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> It is simply not possible to allow a phrase like "postcolonial literature" still to wander about like a decomposing chicken in search of its head, and to have it foisted upon the backs of younger writers.
>
> DERMOT BOLGER, *Picador Book of Contemporary Irish Fiction*, 1992

> Writers now invent other sorts of Ireland.
>
> COLM TÓIBÍN, *London Review of Books,* 1996

> In the last few years, Irish-set crime writing has not merely begun to blossom but has become arguably the nearest thing we have to realist literature adequate to capturing the nature of contemporary society.
>
> FINTAN O'TOOLE, *Irish Times,* 2009

THREE epigraphs, from important progressive voices, anchor my essay and embody the trajectory of my argument. Dermot Bolger's resistance to postcolonial strictures about subjects and approaches accompanied characteristically generous editorial activism, as the writer's remarks were the introduction to his groundbreaking 1992 anthology of contemporary fiction—a vivid literary testimony to his wisdom. A few years later, just as the Celtic Tiger was getting underway, Colm Tóibín's important review of Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* argued against a similar set of assumptions on different grounds. O'Toole's more recent comments on Irish crime fiction, a genre that is blooming after economic boom and bust, point toward a central contention of this article: the minority literary pushback voiced by Bolger and Tóibín, passing through dramatic economic and social swings around the turn of the century, takes flight in the genre of crime fiction. While O'Toole not-

ed that "the most successful Irish crime writer, John Connolly, who began his career just a decade ago, felt it necessary to set his books in the U.S.," it is the "fallen world [of] boom-time Ireland" (359, 360) as captured by Declan Hughes, Gene Kerrigan, and Alan Glynn that has come to the fore. These writers' engagement with Dublin in particular offers readers realistically observed depictions of Ireland's capital city, as does crime fiction by writers including Gene Kerrigan, Arlene Hunt, Tana French, and Ingrid Black (pseudonym of writing team Eilis O'Hanlon and Ian McConnel).

Crucially, crime fiction is able to illuminate the very circumstances that led to its emergence. Beyond chronological parallels that might otherwise appear purely coincidental—Irish crime fiction finding its feet during turbulent economic and social times—there is investigation of those turbulent times within the genre fiction itself. Through analysis of work by internationally successful crime novelists Gene Kerrigan and Tana French, this essay elucidates some of the ways Irish crime fiction uses the genre to mount that investigation. French, a *New York Times* bestselling author, and Kerrigan, whose 2011 novel *The Rage* was selected to launch Europa's World Noir series in 2013, are producing important representations of contemporary Dublin for readers in Ireland and abroad, and their success indicates that the comparatively young field of Irish crime fiction may come to play a significant role in international crime fiction. While French's circumscribed first-person narratives contrast with Kerrigan's on-the-go streets of Dublin featured in his stories, both take advantage of crime fiction's potential for social record and critique. My essay offers an analysis of the crime novels of Kerrigan and French (four titles each as of 2013) that is contextualized by crime-fiction scholarship, and it argues that these novels use the genre to construct compelling portraits of contemporary Dublin's public and private spaces. After briefly examining the early novels of Dermot Bolger as literary forebears of the emergence of Irish crime fiction in the twenty-first century, I turn to Gene Kerrigan's new Dubliners to demonstrate his transformative use of the police procedural ensemble to capture moral ambiguities. I follow this with an analysis of Tana French's psychological crime fiction and its presentation of uncertainty and unknowing.

Seventeen years before giving recognition to Irish crime fiction in the *Irish Times*, Fintan O'Toole predicted a different direction for

Irish writers intent on capturing contemporary Ireland. In his introduction to Dermot Bolger's *Dublin Quartet*, he forecast that "because Irish reality has become increasingly surreal, the usual division in writing between the realist on the one hand and the fantasist on the other has begun to break down. Realism has to become surrealism; naturalism has to become supernaturalism" (4). Made in the context of Bolger's literary innovations of the late 1980s and early 1990s, O'Toole's forecast was prescient. In his recent young adult title *New Town Soul* (2010), Bolger has returned to material not unlike that in his first novel, *Night Shift* (1985), albeit with a south-of-Dublin setting (Blackrock) and an increased focus on personal and psychological themes in a register suitable for younger readers. In O'Toole's terms, *Night Shift* is surreal whereas *New Town Soul* is supernatural; the young adult book lacks political critique—even the economic crisis barely impinges on its content—but mixes together spiritual hauntings and prerepublic social structures in ways that would not be unfamiliar to Elizabeth Bowen or Sheridan LeFanu. O'Toole's introduction to *Dublin Quartet* recognized Bolger's literary heritage, but demonstrated how he was breaking new ground. As Bolger took his place in the literary tradition while reshaping aspects of it, important elements of his work pointed toward a development O'Toole could not foresee: crime fiction as the critically and commercially successful inheritor to the innovations of Bolger's plays and novels.

