more than a chimera. By tracing the path from prosperity to austerity, we will be endeavouring to illustrate in a detached and systematic fashion the myriad factors that contributed to what has been a major socio-cultural, as well as an economic, upheaval.

The sudden downturn naturally also gave rise to a number of books, seeking to analyse the depressing transition from boom to bust that was predicted in some of the studies already mentioned above. In 2009, there were some notable accounts of the economic and political catastrophe: in *The Bankers: How the Banks Brought Ireland to its Knees* (Ross 2009), Shane Ross detailed the actions of the people in charge of Allied Irish Banks, Bank of Ireland and Anglo-Irish Bank; Fintan O'Toole's *Ship of Fools* (O'Toole 2009) examined the nexus between developers, bankers and politicians and looked at the hubris that brought about the collapse; *Ireland's Economic Crash: A Radical Agenda for Change* (Allen 2009), saw the crisis as a tipping point and set out an agenda for economic change, including a

scheme of public works. Matt Cooper's *Who Really Runs Ireland?* (Cooper 2009) looked at the elite corridors of power and at a crony capitalism that, in a light touch regulatory environment, encouraged relationships between politics and business. That latter point was further and more closely examined in Martina Devlin's and David Murphy's *Banksters: How A Corrupt Elite Destroyed Ireland's Wealth* (Devlin and Murphy 2009). These books sold very well, underlining the morbid fascination in Ireland with unveiling the real reasons for our economic collapse.

As the structural economic flaws that permeated Irish society came under the critical microscope, 2010 brought the publication of other books which attempted to analyse the reasons for the financial meltdown. In *Wasters* (Ross and Webb 2010), Shane Ross and Nick Webb outlined the phenomenal waste of public money by the state and semi-state sector over the period of the Celtic Tiger. Fintan O'Toole offered a prescriptive account of an alternative route, building from the corpse of the Tiger in *Enough Is Enough: How to Build a New Republic* (O'Toole 2010), wherein he set out an agenda for political, fiscal and administrative change in Ireland. Peadar Kirby examined the economic and political flaws in the system that led directly to the downfall in *Celtic Tiger in Collapse: Explaining the Weaknesses of the Irish Model* (Kirby 2010). David J. Lynch's title, *When the Luck of the Irish Ran Out: The World's Most Resilient Country and its Struggle to Rise Again* (Lynch 2010), explains the broad outline of his thesis, even though this book also takes some account of cultural products such as U2 and *Riverdance*, which he sees as indicative of the enduring success of certain Irish cultural phenomena. In 2011, in *How Ireland Really Went Bust*, Matt Cooper produced a more in-depth account of the events leading up to the actual bank collapse and the entry of the Troika of the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank into Irish politics (Cooper 2011), while in 2012 Fintan O'Toole provided a critique of the republicanism of Ireland in *Up the Republic! Towards a New Ireland*, and Gene Kerrigan assessed the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger in *The Big Lie – Who Profits From Ireland's Austerity?*

So it is clear that there has been serious analysis of the Celtic Tiger in all of its phases, and hence it is necessary for a book such as this to state clearly why there is a need for it, and to explain what new perspectives it can bring to bear in order to achieve some understanding of what happened in Ireland during this period, and how we should learn from it. Our thesis is that all facets of the crisis have to do with aspects of language, structure and ideology, and it is these particular lenses which may shed light on hitherto unacknowledged effects of this pivotal period of Irish history. There are a number of issues involved here. Firstly, we see the

Celtic Tiger period as broadly spanning the mid-1990s to the present, and we see it as involving both the prosperity and resultant austerity. It is important to remember that no economy exists independently of the country which it serves; in fact, one could argue that the constant focus on the economy, and the way in which cures and suggestions are posited for the economy, is actually an error. One should also realise that ‘economy’ is a noun used to summarise and encapsulate the buying and selling that is done in a country. In technical terms, this figure of speech is called a catachresis (a misuse or misapplication of a word to explain a term which has no name) or a metalepsis (where one thing is referred to by something else that is only remotely associated with it), where there is an incorrect name given to a phenomenon. While this may seem far removed from the issues of sovereign debt and bank bailout, nevertheless we would maintain that correct terminology would allow for a more accurate assessment and critique of what is going on. The Celtic Tiger, for good or ill, affected people, society, culture, lived lives; this has gone largely unnoticed in the current crisis, with its predominant focus on matters economic.

