THE IRISH CONCEIT:  
IRELAND AND THE NEW AUSTRALIAN NATIONALISM

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People say to me I should ... you know, poor Aborigines. You know, I know ... I've read Blood on the Condamine, I know that ... I mean ... I sympathise with the American Indians, I know that horrible things have happened in the past, that ... you know ... During the Battle of the Boyne my family were like bayoneted in the Streets of Dublin and Belfast and Cork, herded onto transports in chains and enslaved. Dragged to a country they knew nothing about and dumped and told this is your life, good luck. And they couldn't go home. They had no choice. They did not invade this country, they were dumped here. They weren't allowed to go back in most cases ... I mean the IRA were retreating out of Northern Ireland when the six counties were ceded, watched their families and children being bayoneted by the English, had their children stolen away and put into British institutions so they could lose their Irish accent ... I mean I rang the Irish government and said, you know, 'what would be my chances of putting in a land claim for my farm ... at Cavan that was taken from my great, great, great grandmother when you forced her off our land that she's lived on for centuries ... What people in history haven't been raped, pillaged and murdered. I mean are we going to sue the Italian government for the Roman invasion of Gaul. Are we going to ... um are we ... we can't all go back and live where we all first came from. I mean how far back do you want this to go? I mean for God's sakes ... we're in a bind. We have to get on with the future. It's too back ... yeah, stuff happens. I mean everyone's had a massacre in the past. The English have been massacred by the French. The French have ... I'm sick of name-calling. I'm sick of pointing the finger. I'm sick of saying ... well I'm black, I need help ... I know white people that need just as much help. For every one of the stolen generation children there's fifteen stolen white children.

Michael, One Nation member, Canberra'

Michael's narrative provides an example of the deployment of Ireland in the new narratives of nation generated by Australia's new nationalist movements, especially as characterised in the One Nation Party of Pauline Hanson. In the various versions of this narrative I have recorded, we find similar structural elements. Firstly, a claim is made on Irish ancestry.
Secondly, a story is told of a lost farm and the attempt to retrieve this farm through a land claim made on the Irish government. Thirdly, the narrative arrives at its denouement by condensing the Aboriginal history of dispossession and subsequent attempts to reclaim land within the greater history of Irish suffering, dispossession and the tragic impossibility of any form of redress for the Australian victims of the Irish diaspora. The mythologised history of Ireland, heavy with emotive and dramatic character, but deprived of any real historical actuality, is drawn into analogy with a compressed narrative of Aboriginal dispossession, colonisation and genocide drained of both historical and emotional content and registering only as a sub-plot, an ancillary tale of lesser suffering. The Irish narrative subsumes that of the 'lesser' story of Aboriginal dispossession, reforging a new narrative in which Irish dispossession assumes many of the features of Aboriginal dispossession. The Irish subjects of this narrative suffer the aggression of a British colonisation coloured by landmark features of Aboriginal dispossession. Real historical elements such as the taking of Aboriginal children from their families by the white Australian state, for example, enter the story as the experience of Irish Australians. Irish children, not Aboriginal children, are stolen and institutionalised by the British 'so that they can lose their Irish accent'. The two narratives are condensed and reframed in order to resituate the Irish Australian as the victim of colonisation. In this process, a series of inversions occur. In the Irish-Australian narrative suffering is brought into the present. Massacres happen in living memory, and are witnessed by and perpetrated on the narrator’s immediate family. In the Aboriginal narrative a disembodied suffering occurs at the limit of Australian history, outside human memory and human experience. In the Irish-Australian narrative suffering is perpetrated on the innocent victims of British aggression; in the Aboriginal narrative such acts are the result of the indigence, violence and barbarity of the Aborigines. Michael’s narrative is actually very unusual in that he names both his father and his father’s mates as responsible for the taking of children, but this act floats out of real time in its ‘all the time’ location.

