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After the Crash: Post-Celtic Tiger Literature in Ireland

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Abstract

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The Celtic Tiger is the name attributed to a period of economic prosperity in Ireland from 1995-2008. However, the Celtic Tiger has come to represent a larger period and more than just prosperity because of the way that it was brought to a swift end in 2008 by a crippling recession. The effects of this economic rollercoaster are felt throughout all of Ireland and remain a nascent issue today. This thesis is an investigation of the cultural effects of the Celtic Tiger and subsequent crash as manifested through literature. First, it provides an analysis of the Irish literary tradition and how the rampant commodification of the Celtic Tiger has changed the way that contemporary critics and citizens view historically famous authors in Ireland. From these changing perspectives, we transition into an analysis of three fiction authors currently working in Ireland. The works of Claire Kilroy, Paul Murray, and Kevin Barry deal with the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath through both narrative and style. The unique ways that each author has chosen to characterize and/or satirize this period says a great deal about the cultural influence of such economic flux. These authors also represent a transitional period, in which Irish authors had previously had a reputation for looking back into the past, whereas now, authors are engaging with the world around them as it is changing. This thesis concludes with an investigation of whether or not these authors are examples of a new literary movement in Ireland and whether or not academics in the future will perhaps study a period of literature known as Post-Celtic Tiger Fiction.

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This Honors Thesis is dedicated to the memory of my

“Good Old Granddad,” Lewis Weisblatt (1921-2014)

Joan and Joel Weisblatt. William Weisblatt. Vrinda Khanna. Mildred and Lewis Weisblatt. Judy and David Alster. Toby and Edward Jacoby. Rosenda and Howard Alster. Blake, Paula, Sidney and Jules Jacoby. Nicole, Alex, Gabriel, and Jaden Jacoby-Cooper. Michael and Kevin Alster. Barbara and Alan Weisblatt. Dr. Geraldine Higgins. Dr. Paul Kelleher. Dr. David Pratt. Dr. Erwin Rosinberg. Dr. Michael Elliott. Dr. Matthew Bernstein. Dr. Chris Morash. Dr. Brian Cliff. Sonam Vashi. Frances Wright. Consul General Paul Gleeson. Sondra Reed.

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Introduction:

Literature, Culture, and *Storymap Dublin*

In 2013, two unemployed Dublin filmmakers, Andy Flaherty and Tom Rowley, decided to create an “App” that would engage the people of Dublin, visitors and residents alike, with the city’s rich literary history. This app is called *Storymap Dublin*¹ and is essentially a map of the city in which places of literary significance are marked as if they were landmarks or museums. Users can explore Dublin as a truly literary city, listening to recitations of famous passages at various nodes of literary significance. Flaherty and Rowley did not necessarily start this project because they felt that Dublin’s literary image was lacking, but rather that the public image of Dublin was no longer driven by literature: “...the lads became annoyed with all the negative press the city was receiving. The bleak tales of recession, the gloomy accounts of unemployment and the notion that Ireland’s best and brightest had emigrated... ‘We wanted to bring the charm and character that had been pushed aside by the Celtic Tiger and bring it centre stage.’...” (http://storymap.ie/about) “The lads” saw a contemporary view of Dublin that had been clouded by poor news of economic corruption and recession, as well as a depressing notion that Irish literary greats had been among those to emigrate in the wake of economic turmoil. Through *Storymap Dublin*, they sought to re-establish a public image of Dublin that was enriched and driven by literature.

Flaherty and Rowley tapped into an idea that is extremely important to the contemporary view of both Dublin and Ireland as a whole: the notion of literature as a commodity. Historically, there have always been close ties between literature and culture in Ireland; however, as Flaherty and Rowley noticed, these ties have become more complicated in the new millennium, due to

influential factors like economics and emigration. In the introduction to The Cambridge History of Irish Literature², editors Margaret Kelleher and Phillip O’Leary propose that modern interpretations of the Irish literary canon have been further complicated by changing cultural climates in Ireland and on a greater international scale:

...given the rapid changes affecting Ireland today, in particular the still-embryonic growth of a newly multi-cultural society as a result of increasing immigration, this question of creating and living with a more fluid and embracing sense of Irish identity may well be the most important new theme in Irish literature confronting the editors of the success to these volumes in the future. (Kelleher and O’Leary 4)