At the beginning of June 2012, the IMF and ECB provided 4.5 billion euro to Greece as part of what has been loosely termed the Greek bailout. The use of language here would suggest that this money is bailing out a leaking ship, providing funds to pay Greek workers, in order to maintain societal norms and living conditions. However, this is an incorrect reading of the term, as nearly 4 billion went straight back to the European Central Bank – the difference being that the money was now a payment of sovereign debt. The same happened in Ireland where, out of its bailout, some 60 billion went to reinforce the banks, which is code for paying their debts and *de facto* making those debts Irish sovereign responsibility. The purpose of this transaction is in fact to transfer private debt, from private speculators and bondholders and bankers, into sovereign debt, which means, in effect, that this bailout worked to socialise private debt and serve as a guarantor for these to whom the money is owed. This money is no longer owed by private citizens or limited companies which can become bankrupt; instead, it is now owed by a country, a sovereign state, which makes the debt a lot less unsure. To understand the language here is to have a greater understanding of how the etymology of economics, arcane and specialised as it is, affects the language of a culture and a society.

Cultural analysis can also bring to light behaviours which would seem to run contrary to the dictates of common sense. Thus, when we see how Ireland, despite warnings in 2008 and 2009, repeated the tax exemptions given to builders and developers which were initially awarded to stimulate a dormant construction and property sector; or when the

current government, despite protestations long and loud in the election of 2010 that they would not be bound by the Bank Guarantee of the bailout by the Troika, have nevertheless repeated the exact policies of austerity against which they railed while in opposition. This would appear to go against political wisdom and economic sense, which is where once more a cultural analysis can be useful. Sigmund Freud postulated that, as well as the pleasure principle, the desire to achieve some form of pleasure as a core motivation of human behaviour, there existed 'in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle' (Freud 1961, p.16). Cultural analysis of the First World War further developed this thesis:

Victims of shell shock were regularly reported to suffer recurring nightmares in which they re-lived, with similar feelings of terror, the same traumatic incidents that had triggered the shell shock. This was in direct contradiction to Freud's ideas about one of the purposes of dreams. As well as being the vehicles of wish-fulfilment, dreams were there to rework emotionally distressing material so that it did not disturb sleep. Yet these traumatised soldiers were repeating a deeply distressing experience time and again. How could this repetition-compulsion fit in with the pleasure principle? After thinking long and hard about repetition-compulsion, Freud was forced to the conclusion that it was a manifestation of an instinct in direct contradiction to the life instinct or the pleasure principle. This was Thanatos (from the Greek word for 'death'), the death instinct or those impulses aimed at destruction or an escape from all stimulation into a state of inorganic inertia. (Rennison 2001, p.85)

There are aspects of current political behaviour in Europe that would accord with this death instinct, and we would contend that analysis such as the one provided in this book can be very valuable in attempting to understand the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath. Cultural critiques help also to focus on the trite tautologies which have passed for analysis over the last number of years. It is time to emphasise the redundant nature of the almost phatic phrase: 'we are where we are', or the escapist mantra of 'we all partied'. First of all, these phrases are patently not true and secondly they are typical of the vacuous language that dominated public discourse in Ireland during the past two decades. While it may seem that such a critique has limited relevance for serious economic issues, this book argues that it is through language that such issues are either confronted or evaded. The two aforementioned phrases underscore a line of thought which espouses helplessness in the face of forces beyond our power, which in turn means that there is no onus to make any changes in society or culture.

A more overt focus on language and nomenclature might also have

alerted us to the transitory nature of the prosperity in Ireland. As already noted, the term Celtic Tiger came into being in 1994, but rather than being invented, it was appropriated from a number of Asian economies such as Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea and China. Due to large amounts of investment, these economies grew with great rapidity between the 1980s and the 1990s, but then were rocked by the financial crises of 1997 and 1998, which were largely due to difficulties with debt-servicing and banking. Interestingly, the Celtic Tiger repeated the trajectory of its Asian relatives, and experienced something like the same consequences. One of the problems in Tiger economies was that wealth was concentrated in the hands of an elite, and the same can be said of Ireland, where those at the top of the social pyramid have not really felt the full impact of the recession, and this is especially true of the bankers, speculators, regulators and the political classes who have been seen as culpable in not exercising due vigilance of the Irish finances.