We can see here the logic of colonial appropriation at work: the moment when the stories of the disposessed get taken up, remade and assumed by the colonisers. And we can identify the function that the generation of such narratives play in reforging a nationalist imaginary. For over two decades feminists, multiculturalists, cultural historians, theorists and indigenous Australians have gradually brought the nationalist tradition and its narratives into disrepute—recalling the misogyny of the bush and bohemian traditions, the bloody legacy of colonisation, the xenophobia of the White Australia policy and, more recently, the crimes of the Australian State *qua* the stolen generation. This erasure of traditional forms of imagining the Australian nation has accompanied a period of accelerated social change
globally. Late modernity has entailed dislocation, diaspora and rapidly changing conceptions of nation, ethnicity, sexuality, history and identity—and Australian society has not escaped this flux. The answer to these various crises, forged by the new nationalism, arrives in the form of a narrative, a meta-narrative able to stabilise these disparate experiences of trauma, and able to provide a solution as to their cause. In the new nationalism we find these heterogeneous elements—elements that seem to defy a common thread—drawn together and stabilised by new narratives that provide coherency and that enmesh an uncertain social world and its various disorders into a stable and unified ideological field. Enter Ireland, and its deployment.

This Ireland has little to do with contemporary Irish reality or even Australia's Irish legacy, but is nevertheless, a familiar Ireland, a mythical Ireland, which is constructed through the lens of the stage-Irish tradition. What is interesting about this deployment of Ireland is not its novelty; Ireland has long held a central rhetorical place in white Australian nationalist narrative. But we now see it redeployed at a time when the antagonisms it once gave voice to—between Australians of English and Irish descent, between labour and capital, Protestant and Catholic, republican and monarchist—would seem to be long superseded by new forms of social allegiance, solidarity and antipathy. In Australia's new nationalist movement, we find new forms of alliance; erstwhile National Party members, for example, working in coalition with erstwhile labour supporters. In these new alliances we find curious new ideological formations that allow hitherto opposing ideologies to find new synthetic forms; thus the confluence, for example, of nationalism and Irish nationalism. The new nationalist discourse is replete with tropes of the old white Australia: the honest white labourer besieged by unfair competition; Australia the innocent babe threatened by a debauched, perverse foreigner; un-Australian Australians opening the door to a flood of hungry and diseased foreigners; Asia as the site of pestilence. But these old elements of white Australian discourse reappear with familiar unfamiliarity. They transform uncannily into new tropes and narrative structures that belie our remembrance of the past, unsettling even those remnants of the nationalist tradition that have escaped a critical interrogation. It is in this reforging of the nationalist tradition that Ireland is called upon to restage the Australian history of colonisation, to lend a mythological rendition of Irish history as the frame for new narratives in which white Australians are figured as the victims of colonisation.

A central function of such narratives is to redeem Australian nationalism from its colonial taint. They reinstate the 'Australian' as an innocent and goodly character; a victim, rather than perpetrator of, various malevolent forces. Slavoj Zizek points out that in anti-Semitic ideology the Jew is a device that enables a series of crises—economic, moral, political and
national—to be unified into a single narrative plot in which the Jew is located within the plot as its cause. As cause 'The Jew' is a signifier that quilts the heterogeneous material into a unified ideological field; a quilting point, experienced as an unfathomable, transcendent stable point of reference concealed behind the flow of appearances and acting as its hidden cause. It is not difficult to locate this quilting point in the discourses of the new Australian nationalism. Two old and familiar figures provide both cause and solution. Aboriginal and Asian take the place of Jew and the solution is, unsurprisingly, their subjective erasure—their disappearance into the normative category of Australian. The redemption of the white Australian national character acts as foundation for this point; in order to locate the 'cause' and its 'solution' in the indigenous and alien other, the white Australian self must be redeemed. And redemption goes, curiously, by way of Ireland.