Reading Bolger's first novel, *Night Shift* (1985), as a forerunner of twenty-first century Irish crime fiction, the potential crime-fiction elements are strikingly evident: Mountjoy Jail ("the Joy"), pornography, repressive and exploitative gardaí, vandalism, cider parties, street drugs, sketchy property developers, sexual repression coexisting alongside illicit and dubious sexual expression, and workplace sabotage requiring police involvement. The smallest nudge would make Dan a plausible murderer of young women: his obsessive pattern of stalking and his identification of his chosen victims with the Virgin Mary, fueled by an increasingly violent taste in pornography, would lead naturally to such a conclusion.

Bolger's next novel, *The Journey Home* (1990), an ambitious work, moves crime to its center. The novel's sense of place provides one link between literary forebears such as Joyce and the crime novelists who follow Bolger. In spite of the drugs, vandalism, exploitation, corrup-

tion, degradation, and lawlessness, Bolger presents a loving portrait of a generally ignored part of Dublin: the section of the north side that was swallowed up in suburban expansion in the 1960s amid a burst of dubious rezoning and underwent in the late 1980s a subsequent transformation from a suburb that still maintained its village nature and connections with an older Ireland into an integrated part of the urban landscape. What the novel's young hero, Hano, refers to as "this invisible, unofficial city which we both inherited" (207) ends up seeming at times like nothing so much as Sheridan Le Fanu's Chapelizod, a place that had been long since swallowed up by Dublin. In the present, the place Hano and his friend Shay grew up in is dominated by the dual carriageway and the Plunkett brothers: abruptly ending a moment of shared sentiment, Shay jokes that they should leave the ruined church site "before the Plunkett brothers rezone this and build an amusement arcade here" (207). Such an occurrence is plausible enough to give the joke its dark power. Never content to rest on their laurels, the Plunketts are continuously expanding by, for example, building "two small terraces of houses" in the fields beyond the church (152) and refitting a shop which is about to become, near the end of the novel's present-time action, Plunkett Videos (235). One of their properties, Mother Plunkett's Cabin, captures the combination of faux-historical veneration and global tat, with both components being lucrative: "The pub was in two sections: the bar in front paved with flagstones like a scene from *The Quiet Man*, with old black-and-white photographs of Kerry lining the walls; the door of the cabaret lounge at the back was in the shape of a horseshoe and the green carpet had a design of gold stetsons and wagon wheels" (152). The creeping Americanism represented by the John Wayne film blossoms into full-fledged life in the lounge. But all of this dross is shown to be sinister; it is not merely bad style to be laughed at, but also the frontispiece for the real evil of the Plunketts. The family is the unholy force that owns the suburb and its residents. As the book develops, readers become familiar with the Plunketts' sexual perversities, criminal business practices, corrupt politics, and taste for violence, but these traits are most powerfully condemned in relation to the village-turned-suburb: "We drove back up the main street where coach horses had once halted. The shopping centres ringed the crest of the hill—before us Plunkett Auctioneers, behind

us Plunkett Stores, down a lane to the left Plunkett Motors; and, beside the Protestant church across the bridge, Plunkett Undertakers on the right *to complete the crucifixion*" (74, emphasis added).

The three men of the Plunkett family embody what ails Ireland in terms of politics, commerce, and crime. There is Patrick Plunkett, a TD and junior minister in the government who got his first seat as a young man largely through faking up a connection to Joseph Mary Plunkett of 1916 fame during the year of the fiftieth anniversary celebrations. Patrick's brother Pascal squats like a toad on the suburb and is the local face of the official Plunkett businesses and the suburb's moneylender. Patrick's son Justin owns a city-center brothel—"It may be an embarrassment to the government to have it open; it would be an even greater embarrassment for the fuckers to have to close it down"(34)—and runs a network for the import and sale of illegal drugs. Bolger offers the readers a close, personal engagement with the Plunkett family through the young protagonists and through the Hanrahan family. Shay and Hano experience the seamier side of the Plunketts, including the sexual irregularities of the elder Plunketts and Justin's drug-running, while the Hanrahan family is trapped by the official Plunketts. The impossibility of escaping them is encapsulated in Mrs. Hanrahan's remark after her husband's death: "'Mr Plunkett gave us credit on the funeral bill,' she said. 'But sure, the only way I could have paid him would be to borrow the money off himself'" (139). Although Hano's father worked decades for Pascal Plunkett, he told Hano as a child, "You can be anything you want, but no son of mine will ever work for a Plunkett" (139). In this, he was mistaken, but one wonders what he would have thought could he have known that his son would murder Pascal Plunkett.