Based on Kelleher and O’Leary’s analysis, it is safe to say that economic development, globalization, and immigration have all dramatically influenced the way that Irish literature is currently written and promulgated as well as the way that Irish literature of the past is currently viewed. However, isolating this influence does not make its magnitude any less ambiguous or easy to define. In his essay, *Irish Literature In English in the New Millennium*³, Fintan O’Toole describes how even the word “Irish,” has been increasingly complicated by the evolving relationship between literature and culture:

The shift from solid earth to intangible air captures a widespread feeling that the word ‘Irish’ has become an airy nothing. The idea that a parody of a parody is the best way to get at the nature of Irish identity at the start of the twenty-first century makes an odd kind of sense... (O’Toole 629)

O’Toole characterizes changing contributions to Irish identity as a shift from “solid earth” to “intangible air.” Through this metaphor, O’Toole affirms a view of prior contributions to “Irishness” as being more “rooted,” as remnants of history and culture to be found within the richness of the soil. As he looks to the latter end of the transition, he sees the same definition as floating aimlessly through the air, having lost its meaning, it’s connection to the ground. He

suggests parody as a logical effort for ringing in the definition from its nothingness; however, he remains objective, not casting a strong opinion on the benefits and drawbacks of this change.

Instead, he proceeds to analyze the contributing factors as learning tools:

“...The concern with the commodification of culture is appropriate to a country that had become, around the start of the new millennium, the world’s most globalized. The trick of successfully packaging a notoriously elusive product is indeed one of the keys to the privileged position of Irish literature in the international market-place of cultural goods and ideas...the disruptions and discontinuities of a radically transformed Ireland have a history. Stories and images echo each other across time, even if it is only the call of one parody to another.” (O’Toole 629).

O’Toole makes the essential connection between the commodification of culture, globalization, and Irish literature. In a contemporary Ireland where the very nature of Irish identity has become determined by a commodified culture, it is through that scope that the literary giants of its past and present are viewed. Once traditional views of authors like Beckett, Joyce, and Yeats have become ingrained with a blunt realism that removes a Romantic element from their history and places them within the context of a modern Ireland under international observance. These authors are like industries subject to analyses, projections, and the international spotlight. They become crucial pillars of Irish global influence and essential attractions of Ireland’s tourism industry.

Once the authors of an established yet malleable literary tradition have become subjected to commodification, the question remains as to how contemporary authors engage with their literary forefathers. Do contemporary authors view Irish literary giants through academia and history, or do they look at them through a more contemporary and commodified lens?

Furthermore, do contemporary authors view themselves as a part of this rapidly changing

tradition, and how do they engage with the factors that caused such a rapid and incessant transformation?

A Public Relations Nightmare: Kevin Barry's "The Apparitions"

In addition to designing and promoting the *Storymap Dublin* app, Flaherty and Rowley arranged public recitations of contemporary works that engaged with the idea of Dublin's literary image. One of the authors chosen for these recitations is Kevin Barry, a prominent Irish fiction writer from Limerick who has achieved both domestic and international acclaim in recent years.

Kevin Barry's 2011 novel, City of Bohane⁴, received the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award in 2013, and his other two short story collections; There Are Little Kingdoms (2007)⁵ and Dark Lies the Island (2013)⁶ have met with significant critical acclaim. However, one of Barry's most poignant short pieces is one that has not yet been published in one of his collections and was chosen by *Storymap*. The short story, "The Apparitions"⁷ bridges the elusive gap between the traditional Irish literary canon and a recently globalized Dublin. The story charts the sudden appearance of three apparitions in distinct locations throughout Dublin. These apparitions are in the form and likenesses of Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, and W.B. Yeats. However, these famed authors in ghostly form do not appear to the modern people of Dublin as literary Gods descended from heaven, but rather as inconvenient nuisances, dreary reminders of a once romanticized past. With new Dublin in full view, the authors find themselves engaging with their new surroundings, while upholding the stoic sentiment that a long-dead literary figure would be likely to have:

...Beckett turned by the merest fraction to look towards the Liffey's storied waters. By coincidence, the new Samuel Beckett Bridge had lately been slung across the river, just west of Ring's End, to link the Grand Canal Dock redevelopment scheme with the Irish Financial Services Center, but let it be said

that no apparent distaste clouded the falcon-like gaze of the stout hearted old resistance fighter. (Barry “The Apparitions”).