We find the same attempt at redemption, through the deployment of Ireland, in a text that would seem at a far remove from the stories of One Nation members—Tim Winton's novel of 1994, The Riders. My intention here is not to slur Winton as a fellow traveller of One Nation; I make no such suggestion. Rather, what I wish to demonstrate is that the conceit we see in operation in One Nation discourse is part of a far broader attempt by the white Australian community to re-enjoy nation; intrinsic to this enjoyment is the attempt to re-establish a destitute imaginary through the genesis of new narratives able to remobilise the traditional fantasies and antipathies of Australia qua nation, while at the same time short-circuiting the unpalatable history that has brought this enjoyment into question. Making this comparison I hope to close—a little—the very comfortable but imaginary gap that is drawn between One Nation and the rest of us; to probe the pervasiveness of Australian nationalism, and its enjoyment by a far larger community.

The Riders is, ostensibly, a contemporary re-telling of the classic tale of a fool who loves too well. The novel's central character, Scully, has lost his heart to a woman who demands of him the servitude of a Snag. Scully concedes everything to his wife Jennifer, his love for her leading him to abandon Australia as she searches for a creative outlet in Europe, dragging him, and their daughter Billie, behind her. The novel begins at the end of this journey. On the eve of returning home to Australia, a week-end trip to Ireland ends with Scully left to restore a newly purchased derelict house in county Offaly, while Jennifer and their child Billie return to Australia to sell their Australian home to enable them to re-settle in rural Ireland. But while Scully labours on his Irish farmhouse, Jennifer sells their home and makes off with the cash. She has had enough of Scully and his love-sick and hometown Australian ways. She wants European finesse, culture and civilisation and entry into its closed worlds is hampered by the big-fisted, battle-scarred, working-class
and ostentatiously Australian, Scully. The greater part of the novel is taken up by the harrowing attempt by Scully to find Jennifer, who has abandoned Billie to an air hostess and disappeared mysteriously in Europe. Following Scully, the reader is taken on a grand tour of relations between the Old World and the New. We witness Scully rubbing up against European mores and suffering the familiar Australian incapacity to make an Australian symbolic stand up in the antithetical symbolic of Europe. Scully does not defer, he is innocently democratic and non-hierarchical in his dealings with people, his friendliness is open-handed and generous, and his demeanour that of the big-bodied, big-handed largesse of the Australian bush tradition.

In contrast, the Europeans of the novel are supercilious, arrogant and, most importantly, they just ‘don’t get’ Scully; his innate goodness has no place in their symbolic hierarchies. This grand tour of Europe draws the reader into an affirmation of the Old World ‘Other’ of Australian folklore; a world in which the French are unstintingly arrogant, the English mercilessly superior and all the Europeans hostile in the face of Scully’s Australian amicability and vulnerability. The end point of the novel arrives with Scully giving up his search for Jennifer, who by this point has become a synonym for Europe and all its complexities, enigmas, snobbism, hierarchies and un-Australian ways. In drawing this opposition between a European dissembling and an Australian authenticity, Winton enters an old argument. As he has made clear in a number of public interviews, his intention is to lend his voice to the task of ‘shaking off the cultural cringe’. When the reader experiences Scully’s worldly innocence, his democratic orientation and his generosity of spirit, the hierarchies and snobbism of Europe are cast into relief by the intrinsic worthiness of Scully and, by extension, of the Australian ‘Thing’. In Australia, the necessity of ‘throwing off the cultural cringe’ has the status of an unassailable political verity. What continues to escape commentary, however, is the aggressive nationalist identification that underpins this rhetoric; an identification with an imaginary site cleared of foreign contamination, and in which Australianness, in its inherent goodness, finds an imaginary boundary; a limit in which self and other can finally be identified and where the ego can find its resting place. It is precisely this impossibility, in a culture defined by its imbrication with other cultural traditions, and by its usurpation of another culture’s ground, that makes this drive for an autochthonous culture and for an independent identity so pressing and yet so impossible. Hence the repetition of the narrative in which the moment of recognition of this identity is always on the cusp of the future and yet at the same time grounded in a mythic past. The Riders belongs to a long line of similar narratives that stage this moment when Australia finally recognises and embraces itself. Winton’s popularity is in no small part to be located in the affirmation he proffers his reader of a familiar, goodly Australian who makes a journey of self-discovery into the
rightness of his belonging in Australia. This journey goes via Ireland. In Winton’s re-enactment of the gesture of throwing off the cultural cringe, we find Ireland called upon as buttress, as ally, and as homeland.