Part of what makes *The Journey Home* so significant to understanding the shift from the Irish literary tradition and the crime fiction that follows is the novel's own awareness of portraying a transitional time period. Sharp perceptions of generational differences play out in the novel repeatedly, like variations on a theme. A group of children dancing to reggae music around a graffiti-covered mock Celtic cross strike Hano as "an autonomous world, a new nation with no connection to the housewives passing or the men coming home from work in the factories. And little even in common with me, though I was only a few years older than them. Because in those few years the place had

changed beyond recognition" (227). The names of the young protagonists are another marker of this transition. Christened Seamus, Francis, and Cait, they go by Shay, Hano, and Katie throughout the novel. Hano and Katie emerge from their uncanny experience in the ruins of the rural Crystal Ballroom—with its evocation of the 1950s—reclaiming and using their real names (189). The novel ends with a vision of Ireland's future as a specifically European one. Bolger's novel imagines an influx of Europeans to run things, Irish politics made an empty show, and Ireland as "the last corner of Europe, the green jewel" (292). The "chosen million Irish left," red-haired waitresses, and complaisant civil servants are there to service the incomers, and have been handed over to the Europeans by the likes of the Plunketts (293). In transitional times it is difficult to forecast the future, or even to see the full shape of the transition, but with twenty-first century hindsight we can see how Bolger's early novels are preparing the ground for Irish crime fiction and blurring the boundaries between literary and genre fiction.

Gene Kerrigan is a perceptive observer of crime fiction's development, and he offers his own history as emblematic. A long-time reader of American crime fiction, Kerrigan's initial foray into the genre was never completed. Written in the eighties, "it was a pitiful effort. It was set in America. I'd been in the States often enough to get away with setting a story there, and in those days a crime novel set in Dublin wouldn't ring true" ("On Writing Irish Crime" 80). After seven non-fiction books "involving themes I pursued in my journalism," Kerrigan found that not only was he ready to write a good crime novel, but that "Ireland had changed dramatically": doors were now open for realistic, ambitious crime fiction by Irish writers using Irish settings (80). The emergence of crime fiction in the twenty-first century is integrally connected to a changing relation not just to literary history—opening up space for serious writers to take up a genre such as crime fiction—but to history itself, opening up space for a reevaluation of periods of Irish history previously glossed over as uninteresting or unedifying. This has been demonstrated in a recent flurry of Irish crime novels with historical settings, notably the 1950s Quirke series published by John Banville under the name Benjamin Black.[1]

1. The historical crime novel is the subject of my 2006 book, *Contemporary Feminist Historical Crime Fiction*. This work includes a chapter on Irish crime writer Gemma O'Connor, whose six crime novels (1995 to 2002) preview some of the features

Kerrigan's 1996 true-crime collection, *Hard Cases*, includes a dozen cases. Of these, Kerrigan writes in his preface that "I found each individually interesting in itself. I believe that together they show us, from unusual angles, something of how modern Ireland is constructed" (ix). Although the cover of the 2005 reissue features the clichéd image of a smoking double-barreled gun pointed directly at the reader and the conventional black, red, and white color scheme beloved of true-crime book design, there are in fact few guns involved in the cases and Kerrigan's selection is unusually eclectic—a deliberate subversion of the conventional range of resolutions for true crime anthologies. Kerrigan includes some non-criminal civil cases, such as the dispute between rival Irish Elvis Presley fan groups for the right to call themselves "official," and he redefines the expected relation between knowledge and judicial outcome. The series of scandals surrounding the privatization of Siúcre Éireann and the narrative of life-long criminal Karl Crawley both, in their different arenas, demonstrate Kerrigan's thesis that the Irish judicial system not only fails to curb crime, but that it often perpetuates it and even adds its

of Tana French's approach to the genre such as in-depth psychological examination, sins of the familial past affecting the present, a new investigative character with each title, and use of fictitious places and geographical license taken with existing places, though O'Connor's feminism is notably absent from French's work. The relevant subgenre for this essay is the police procedural, and while it does not belong in the main discussion, some readers may appreciate a contextualizing note. As described by crime fiction scholar Stephen Knight, the primary elements of the police procedural from inception include a substantial police team, paired work with multiple ongoing cases, interest in the "human impact of the police," and crimes that "combine outward social credibility with an inner humanist emphasis" (156). John Scaggs notes the centrality of realism to the procedural subgenre, a realism that is "the foundation not only of the detective's investigative process, but also of the themes, characters, action, and setting" (91). Lee Horsley likewise notes of the subgenre that "there has always been within it a capacity for socio-political comment" (158). A more forceful statement of this potential comes from U.S. crime writer James Ellroy, who believes "crime writing is the only genre capable of correctly describing contemporary American society" (Bertens and D'haen 97). In a specifically Irish context, Ian Campbell Ross names crime fiction by Declan Hughes, Gene Kerrigan, and Alan Glynn as "prob[ing] the metropolitan heart of modern Ireland" (31) while Andrew Kincaid tries to define what he calls Irish noir, noting that "it is no coincidence that it came to fruition at a time when so much in Ireland was insecure" (44). As the scholarship suggests, the police procedural subgenre is well suited to realistic examinations of society, and in the hands of skilled Irish crime novelists such as Kerrigan and French it is becoming an important presence in contemporary Irish literature.

own measure of criminality. These patterns are exhibited throughout *Hard Cases*: demonstrably guilty parties sometimes receive no punishment or are actually rewarded; An Garda Síochána is shown to be misguided, incompetent, or abusive, with a variety of people brought in for questioning—some as potential witnesses rather than active suspects—dying while in custody; an investigation of the high suicide rate in Irish prisons produces recommendations of which only half are implemented within two years; and those responsible for administering the system are sometimes revealed to have their own exploits with the law such as serial drunk-driving arrests. One case that brings together several of these motifs, the 1976 murder of Vera Cooney in her home on the Strand Road, Sandymount, remains unsolved because the police forced a false confession from an innocent man, Christy Lynch. His two convictions were eventually quashed in 1980 but by then "the chances of the police picking up the threads of the investigation were non-existent and the case remains unsolved" (267).