Beckett gazes upon the Liffey with all of its indications of Dublin’s economic modernity. The Beckett Bridge has come to represent progress in Dublin, via the economic boom of the 90s, The Celtic Tiger. The Grand Canal Dock redevelopment has come to represent the dramatic failure of the housing industry during the 2008 global recession.¹ The Beckett apparition gazes upon both of these landmarks, as well as the “storied” Liffey, viewing the Dublin of past, present, and unforeseeable future. Although Beckett gives no emotional response to these symbols of a Dublin unfamiliar to himself, he begins to affect the locals by inciting curiosity among the “Dublin Intelligentsia.” However, after some time, and what Barry describes as “beard stroking” and “hand ringing,” the curious minds inside “bodies made pale from too much time in the Trinity college reading room” become bored with the Beckett apparition and it becomes “just another of those oddities of Dublin life that its people find are as well left unremarked.” Once the people show a lack of interest in the ghostly appearance of Beckett, the apparition stirs its own fate by communicating, once more, in an inappropriate form which only Beckett could deliver: “Then Beckett spoke. This occurred at precisely 5 o’clock on Tuesday Evening in the last week of November, he said, ‘Oh I have an itchy itchy anus.’” (Barry “The Apparitions”) While this

¹The Celtic Tiger is the term used to describe an economic boom that occurred in Ireland between 1995-2000. The boom was the result of high foreign direct investment and a real estate bubble. However, in 2008, during the global financial crisis, this period of supposed economic prosperity ended up causing a dramatic crash. Banking scandals and the burst property bubble led to an intense recession unrivaled by any other period since the start of the Celtic Tiger. Crashing stocks and unemployment were blamed on the corrupt banking system and irresponsible government policies implemented by the controlling party, Fianna Fáil. The European Union and International Monetary Fund subsequently bailed out Ireland for nearly 100 billion Euro. In 2011, opposing party, Fianna Gael gained government controlling using Fianna Fáil as a scapegoat for causing the crash. Since securing the leadership, Fianna Gael has worked to lower unemployment and repay the bailout loan.
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-2008_Irish_economic_downturn#2010)

communication reignites the public's attention to the apparitions it comes in the form of finding a solution to the "Beckett Problem", rather than continuing to engage in the mystery.

Dublin's reaction to Beckett's appearance can be seen as a metaphor for the relationship between contemporary Irish and the literary giants of its storied history. The initial reaction of college students and academics showing their devotion to the apparition represents an inherent literary curiosity as well as a devoted attachment to the past. However, once Beckett speaks, it becomes clear that the modern Dubliners view Beckett as a nuisance. Beckett has been dissolved into a parody of his own work, complaining about the itchiness of his buttocks as many of his best-known characters might have done. Modern Dublin does not embrace this parodic version of Beckett, but rather reels back in disgust, and calls for the narrator (a Public Relations specialist) to do something about the apparition. With Dublin and all of Ireland in the international spotlight, the ghost of an aged literary figure complaining about his itchy anus is seen as a public relations nightmare:

Now, the Beckett apparition had of course attracted an amount of international media coverage. Ireland is always favored as a source for skewy color pieces. And throughout the early weeks, Global news crews were frequently on the scene in Ring's End. The apparition was a boost to our tourist numbers, certainly, though of course, a smallish one. A ghostly visitation from an avant-garde dramatist will realistically only do so much for your bednight figures. But still it was coverage. And the authorities were now concerned that having Beckett whinging about his arsehole on an hourly basis wasn't an ideal projection of the city's literary image. (Barry "The Apparitions")

The narrator, reveals himself to be a sort of Public Relations ringer, called in to solve the issue and save Dublin's literary reputation. However, what he is really being called in to do is to reconcile the image of Ireland's internationally interpreted literary history with this irritable postmodern ghost. He has been called in to cover up that which is undesirable, and to turn what could be seen as a miracle, into a figure of profit. Just as he attempts to solve the issue, the plot

thickens and two more apparitions appear. First, that of James Joyce, taking residence in a bordello on Clanbrassil Street, raging drunk, and screaming licentious cat-calls at local Dublin passersby. The Joyce apparition is followed by one of W.B. Yeats, appearing on the Northside of Dublin, wandering the streets, asking locals for a “nodge,” a small sachet of Cannabis resin, a nod to Yeats’s history of procuring “a tincture” of Cannabis while residing in Sligo.