In the very early pages of *The Riders*, Winton establishes a line of continuity in which Australia, under the sign of Scully, fits within the broader frame of Ireland. Staring into the fire burning in the ancient hearth of his new home in county Offaly, Scully recalls the fires of his youth. He sits in a house ‘older than his nation’, the task of clearing its mildew and decay before him, recalling the uprooted kauris burning for days on the newly cleared land of his family farm in Australia. It is an image with an unavoidably mythic resonance that locates Scully within the mythos of the Australian colonial tradition. Cleared land, wood fires, we can smell the eucalyptus, see the billy boiling. But we are surrounded by old archaic Ireland, by the quilted character of the Irish countryside—the castle in the corner of Scully’s eye, the newspaper clippings underfoot of an unearthed bogman, the litter of ages of human habitation. Scully reels from the strangeness of this Ireland, its foreign supermarkets, its talk of IRA bombings, its unfamiliar agedness. But in this strange and unfamiliar place Scully remembers the only Irish song he knows, ‘The Wild Colonial Boy’: a song which both epitomises the mythic colonial figure of the bushranger and carries the stain of an Irish rebel tradition. The wild colonial boy, Jack Doolin, is both Australian bushranger and Irish son, born in Castlemaine. Scully’s memory carries Australia in all its newness and difference back into the fold of old Ireland. Scully is in a world that sings his song. ‘Our’ songs are their songs, ‘our’ native sons their Irish rebels; different but the same. And this song takes the reader from contemporary Ireland to colonial Australia, gathering in passing the mythos of the Irish nationalist tradition in a colonial re-enactment of Irish rebellion, which floats just outside the present, at the edge of Scully’s memory.

As the narrative develops, so does this surreptitious framing in which Australia is given a home away from home. The novel begins and ends in Ireland. It is the safe haven Scully ventures from and returns to after the exigencies of his sojourn in Europe; but Winton’s Ireland is a strange rural arcadia untouched by three hundred years of Irish–European dialogue. In *The Riders*, Ireland is never guilty of the sins of the Old World and this opposition between Ireland and Europe is central because it mirrors the opposition that Winton draws between Australia and an alien European other. Old, but not of the Old World, Ireland floats, unattached and uncontaminated by European snobbism, unauthenticity and elitism. Winton’s Ireland is, most pointedly, an Ireland that belongs to a mythic, as opposed to a historical, past.6 As scholars such as Declan Kiberd point out, Europe has provided a conscious backdrop for Irish cultural production since the seventeenth century and has been an important source for the
regeneration of Irish cultural traditions. Even Irish nationalists such as Padraig Pearse saw the development of Irish literature as requiring contact with the ‘European mind’ in order to escape the limits of provincial Ireland. Beyond the realm of cultural production, Europe has provided Ireland with refuge (the Wild Geese), armies (1798) and the hope of political transformation (the European Union). But Winton’s Ireland seems untouched by this history. While it is set in modern time and has all the trappings of late-modernity—electricity, motor cars, the European Union and the ‘Troubles’—it remains a Fey Ireland uncontaminated by its proximity or its shared cultural and political dialogues with Europe. Replete with haunted castle and fairies, Winton’s Ireland hovers outside contemporary time, its contemporary realities screened by the gaze of an Australian imaginary in search of a homeland. The question that needs to be posed is why does Winton require this imaginary Ireland, and how does it sustain his own deployment of an equally imaginary Australian homeland.