The timing of publication of Kerrigan's four crime novels amplifies their social realism, yielding a beneficial circumstance that he has recognized. In "On Writing Irish Crime," he notes that "each tells a stand-alone story, but they cover the period from 2005 to 2011 and in the background you can see what's happening to Ireland. . . . If you wanted to see the parallels, you could; a society that comes to believe that greed is good, proud of its victories and ignoring the corruption within; a society suddenly in trouble, shifting the responsibility to its weakest" (82). *Little Criminals* (2005) captures the dominant atmosphere of runaway greed; *The Midnight Choir* (2006) exposes the corruption fermenting under the surface; *Dark Times in the City* (2009) portrays the implosion of the boom; and *The Rage* (2011) engages the immediate aftermath of that collapse. This chronology influences the sense of dysfunctional community that is conveyed by Kerrigan's four novels.

Crime fiction's Dublin is not the tourist's Dublin, though parts of it are included. When a stereotypical American tourist is held up by a syringe-wielding assailant at an ATM just off Grafton Street, for example, it confirms the victim's impression that Dublin is surprisingly "just like Philly" (*Choir* 29). Neither is it the historically aware Dublin captured in such detail by Bolger, where the past incarnations of the suburbs are nearly-visible shadows behind their current configura-

tions. In Kerrigan's novels Dublin, both city and suburbs, is covered from north to south and can be read almost like a bizarre metropolitan bus map—Swords, Glasnevin, Ballymun, Clontarf, Coolock, Killester, Finglas, Sandymount, Ballsbridge, Dun Laoghaire, Clondalkin, Tallaght—with a couple of excursions to Rosslare (*Little Criminals*) and Galway (*Choir*). The characters, events, and situations presented are geared appropriately to each location, with a preponderance of ordinary locations. The props are likewise realistic, including Cully and Sully ready-made soups in the refrigerator and Starbucks as a place to get coffee without a lecture on globalization. These emphases are consistent with much of contemporary Irish crime fiction. In Arlene Hunt's 2008 crime novel *Undertow*, for example, investigator Sarah Kenney follows a lead to Rebels hair salon, located above an Xtravision video shop and a Spar: "She hoped the Vanessa who worked here was the same Vanessa she'd heard about at the cab office. It had taken eight phone calls to locate her. Who could have known there'd be so many hairdressers in Drumcondra?" (118). These details indicate the kind of realistic Dublin captured by contemporary crime fiction, and if the investigators of QuicK are surprised by the number of hairdressers in Drumcondra, so perhaps are readers. The landmarks familiar to everyday Dublin (Spar, Xtravision) are rarely deemed worth noting in literary fiction. The name of the salon, Rebels, seems an ironic jab at older tropes of Irish culture given what the investigative team finds on multiple visits to the salon: on the one hand, a mindless obsession with hair dye, fake tans, and celebrity news; on the other, an illegal immigrant cleaner working for exploitative wages whose passport is being held by one of the criminals who smuggled her in. This job is her fate because she was judged unsuitable for the "entertainment" industry most of her fellow travelers were consigned to. Lifting the lid on banal criminality in such locales enables crime novelists to engage contemporary reality without straining for significance.

Kerrigan's four novels intertwine series character development and high-action plots to thematize contemporary Dublin. The recurring crime bosses such as the Mackendricks and the Turners lend continuity on the criminal side—the Mackendrick family is like Bolger's Plunkett family with Celtic Tiger criminal wattage—while the high-ranking garda officers and investigators do likewise on the policing side. The ongoing developments Kerrigan reveals under-

score the changing Dublin criminal landscape within and across the novels.