The effect of exceptional wealth, followed by massive indebtedness, on the collective unconscious of the Irish people has never really been addressed; neither has there been scrutiny of the attendant sense of religious disenchantment that has characterized Irish society, albeit over a more extended time-line. A high point of Catholic hegemony in Ireland was perceived to be during John Paul II's visit to Ireland in 1979, with Church appeal and sway particularly apparent when Father Michael Cleary and Bishop Eamonn Casey 'warmed up' the crowd of over 280,000 young people in Galway on 30 September. One could also trace the beginning of the end of that hegemony from 1992 when the same Bishop Eamonn Casey admitted that he had had an affair with Annie Murphy, and that he was father to her son. In his turn, Michael Cleary was discovered to have had a sexual relationship with his housekeeper Phyllis Hamilton for a number of years. Their son, Ross, lived with the couple without ever being acknowledged as Fr. Cleary's offspring. Cleary was a skilled communicator with a special appeal for young people, which made him a popular figure with his superiors, who were also impressed with his conservative pronouncements on the issues of pre-marital sex, contraception and abortion. The scandals surrounding these two high-profile clerics caused a level of spiritual shock in Ireland that one could see as paralleling the economic shocks of recent years and the subsequent revelations of misconduct by other priests and religious meant that many people were left bereft of any sense of spiritual security.

Again, while there have been, as already noted, numerous reports on the facts of the abuse of children and of Church complicity in not

reporting these abuses, there has been little or no analysis of the effect on the mind-set or on the sense of identity of people who defined themselves as Catholic but were now rocked to the core by the clerical abuse scandals and the culture of secrecy and cover-up that followed. The Church showed itself to be just another human institution whose culture of ‘group think’ allowed them to justify everything in the interests of preserving their power and prestige, irrespective of the suffering their actions or inaction caused for other people. In Ireland, the socio-cultural elite, numbering amongst them the Church, the banks, republicanism, the Fianna Fáil party, the wealthy, were central to the sense of ‘ourselves’ as a society. The other studies of the period that we have already mentioned, many of which provided key insights into certain aspects of the phenomenon, were not in a position to assess the full range of socio-cultural effects of the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath on the Irish psyche.

The following book of essays is a first step towards filling this lacuna. It could be said that the net effect of the Celtic Tiger on the Irish socio-cultural sphere was to accelerate development from a pre-modern culture to a postmodern one, without ever passing through the slow developmental process of modernism and modernization that has been the pattern in most other western economies and societies. The slow *embourgeoisement* of these European cultures has left a strong legacy of literature, music and, more recently, film, through which the gradual changes in society were expressed and commented upon. However, such was the speed of the Irish economy’s growth that these concomitant socio-cultural paradigms had not evolved. Literature and culture are means by which language can be used to signify the traumatic real of an event. All of the economic jeremiads have not brought a genuine understanding of the profound effect of the Celtic Tiger on the Irish people’s communal sense of self. It is the unconscious aspects of this period, the repressed and suppressed narratives, which may provide some important measure of comprehension. To understand the nature of this inanimate beast, a forensic examination of its insides is necessary.

While acknowledging the contribution of Ging, Cronin and Kirby, who examined the legacies of the Celtic Tiger in *Transforming Ireland* (2009), we believe that more time had to elapse in order to assess the full impact of the transition from prosperity to austerity. Kirby, in particular, has been consistent in his exposition of the dangers associated with the unquestioning embrace of neoliberal discourse. We read the following lines in the Introduction to *Transforming Ireland*: ‘in the explicit rhetoric of neoliberalism, the significance of culture as an aesthetic or political endeavour is almost wholly consumed by the discourse of corporate profit’ (Ging, Cronin and Kirby 2009, p.9). Our desire in this

book is not so much to view the political and economic consequences of the Celtic Tiger as to consider how exactly the move from boom to bust affected our social and cultural outlook, our eating and drinking habits, our religious behaviour, our literature and visual culture. In brief, we propose to assess how a new sense of 'Irishness' has had serious socio-cultural ramifications, in addition to the politico-economic fallout that has been well-traced in other studies of the period.