The answer to this question is to be found in the form of affinity Winton claims between Ireland and Australia; an affinity that requires that both Australia and Ireland share the status of colonial other and this in turn requires that both Ireland and Australia are located in mythical time outside the unsettling demands of the present. Throughout the novel Winton’s central Irish character Pete-the-Post—the only sympathetic European character in the novel—is drawn into an affinity with Scully. Both the Irishman and the Australian are defined as other to Europe, as subject to European oppression, European elitism, a colonising European gaze and European unauthenticity and unnaturalness. Scully and Pete-the-Post share, for example, a bodily affinity. Scully’s body defies European bourgeois standards of aesthetic conformity:

The broad nose with its pulpy scar down the left side from a fight on a lobster boat, the same stupid blue that caused his wonky eye. The eye worked well enough, unless he was tired, but it wandered a little, giving him a mad look that sometimes unnerved strangers who saw the Brillopad hair and the severely used face beneath it as ominous signs. Long ago he’d confronted the fact that he looked like an axe-murderer, a sniffer of bicycle seats. He stuck out like a dunny in a desert. He frightened the French and caused the English to perspire. Among Greeks he was no great shakes, but he’d yet to find out about the Irish. In Ireland, Scully’s face fails to terrify. In lieu of a European horror at the bodily marks of an Australian labouring man’s life, Scully finds affinity, recognition and welcome. The principal bearer of this Irish welcome is Pete-the-Post, who we meet for the first time as:

... a long, freckled shambles of a man unfolding himself like a piece of worn patio furniture ... Beneath the postman’s crumpled cap was a mop of red hair and two huge ears.
These ears, like Scully’s hair and wonky eye, refuse to keep quiet; signifying a shared Irish-Australian refusal to conform to European chic. These two bodies, moreover, share a position in the imagined European gaze. Throughout the novel, Europe signifies an oppressive gaze, the gaze of the first world that perceives the colonised other, the Australian, as primitive, savage, uniformed; and Ireland, as we know, is the savage of Europe. Claiming Australia as the object of this gaze, Winton is demanding the shared status of Ireland as colonised, hence the recognition of affinity that greets Scully in Ireland. The Irish man seeing Scully recognises an odd but charming self. Thus Pete-the-Post assures Scully that, even if Scully himself does not recognise it, his name signifies that he is, at heart, Catholic Irish. And Scully admits to being desert Irish: a joke that nevertheless contextualises Scully in his claim on Irishness as a lost son, of a lost tribe, but nevertheless of the soil.

Similarly, Winton’s Ireland and Winton’s Australia share an affinity with nature. Throughout the novel, Scully’s memory goes by way of eucalypts, beachscapes and high blue Australian skies, a journey home in which he is written into the landscape as its rightful occupant. Winton adumbrates again and again the necessity for Scully of being in, and belonging to, the Australian landscape. His dis-ease in Europe is always premised on this ease at home, and home is always figured as landscape. What differentiates him from the Euro-centred Jennifer is this pull of the land, an irresistible force that declares itself again and again in its clarity and brilliance, against the pale washed-out, prosthetic worlds of Europe. In the fictional world that Winton constructs, Ireland alone shares with Australia this affinity between culture and nature. And Ireland alone, in all of Europe, possesses landscape. Thus Scully regards the castle below his Irish farmhouse:

He heaved himself over the wall and walked up into the field below the castle whose foundation seemed to be a great granite tor buried in the brow of the hill ... He saw it plainly now. Scully had long thought that architecture was what you had instead of landscape, a signal of loss, of imitation. Europe had it in spades because the land was long gone, the wildness was no longer even a memory. But this ... this was where architecture became landscape. It took scale and time, something strangely beyond the human.¹⁰

In this passage, Winton is drawing an affinity between Australia and Ireland that establishes their shared difference from Europe. Ireland and Australia ‘share’ a relationship to nature, to landscape and the naturalness of their belonging to it. As Sneja Gunew points out, Australian nationalists deploy the land in its uniqueness as a rhetorical device through which to launch the claim of a unique cultural identity.¹¹ Positioning the native son in a unique landscape and as the bearer of a unique identity is an attempt to ground white Australian claims to legitimacy in nature itself. Winton is drawing on the Irish nationalist tradition, reasserting Catholic Ireland’s belonging to the
soil, as a surreptitious means of grounding an Australian belonging. If the Irish have *landscape* rather than merely architecture, if they belong by nature to the soil, then by extension so does Scully. The native son, or a journey of recognition of the rightness of his belonging on the Australian soil, sees his own affinity to land mirrored in the rightness of Catholic Ireland’s belonging to the soil. Thus Australian claims to homeland take on the rightness, the unassailable virtue, of the Irish Catholic struggle against English colonisation.