Exemplifying this approach, Detective Garda Rose Cheney is a notable depiction of a professional female police investigator. Readers first see her from Detective Inspector Harry Synnott's perspective in *Midnight Choir*. As they drive to interview someone named in a rape complaint, she talks about the housing market; he knows her to be "a bit of a yapper" (22) from previous work experience. A contrasting view is offered when, after a jewelry store hold up and shooting, the readers get a chance to observe her from the perspective of a shop assistant who is so impressed by her caring demeanor and careful listening that "he told her everything" (150), thus leading them to the perpetrator, Joshua Boyce. By the time she expresses her fury that Synnott's unethical shenanigans have cost the prosecution of a serial rapist ("Have you a notion of how hard it is to get a rape conviction in this country?" [340]), he claims to have done nothing wrong and it is impossible not to appreciate the moment when she says, "'Fuck you, too, sir'" (339). In *The Rage*, Rose Cheney reappears toward the end of the novel to help protect Maura Cody from Vincent Naylor's murderous intentions when the official forces have refused Detective Sergeant Bob Tidey's request for such protection. The ambiguity of Maura Cody's status as both victimizer and victim, captured nicely by the headline "ABUSE NUN IS SHOOT-OUT HERO" (210), is a characteristic Kerrigan touch.

Detective Sergeant Bob Tidey appears in multiple books, in roles that thematize Kerrigan's understanding of contemporary Ireland. In *Dark Times in the City*, Tidey expresses Kerrigan's own view[2] when he says:

> This kind of thing, it's not like some evil spirit descended on the city. We sow, we reap. Chicago in the 1920s, London in the 1960s, Moscow in the 1990s—when things change, and people have money that they didn't use to have, they find new ways to spend it. Other people find new ways to take it. Supply and demand, market forces. . . . [W]e're not the island of saints and scholars any more, we're the nation of entrepreneurs. Everyone wants to be an entrepreneur, including the psychos who run the drug business. They understand the importance of market share. They can't use the courts to enforce their mergers and acquisitions, so they use guns. (153–54)

2. See "On Writing Irish Crime."

Something has gone wrong, however, for when the next book opens, Tidey is about to commit perjury. A well-intentioned statement that he saw nothing during a pub mix up between two thugs and two uniformed gardaí has led, thanks to a mobile-phone video of the events, to the inevitability of perjured testimony. While readers may discount the significance of these apparently trivial actions, his decisions at the end of the novel lead directly to two deaths.

The larger context provided by comparing the central villains of *Little Criminals* (the "greed" book) and *The Rage* (the "aftermath" book) is illuminating. Although Frankie Crowe of *Little Criminals* and *The Rage*'s Vincent Naylor are fairly close in age, each belongs to a different generation of criminals and inhabits a different economic situation even as they share some important traits. Crowe is the more old-fashioned small-time villain Kerrigan covered in something like his true-crime piece "Dessie O'Hare's Last Stand." Naylor on the other hand embodies the new Ireland, from his concern with his appearance to his taste in music, clothes, and women. What they both share is a desire to go "big time." The mechanisms of their defeat are strikingly different, however, and in those plot developments are glimpses of Kerrigan's understanding of a changing Ireland. Frankie Crowe eludes the gardaí, escaping with the ransom money and killing Detective Sergeant Nicky Bonner; it takes septuagenarian Stephen Beckett's civilian intervention to end Crowe's criminal career by ending his life. By contrast Vincent Naylor's demise is orchestrated by Bob Tidey. Using his ability to have someone arrested and held, Tidey sets up a series of chess moves that lead from the set-up arrest of Mickey Kavanagh to Trixie Dixon's appeal to crime boss Roly Blount and to the murders of Vincent Naylor and Liam Delaney, the latter looking like "someone's been using him for butchery practice" (290). Tidey has used the criminals for his own purposes, not merely bypassing the criminal-justice system he is sworn to uphold, but actively seeking out the criminal entrepreneurs he denounced in *Dark Times*. Bob Tidey's dilemma in *The Rage* is that there is "no moral thing to do. But something still had to be done" (2). At novel's end, when his wife presses him, he recognizes as his fundamental problem that he's "not who [he] set out to be—not any longer" (292), a wisdom not likely to be attained by the Synnotts or Mackendricks of Kerrigan's Dublin. Matthew Hart's description of David Peace's

Red Riding Quartet (1999–2002) as "ask[ing] how personal ethical rot legitimates wider social crimes" (548) can also be applied to Kerrigan's crime novels. In *Little Criminals* Assistant Commissioner Colin O'Keefe remarks that "Half the world's troubles are caused by people who don't know their limitations" (160). Although he is referring to Frankie Crowe, and makes the remark without fanfare, "as though he was talking to himself," he could be speaking for the whole of Gene Kerrigan's fictional milieu—and for Ireland.

In contrast to Kerrigan's multiple perspectives, Tana French's Dublin murder squad series prioritizes one individual voice in each novel. That intense narrative perspective contributes to the nearly claustrophobic sense of place and interior space of French's Dublin, a marked contrast to Kerrigan's wide-ranging city. While Kerrigan's books take readers around a realistically observed Dublin, French is taking her readers on an alternate kind of tour: different levels of the housing market explored one book at a time. Each book is pinned emphatically to one location, with relatively little time spent at other sites that tend to be institutional (such as Trinity College) or anonymous (such as the post-divorce flats of detectives Kennedy and Mackey). While each site is fictitiously named, each embodies a recognizable, realistic type of housing. *In the Woods* (2007) is set in Knocknaree, a south Dublin suburb created in a pre-Tiger expansion; *The Likeness* (2008) moves closer to the Wicklow Mountains and takes up the Big House heritage (the house is, fittingly, torched at novel's end); *Faithful Place* (2010) is set in the working-class Liberties terraces;[3] and most recently, *Broken Harbour* (2012) ventures north of Dublin to a ghost estate, where the erstwhile Broken Harbour has been renamed Brianstown. This tight focus on locations creates a vivid sense of contemporary Dublin; that three of the four locations have great personal significance for the narrators adds to the impact.[4]