In his *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson makes the point that there are underground master-narratives always present in our cultural matrix, and that they are ideologically operative in much of our thinking. The task of the intellectual, then, is to unearth aspects of this political unconscious through 'the dynamics of the act of interpretation' (Jameson 1981, p.3). Jameson sees this unconscious as an absent cause, and as something that is only available in textual form; he further suggests that access to 'the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualisation, its narrativisation in the political unconscious' (Jameson 1981, p.26). The 'Real' refers to the world beyond language, to that which cannot be symbolised in language, it is 'what resists symbolisation absolutely' (Lacan 1991, p. 66); it is therefore that which is 'without fissure' (Lacan 1988, p.97), it hints at what lies beneath the symbolic order, things that have an effect, but that cannot be said. The aim of this book is to bring the 'Real' of the socio-cultural consequences of the Celtic Tiger out of the darkness and to begin a debate that is, in some respects, equally important as the numerous economic analyses of recent times. The realms of language, fiction, drama, film and public culture provide a supplement to the economic aspects of society, as they both contribute to, and are largely constituted by, the economic paradigm. This book will analyse how culture and society are mutually-informing discourse and how this synthesis may help us to more fully understand what happened in this period, and more importantly, why it happened.

The opening chapters of the book examine one of the great signifiers of Irishness – the Catholic Church. In the opening chapter, Eamon Maher argues that Catholicism's grip on Irish society was on the wane long before the advent of the Celtic Tiger. Both before and during the years of unprecedented economic prosperity, there was continued questioning of Church authority, particularly in the area of sexuality. Maher concludes that the perceived religious 'crisis' that one associates with the Celtic Tiger years might well be an opportunity for renewal for the Church. Catherine Maignant develops this theme by suggesting that while many assume that the Celtic Tiger has devoured religion, examination of various data does not support this analysis. She suggests that the Irish religious market has evolved from being

monopolistic to becoming more pluralist, and she goes on to explore the nature of today's religious market in Ireland from the perspective of the Celtic Tiger values as echoed by religious market theories and by the post-secularization theory. Finally, Brendan Geary looks at how assumptions about the Catholic Church have been shattered by the reports of child sexual abuse, and their subsequent cover-ups, and he examines how the institutional Church has reacted to these events. He notes that, as in Spain, the Netherlands, and Poland, the Bishops in Ireland are adopting a defensive rather than an open, engaging stance. He suggests that new forms of leadership will be needed to form new and progressive responses to this crisis.

Popular culture is one of the few cultural areas to address the Celtic Tiger directly. In chapter 4, Eugene O'Brien argues that cultural unconscious of the Celtic Tiger is to be found in the humorous narratives of Paul Howard and his fictional Celtic Tiger cub, Ross O'Carroll-Kelly. Freud has noted that 'the realm of jokes has no boundaries' and it is in humour that the repressed 'Real' of the Celtic Tiger can be made to return. Like dreams, jokes use the same techniques of condensation, indirect representation, and displacement, and this chapter examines what they reveal. When Bono sang 'Uncertainty can be a guiding light' on the title track from U2's album *Zooropa* (1993), many people felt him to be perfectly attuned to an emerging sense of Irish identity. It was, moreover, a message that was taken up in various ways in subsequent popular musical engagements with modern Irish identity. In chapter 5, Gerry Smyth examines the music of U2, The Script and Jedward as signifiers of aspects of the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger.

In chapter 6, Sylvie Mikowski asks why is it that women writers should have turned to the depiction of rich, globalized Ireland far more readily than their male counterparts. She shows how Deirdre Madden, Eilís Ní Dhuibhne and Anne Enright have each found a way to express in their fiction the ineradicable permanence of sexual difference in a world where economic and sexual liberalism combine to erase that disparity. In chapter 7, Justin Carville explores the significance of the photograph's capacity to present a moment that is simultaneously disappearing and becoming. Drawing on recent debates on the accelerated distribution and circulation of media imagery and the gaze of contemporary photography, Carville opines that the aesthetics of topographical photography provided a visual critique of the cultural politics of the Celtic Tiger. Bryan Fanning, in the following chapter, argues that the large-scale immigration into Ireland during the Celtic Tiger period had its roots in a post-1950s nation-building project of economic development which superseded an economically and culturally isolationist Irish-Ireland period. The lack of

political debate about this post-1990s immigration is an eloquent silence and Fanning attempts to fill the void by offering an insightful discussion of immigration in the Celtic Tiger period.