Scully’s journey of recognition of the rightness of his belonging in Australia is framed by an Ireland which provides a home away from home. Ireland is represented as an ancient community that anchors Scully’s new homeland in the primordial and organic belonging of Irish Catholics to the land, and in the heroic anti-colonial rebel tradition. In this ploy, Europe and England are figured as colonial oppressors—of Australia—and the Irish rebel tradition is re-enacted long after its eclipse in Ireland. What must be occluded in this narrative, is the central fact that Australians were not victims of colonisation, but colonisers. As victims of dispossession, of famine, of the crown—and of a contemporary Eurocentrism—they are positioned elsewhere than at the scene of the crime. Recognising this, we approach the necessity of Winton’s construction of a mythical rural Ireland—a conceit that floats outside contemporary history. We could recognise Winton’s Ireland in the nostalgic and sentimental Ireland of tourist brochures, or more uncannily we could find traces of it in the mid-nineteenth century novels of Charles Lever and Samuel Lover, or in other similar Anglo-Irish representations of Ireland as a rural pastoral peopled by garrulous, lovable and harmless Paddies. One cannot help noticing, for example, an affinity between the ludicrously ungainly Irish body that Winton constructs and the Irish bodies so familiar in the novels and plays of the stage Irish tradition. How similar the farcical description of Pete-the-Post, ‘unfolding himself as a worn piece of patio-furniture’, is to the descriptions of ridiculous Irish bodies in the novels of Lever and Lover. In Samuel Lover’s *Rory O’More*, we are introduced to the body of the schoolteacher Phelim O’Flanagan: ‘Phelim was a great character: he wore a scratch wig that had been built somewhere about the year one, and from its appearance might justify the notion that Phelim’s wig box was a dripping pan.’ The central character of this novel, Rory O’More, is drawn with the same simple and crude brush strokes as Winton’s Pete-the-Post; sentimental, virtuous, honourable—if slightly ridiculous on first take.

We could not find Winton’s Ireland—Scully’s home away from home—in the works of contemporary Irish writers such as Deane, Healy, Montague or Toibin. In contemporary Irish writing, the question of homeland is as troubled and unresolved as it remains in non-fictional Australia. As Timothy O’Leary writes of Dermot Healy’s *The Bend for Home*, ‘the reader senses
that for Healy home is something for which one always yearns but never reaches. The "bend for home", the last turn in the road before home comes into view, is as close as one can get." In *The Bend for Home*, Healy investigates the pull of nostalgia for a lost home, in this instance county Cavan. Nostalgia for home, Healy warns, 'steals material from the same source as fiction, and then leaves the reality wanting.' In Winton's Ireland we experience this act of theft; we are returned to a nostalgic rural Ireland produced for an Australian readership, where nostalgia stands in for reality and fiction itself is left wanting. This Ireland is defined by its provincialism and peopled by Paddies that are recognisably those of English making and that belong on an English stage. In Winton's pastoral everything that issues from the mouths of these Irishmen fulfils some charming idyll: 'Jaysus', Pete-the-Post's first words of introduction, 'I thought it was the truth all along ... would you be Mister F. M. Scully now ... You're the Australians then, ... by God you're famous as Seamus around here already.' These Irishmen only speak in the parodies of the English stage tradition; and in this tradition they are garrulous, friendly, effeminate, their emotions ever on display, uncontrived, unmarred by the complexities, the snobbism and the inauthenticities of modernity. They have nothing in common with the often terse, bitterly black and sardonic world that emerges in Irish representations of rural Ireland, but much in common with an English colonial gaze and its deployment of the 'Paddy'.