One of the notable features of French's crime novels is the will-

3. French's author's note at the end of *Faithful Place* explains that while there used to be a northside Dublin street named Faithful Place, she moved Faithful Place to the Liberties area, clearly indicating her desire to have the geocultural location of the Liberties even though the Liberties has history that she "didn't want to belittle" (437) by choosing a real street.

4. As Shirley Peterson describes it in her *Clues* essay on French, "Whether faced with the pastoral playground of *In the Woods,* the Anglo-Irish Big House of *The Likeness*, or the abandoned row house of *Faithful Place*, French's detectives confront their

ingness of the author to raise the genre's traditional uncertainty and false appearances to the level of not knowing, even at the end. As Jon Thompson argues in *Fiction, Crime, and Empire*, "The effect of the denouement in crime fiction is to reconstruct the assumed reality by restoring to it a lost subtext" (120). If the genre traditionally provides closure through explanation, with the sleuth explicating his or her logic in order to draw the apparently random and mysterious into a coherent pattern, French's novels tend to subvert that solution and destabilize any sense of restorative truth. Although raising a mystery from the past in each novel, thereby doubling the number of expected conclusions, she tends to offer either flawed resolutions or, in some cases, none at all. I would argue that the investigative failures *within* the text are related to the apparent transgressions of genre expectations experienced by readers, so that while the narrators make a mess of their respective investigations, some of the things readers never learn—such as what happened in Knocknaree in 1984 or the truth about the animal in Brianstown—ask readers to share the investigators' experience of not knowing. As Marilyn Stasio writes in her *New York Times* review of French's first novel, "even smart people who should know better will be able to lose themselves in these dark woods."

Although it is not mentioned in her biographical notes, French was a copyeditor at Hodder Headline Ireland for several years. Among the authors she worked with was Arlene Hunt, another young, female, and successful Irish crime novelist whose first book was published in 2004; French copyedited Hunt's first three books. Hunt has written a series featuring the ongoing private-investigative team of John Quigley and Sarah Kenny (QuicK Investigations), but she has also published stand-alone crime fiction titles. Her work as a copyeditor would have informed French's decision to launch her own writing career with a crime novel and given her insight into genre conventions—including when it could be effective to push the limits of those conventions by introducing elements from other genres.[5] She debuted strongly

crime scenes with varying degrees of resistance to sentiment and nostalgia, arriving at some difficult conclusions about their personal and collective history" (106).

5. Stasio's *New York Times* review of French's debut suggests that for at least one reader, she introduced elements from too many genres: "She overburdens the traditional police-procedural form with the weight of romance, psychological sus-

in her first novel *In the Woods*. First-time readers were confident that by novel's end they would know not only who murdered Katy Devlin in 2004, but also what happened to Adam Ryan, Peter Savage, and Jamie Rowan in that same place twenty years earlier. When the crime scene tech expert tells detectives Rob Ryan and Cassie Maddox that her crew found an old hair clip by the site, and Ryan nearly swoons over a flashback to "*blond wing lifting*" (28), readers are ready to make the leap. His comment to Maddox, "I think Jamie Rowan was wearing one that matched that description" (36), fusing as it does the childhood memory and his professional judgment, provides corroboration. The narrative becomes increasingly confident in its assertions that the two cases are in fact connected. As early as the third chapter readers are told that the Devlin case "looked like it might be connected to" the earlier one (32); twenty pages later that proposition is bolstered: "this case was too full of skewed, slippery parallels, and I couldn't shake the uneasy sense that they were somehow deliberate" (53). Shortly after that Ryan is down in the evidence storage room rummaging through the 1984 boxes because "the link to the Devlin case was definite" (67). As Maddox points out to their boss, "same age, same location, and right beside our victim's body we found a drop of old blood—lab's working on matching it to the '84 samples—and a hair clip that fits the description of one the missing girl was wearing" (70). Making the potential link official—that is, by devoting police resources to it—confirms reader expectations that both cases will be resolved. What readers ultimately get, however, is no resolution of the 1984 case at all. The contemporary criminals are too young to have had any direct involvement in the earlier case, and the 1984 detectives had multiple suspects—a tourist, a local with a false alibi, Adam Ryan himself—that further multiplied the possibilities. What happened in Knocknaree in 1984? No one knows. At novel's end, in fact, the narrator knows *less* than he did before Katy Devlin's murder took him back to Knocknaree: "every scrap of memory I had retrieved with such laborious care over the course of Operation Vestal: gone" (419). After the destruction of the woods to make way for the motorway, when one of the workmen tells Ryan,

pense, social history, and mythic legend." To this list I would add fairy tales and the gothic. Each of these could be the subject of an article on French's work, given the large body of critical work available on these genres.