Images of subjectivity have certainly changed during and after the Celtic Tiger. In chapter 9, Kieran Keohane and Carmen Kuhling analyse the transformation that the Irish subject has undergone, and is still undergoing, in connection with the period popularly dubbed the Celtic Tiger. Looking at the history and literature of the monstrous, the chapter posits connections between Celtic Tiger and 19<sup>th</sup> century vampires, 20<sup>th</sup> century native gombeen men, to the 21<sup>st</sup> century zombie slaves that we have become, in thrall to foreign paymasters and senior bondholders. Mary Pierse, in chapter 10, looks at the role of women writers who furnish important images of societal change and paint portraits that are vital for social history. Perceived constraints, relationship difficulties, negotiation of economic, religious, educational and social environment, attitudes to family and children all feature in fiction written in this millennium by Anne Enright, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Edna O'Brien, Belinda McKeon, Cláir Ní Aonghusa and others.

During the Celtic Tiger years, Ireland's gastronomic culture and the story of Irish hospitality changed dramatically. In chapter 11, Brian Murphy argues that Ireland has been revolutionised in terms of dining and drinking practices during the Celtic Tiger years, and has, in fact, developed its own version of a gastronomic cultural field. Examining gastronomy as an index of how Irish people started to see themselves in a different light, he traces the notion of food and wine as socio-cultural signifiers. Literature and film have also, in their different ways, attempted to represent the Celtic Tiger.

It is sometimes said that high culture writers said comparatively little about the Celtic Tiger. Neil Murphy, comparing contemporary writers with Joyce, Beckett and Flann O'Brien, notes the complex and nuanced relationship between these texts and their cultural contexts. Against this literary background, Murphy's essay reflects on some of the ways that novelists John Banville and Dermot Healy deal with issues of representation and artistic response during the years since the mid-1990s.

In chapter 13, Vic Merriman reviews selected examples of Irish theatre's critical engagement with the building industry, and the nexus of crony relationships between developers, legislators, banking and media which underpinned the hegemonic tone of Celtic Tiger Ireland. He considers the interventionist works of the 'theatre of the nation' during the 1990s while also examining the role of critical mediation in reception and analysis of the work of artists.

Chapter 14 sees Eóin Flannery providing a summary critical survey of different poetic responses to the Celtic Tiger period, to its imprints on, and legacies for, contemporary Irish society. Considering this era in recent Irish history in terms of modernization, urbanization, ecological thought and activism, Flannery addresses the works of the following poets: Derek Mahon, Rita Ann Higgins, Paul Durcan, Dennis O'Driscoll, Alice Lyons and Dave Lordan. Finally, Ruth Barton looks at Irish cinema and considers the role of the Irish Film Board, the growth of digital film-making, and the influence of funding on the way films were made. She probes the shift from films that celebrate the new spaces of globalised Dublin such as *About Adam* (2001) and *Goldfish Memory* (2003), to those that focus on Ireland as a dangerous space inhabited by a disenfranchised underclass - *Intermission* (2003) and *Garage* (2007).

In socio-cultural terms, therefore, it is clear that the critical period covered in this book brought about significant changes in the perception of Irish identity. Ireland's sense of itself became more confident, more assured and more globally-oriented, as many of the chapters in this book demonstrate. The dominance of the Catholic Church gradually diminished, and a more secular, European sense of Irishness came into being along with the financial prosperity that accompanied the Celtic Tiger. Now that we have entered the period of austerity, we are even more confused than we were before the mid-1990s, as the self-image has now become less assured and more uncertain. Fintan O'Toole is of the opinion that Ireland failed to grasp the glorious opportunity presented by the Celtic Tiger and instead succumbed to contradictory energies:

on the one hand the great buzz of consumerism and a surging, apparent endless property bonanza and on the other the terrible, heart-stopping thud of revelations that everything you believed in – the holiness of clerics, the decency of nationalism, the idea of public service – was a lie. It was much easier to drown out the insistent whisper of the second of those realities with the triumphant roar of the first than to take on the hard task of making a republic (O'Toole 2012, p.44).