We find this same gaze defining Irishness in the discourse of One Nation. Here the Irish have only one characteristic beyond their definition as victim and that is that old stage construction of the 'fighting Irish'. When One Nation members identify themselves as Irish, Sir Lucius O'Trigger is always somewhere just off stage busting for a brawl, and Phelim O'Flanagan is there in centre stage walloping his congregation with his threeneen. On stage at public rallies, Hanson's red-hair is spoken of as a signifier of her Irishness, of her belonging to the 'fighting Irish'. In numerous interviews this stands as the defining character of Irishness, and One Nation members identify with this trait as a signifier of belonging to a 'fighting' tradition. It remains, however, a fictional tradition, a construction of the English stage. In Michael's narrative historicity plays little role. The Battle of the Boyne occurs on a battlefield stretching from Cork, to Dublin, to Belfast. One has the sense that perhaps the place-name Michael is looking for is Drogheda, but unable to remember it he reaches for Irish place-names more readily at hand. The Battle of the Boyne and transportation to Australia occurs in the one time frame, as if transportation is the immediate outcome of defeat in the battle. More curiously, the British treatment of the Irish in 1920 relies on the military techniques of Cromwell in the seventeenth century. Just as the events narrated in the story bear no relation to historical time, their location bears no relation to real space. Michael's ancestors are massacred in the
aftermath of the Battle of the Boyne where they are to be found in Belfast, Cork and Dublin, and yet ancestrally they reside in Cavan, where they are forced off the farm they have held for centuries. They are the victims of transportation, arriving with the First Fleet, and yet privy at the same time to the secession of the six counties and the IRA's retreat, as well as being victim to the British bayonetizing, stealing and institutionalising of their children.

Ireland, it would seem, is the sacrifice that must be made in order to establish a homeland that will lend its colonial status to a colonising people. This Ireland hovers outside real time, just as Scully hovers in mythical time between colonisation and the present, and just as, for Michael, the Battle of the Boyne hovered in the same time as transportation, because real time has stories of its own. In Ireland, these are the stories of the underside of the rebel tradition, the horror bred from hatred of the other, the petty rivalries and snobbism of rural Ireland, the bitter aftermath of colonial rule and of religious fundamentalism. In Australia these are the stories we now contend with: of the stolen generation and a state-sanctioned destruction of Aboriginal families and Aboriginal culture. It is these stories that continue to unsettle white Australian belonging to the land and that nationalists seek to occlude. In The Riders we see an English colonial gaze called upon in order to continue this tradition of occlusion. In the stories told by members of One Nation we find Ireland enacted as a conceit, a fictional form at work in the world.

1 This transcript is taken from an interview held at the inaugural meeting of One Nation in Canberra in 1997. It is typical of a narrative that lays claim to an Irish heritage that repeats in the stories told by One Nation members. Michael is a fictional name.


4 Snag: a sensitive new age guy.

5 Jacques Lacan introduces the concept das Ding or 'the Thing' as an early formulation of object a. Das Ding is the lost object of the symbolic constitution of reality, the 'absolute other of the subject' the beyond-of-the-signified around which all signification is organised. Zizek, drawing on Lacan's theoretical formulations, argues that myths of nation are an attempt by a community to fill in the empty place of das Dings. Communities, he suggests, are always linked by a shared relation to this 'Thing' or towards enjoyment incarnated, and national identificatication is sustained by a relationship towards the Nation qua Thing; see Le Séminaire, Livre V11; L'éthique de la psychanalyse, 1959–1960, edited by J.A. Miller, Paris, Editions du Seuil; Zizek, Tarrying with the Negative, p. 200.

6 One only has to consider the snobbism of rural Ireland portrayed by John Montague to
realise one is fully in the realm of myth; see J. Montague, 'Sugarbush, I love you so' in A Love Present, Dublin, Wolfhound, 1997.


8 The Riders, p. 9.

9 Ibid., p. 16.

10 Ibid., p. 49.


15 The Riders, p. 16
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