"We've found no bones that I know of. Rabbits and foxes might've turned up, maybe; nothing bigger. We'd have called the cops if we had" (428), the information seems oddly conditional ("that I know of," "might've," "maybe") but it is the most definite information to be had. Whatever happened to Jamie and Peter in 1984, their bodies were not left behind in the woods—maybe. What is certain is that the section of woods that survived the 1980s creation of the suburb has now been completely destroyed by the motorway expansion of the 2000s.

Ryan's loss or repudiation of those 1984 memories is the culmination of many lessons he learns about memory as the contemporary case develops. He attributes a specific action in one childhood memory to his friend Peter, but his mother's version of the story has Ryan in the central role (201). Cassie learns from the surviving investigator of the 1984 events that Ryan took part in a reconstruction; Ryan is shocked that he cannot remember doing so (158). Beyond that, however, French repeatedly draws attention to lying. Seeded throughout the novel are Ryan's reminders to the reader that he is not a reliable narrator. In the opening chapter he says, "what I am telling you, before you begin my story, is this—two things: I crave truth. And I lie" (4). Significantly, he links that apparent paradox to his profession: "I am a detective. Our relationship with truth is fundamental but cracked, refracting confusingly like fragmented glass. It is the core of our careers . . . and we pursue it with strategies painstakingly constructed of lies and concealment and every variation on deception" (3). Ryan sounds this note repeatedly: "I am, as I've said, a pretty good liar" (70); "Don't let me deceive you" (138); and at novel's end, "I told you everything I saw, as I saw it at the time. And if that in itself was deceptive, remember, I told you that, too: I warned you, right from the beginning, that I lie" (409). These warnings are not simply a way to increase suspense, but they spill over into what should be straightforward factual matters. One simple fact—Rosalind Devlin's age—provides an example of how French denies readers certainty. When she makes her first appearance in the novel, Ryan calls her a girl but notes "it was hard to tell how old she was—eighteen or twenty" (46). Rosalind herself, long before the importance of her age is clear, tells Ryan she's eighteen (149). Later, when she wants to bring Katy's twin, Jessica, to speak

to him, he checks the file to see if she qualifies as an "appropriate adult": "I had found the page of family stats. Rosalind was eighteen, and appropriate as far as I was concerned" (161). Much later when they are planning Cassie's wired conversation with Rosalind, the captain asks how old she is; Ryan says unequivocally, "eighteen" (382). After her arrest, when she tells the police she is seventeen, Ryan has more to say on the subject:

> "I did check!" I shouted. "I checked the file!" But even as the words left my mouth I knew, with a horrible sick thud. A sunny afternoon, a long time ago; I had been fumbling through the file, with the phone jammed between my jaw and my shoulder and O'Gorman yammering in my other ear, trying to talk to Rosalind and make sure she was an appropriate adult to supervise my conversation with Jessica, all at the same time. . . . I had found the page of family stats and skimmed down to Rosalind's DOB, subtracted the years— (406)

When is Ryan lying? And to whom is he lying—others, himself, or the reader? French makes it impossible to be certain.

In *The Likeness* the possible criminal past of Daniel March, inheritor of Whitethorn House and unofficial paterfamilias of the group living there, is handled in ways similar to the 1984 Knocknaree mystery. French plants the seed early, tends it carefully throughout the novel, and then thwarts the expectations of readers of learning the truth. Before Daniel becomes a suspect in Lexie Madison's death, even before Maddox has met him, the possibility is raised in her speculative profile of the killer: "He probably has some kind of criminal experience. He did a damn good job of cleaning up after himself. There's a good chance he's never got caught, if he's this careful, but maybe he learned the hard way" (88). When the other housemates are telling Cassie/Lexie about the events surrounding the stabbing, French draws attention to the possibility of prior criminal history: "What did surprise me, what sent warning lights flashing at the back of my mind, was the speed and ease with which Daniel had snapped into action" (396); "Daniel had been right, about the alibi. He was good at this; too good" (410); "He was holding the World War I Webley in both hands, easily, like someone who knew how to use it" (429; in contrast to his earlier clumsy handling of the gun). His expert clean-up of the scene and his taking the gun when the housemates chase