It is hard to say with any degree of certainty whether establishing a true republic is the answer to Ireland's current problems, but at least it is a worthwhile suggestion as to how to emerge from the impasse in which Ireland finds itself. The essays that follow do not attempt to come up with solutions to what is an existential as much as an economic crisis; rather, they seek to show how looking at the rise and demise of the Celtic Tiger through a socio-cultural lens can bring fresh insights and offer some succour to a society in flux.

## Works Cited

- Allen, Kieran (2009) *Ireland's Economic Crash: A Radical Agenda for Change*, Dublin The Liffey Press.
- The Cloyne Report* (2009) Report of Investigation into Catholic Diocese of Cloyne, [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Cloyne\\_Rpt.](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Cloyne_Rpt.)
- Cooper, Matt (2011) *How Ireland Really Went Bust*, Dublin: Penguin.
- Cooper, Matt (2009) *Who Really Runs Ireland?* Dublin: Penguin.
- Devlin, Martina and Murphy, David (2009) *Banksters: How A Corrupt Elite Destroyed Ireland's Wealth*, Dublin: Hachette Books.
- FitzGerald, John; Bergin, Adele; Conefrey, Thomas; Diffney, Sean; Duffy, David; Kearney, Ide; Lyons, Seán; Malaguzzi Valeri, Laura; Mayor, Karen; Tol, Richard SJ (2008) (Economic and Social Research Institute) *Medium Term Review 2008-20015*, ESRI Forecasting Series, No. 11, Dublin: ESRI, [http://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/20080515155545/MTR11\\_ES.pdf](http://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/20080515155545/MTR11_ES.pdf).
- Fukuyama, Francis (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*, London: Penguin.
- The Ferns Report* (2005) Report of Investigation into Catholic Diocese of Ferns, <http://www.bishop-accountability.org/ferns/>.
- Freud, Sigmund (1961) *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, translated and newly edited by James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press.
- Gardiner, Kevin (1994) 'The Irish Economy: A Celtic Tiger', *Morgan Stanley Euroletter*, 31 August 1994.
- Ging, Debbie, Cronin, Michael, and Kirby, Peadar (2009) *Transforming Ireland: Challenges, Critiques, Resources*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Jameson, Fredric (1981) *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Kerrigan, Gene (2012) *The Big Lie – Who Profits From Ireland's Austerity?*, Dublin: Transworld Ireland.
- Kirby, Peadar, Gibbons, Luke and Cronin, Michael (2002) *Reinventing Ireland: Culture Society and the Global Economy*, London: Pluto Press.
- Kirby, Peadar (2010) *Celtic Tiger in Collapse: Explaining the Weaknesses of the Irish Mode*, London: Palgrave.
- Lacan, Jacques (1988) *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Sylvana Tomaselli,. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Lacan, Jacques (1991) *Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book I*, translated by John Forrester, New York: W. W. Norton.
- Lynch, David J. (2010) *When the Luck of the Irish Ran Out: The World's Most Resilient Country and Its Struggle to Rise Again*, London: Palgrave.
- MacSharry, Ray and White, Padraic (eds.) (2000) *The Making of the Celtic Tiger: The Inside Story of Ireland's Boom Economy*, Cork: Mercier Press.
- McWilliams, David (2008) *The Pope's Children: The Irish Economic Triumph and the Rise of Ireland's New Elite*, New Jersey: Wiley.
- The Murphy Report* (2009) Commission of Investigation Report into Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin, <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PB09000504>.
- O'Hearn, Denis (1998) *Inside the Celtic Tiger: The Irish Economy and the Asian Model*, London: Pluto Press.
- O'Toole, Fintan (2010) *Enough Is Enough: How to Build a New Republic*, London: Faber.
- O'Toole, Fintan (2009) *Ship of Fools: How Greed and Corruption Sank the Celtic Tiger* London: Faber.
- O'Toole, Fintan (2012) *Up the Republic! Towards a New Ireland*, London: Faber.
- Rennison, Nick (2001) *Freud & Psychoanalysis*, Harpenden: Pocket Essentials.
- Ross, Shane (2009) *The Bankers: How the Banks brought Ireland to its Knees*, Dublin: Penguin Ireland.
- Ross, Shane and Webb, Nick (2010) *Wasters*, Dublin: Penguin Ireland.
- Sweeney, Paul (1999) *The Celtic Tiger: Ireland's Continuing Economic Miracle*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.
- The Ryan Report* (2009) Residential Institution Redress Board, <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/>