after John Naylor—all of these things rouse Maddox's suspicions. After it is all over and the loose ends are being tidied up, this is one of the elements for which French denies readers definite knowledge. Maddox asks Frank Mackey, her former boss from the undercover unit who "handled" her placement as Lexie Madison, "what did you find on Daniel?" His answer teases: "Frank shook his head, one small ambiguous jerk, over his cigarette. 'I didn't need to find anything. I know when someone smells wrong, and so do you'" (449). Did he find nothing because there was nothing to find? Was there nothing to find because there never had been anything, or because Daniel was a successful criminal who created no record? This move at the end of the novel is similar to French's treatment of the mysterious animal in *Broken Harbour*. While murder victim Pat Spain had clearly been losing his grip on reality, there are in fact physical signs indicating the possible presence of something substantial enough to interest the police tech person's animal expert, Tom (270ff.) and then to support the detective Mick Kennedy's alternative theory that family friend and suspect Conor Brennan was faking the animal to drive Spain crazy (410ff.). At the end of the novel Kennedy says there is no need for him to review the camera footage because he "already knew there was nothing there" (418). What kind of "nothing" is this, and with what certainty can readers accept it? By creating suspense in a context where explanations are standard practice, not only does French decline to provide explanations, she does so while drawing attention to that refusal. Crime fiction has always allowed the possibility of the criminal going unpunished, but what French does goes beyond that to lay claim to some of the dark uncertainties concomitant with life in post-Tiger Dublin.

Scottish-born Iain McDowall's *Perfectly Dead* (2003) offers an illuminating parallel that underscores the way ambitious Irish crime fiction inhabits a literary frame of mind that seeks national resonance for fictional tales. Like the Spain family of French's *Broken Harbour*, the Adams family in McDowall's novel dies in a gruesome murder-suicide. Both cases feature youthful and ambitious parents who have bought into the contemporary consumerist lifestyle so completely that when things start to go wrong financially, one parent cracks under the pressure and chooses familial murder-suicide. The murderous parents receive help from an outsider to end their own lives,

though Conor Brennan's inability to finish off Jenny Spain contrasts with Alan Jones's enthusiastic assistance to Stephen Adams (he even kills the dog afterward as a gruesome bonus simply because he had never liked it). Within this common setup, however, the stories—and the thematic emphases—diverge. The murderous parent is the mother in French's novel and (more typically) the father in McDowall's, and while the Spains live in a ghost estate in a newly created outer Dublin suburb, the Adams live in a well-established upscale section of the fictional English Midlands town of Crowby. These distinctions are not coincidental, but rather reflect thematic emphases. As I have argued elsewhere, French's choice of the mother as family killer is part of her engagement with Irish literary tropes concerning mother Ireland,[6] and the ghost estate in Brianstown provides a visible symbol of the claustrophobia and isolation of a widespread sociocultural breakdown. By contrast McDowall's Stephen Adams is driven to desperation through a downturn in his cable installation business. In his determination to keep up with the Joneses, Adams turns to street drugs as a source of revenue, using the firm's books to launder the proceeds. But he is a self-justifying criminal, not a symptom of a national economic crisis.

As historian Roy Foster notes in *Luck and the Irish*, Ireland is "experiencing history in fast-forward mode, as transformations accumulate in economic practice, in social and religious experience, in cultural achievement and in political relationships, both at home and abroad" (1). The emerging body of Irish crime fiction is well-suited to capture those transformations and to present them to Irish and international readers. Gene Kerrigan and Tana French are producing significant novels that not only capture the society around them, but also represent important developments in the crime-fiction genre. Kerrigan offers an insightful description of the relationship between genre and subject when he writes that his crime novels "weren't written as an analysis of a society's rise and fall—that's not how crime fiction works. It tends not to describe a society but to reflect it. The books are about the characters and their stories, against a background of a country that's aware of its shameful past and worried about its

6. "21st-century Irish Mothers in Tana French's Crime Fiction," scheduled for publication in *Clues: A Journal of Detection* in 2014.

uncertain future" ("On Writing Irish Crime" 82). If Kerrigan and French represent two important strands in Irish crime fiction, where might the genre move next? The example of the emergence of Scandinavian crime writers illustrates one route to international influence, as successful Irish crime writer John Connolly is well aware. It will take "one writer to make significant inroads" with an international audience, Connolly writes, naming Sweden's Henning Mankell as the writer who opened doors for the Nordic influx. Connolly adds that "a certain generosity of spirit is required if the fledgling Irish crime family is to survive into maturity" (50, 51). The Scandinavians are an interesting example for their work must be filtered through the selection processes and delays of translation to reach the large U.S. and other English-reading markets, a barrier not faced by Irish crime writers. Furthermore, as the study of crime fiction continues to develop as an international scholarly field, the genre itself is flourishing in its interrelations with literary fiction. As Magnus Persson notes, using Denmark's Peter Høeg as his example, "as the literary novel has approached the crime story, the crime story has approached the literary novel" (156). Donal Ryan's highly-successful 2012 debut novel *The Spinning Heart* is not crime fiction, but it reminds readers of other, more literary Irish crimes, and perhaps suggests that Irish literature is ideally placed to produce important crime fiction in the twenty-first century whether inside or outside of the genre. As successors to Dermot Bolger and his literary innovations two decades earlier, Gene Kerrigan and Tana French are two writers who make a distinctive contribution to the international crime fiction genre *and* to contemporary Irish literature, portraying a realistic contemporary Dublin for an international audience.

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