Thus, the Dublin Intelligentsia are faced with the three apparitions: ghostly figures of the storied, romanticized, and sometimes beloved giants of Ireland’s literary past. For Barry, this is the way that modern Dubliners view their literary history from a contemporary vantage: a drab wrinkled playwright griping about his backside, a drunken loon dangerously chasing tail, and a soft-spoken poet with a wandering mind, on the verge of junkiedom. Barry’s story is consistent with Fintan O’Toole’s remarks about how in contemporary view of Irish literary tradition, these representations of famously noted literary figures are parodies of themselves. The historical and international reputations of these authors have come into light as stereotypical, satirical, parodies of an unglamorous association between literary genius and eccentric behavior.

The “apparitions problem,” is an effective analogy for the disconnect between how certain Irish authors are read as opposed to how they are perceived in the present. While Beckett’s works are known for being founding pieces of avant-garde literature, his persona has been appropriated by modern culture as a tourist commodity. Literary figures, like statues and landmarks, have been taken as ambassadors of Irish culture, representing for global spectators, essential parts of what it means to be Irish. Just as statues must be kept clean and presentable, so too must these authors. In the contemporary spotlight, they are not judged through thorough academic analysis of their works, but rather superficial representations of who they were as artists. The specific literary merits of Beckett, Joyce, and Yeats that set them apart from other

Irish writers and even from one another are now regarded as subordinate to how well the writers represent the literary image contemporary Ireland would like to put forth. This image is an abstraction that caters to business and to tourism, and thus requires more clean-cut curating.

The remaining question in “The Apparitions” is: if these are the versions of Irish literary history that appear to modern readers, what is to be done about their seemingly outrageous behavior? How do modern students of literature and even those who merely know Irish literary tradition by reputation come to terms with these parodic versions of academically, critically, and socially beloved authors? Well, as the story of the apparitions continues, the public relations expert is called in once more to solve the problem once and for all:

...So the apparitions had to be protected by special screens and words spoken, such a gift from the other world must be protected also by being drowned out. The Beckett screen was a rendition of the playwright gazing into a Parisian mourn, outside a café, while a tape played loudly on an endless loop a rendition of, ‘I can’t go on. I’ll go on. I can’t go on. I’ll go on.’ As performed by a rotating cast of stars of Irish television and radio including the man who does the Brinnan’s bread ad. The Joyce screen was a vision of the young novelist in blazer and straw botter while a tape played the closing paragraph from *The Dead* as recited by an especially soulful actor of the Dublin stage. The Yeats screen was an image from his dope-free early 20s on the beach in Sligo as a musical adaptation of Innisfree was sung by a reformed westlife. Pronounced that the actual apparitions and their voices might yet be allowed to appear for special occasions. But no particular dates were set. (Barry “The Apparitions”)

The metaphorical solving of the “apparition problem” is a postmodern interpretation of how contemporary Ireland engages with its literary history. Those with academic and critical power choose to combat the stereotype and parody that accompanies Irish literature by turning the authors into acceptable commodities. However, by combatting and suppressing this interpretation of literary tradition, the “Intelligentsia” replaces it with equally mythic views of the literary giants; views that are more appropriate for public and international consumption.

The public relations expert in “The Apparitions,” dilutes the artists in question to the point that they are deemed appropriate and acceptable. Bits and pieces of both literature and character are pulled from each artist and rearranged in order to make for the best appearance. While the apparitions are originally characterized by their eccentric behavior, they are “cured” by the public relations expert in order to turn them into representatives that a tourist-friendly Ireland could boast of. Beckett’s unsuitable utterances are replaced by more pensive lines that represent the theme of constant struggle in his works. Joyce’s reputation for unseemly drunken behavior is canvased by memorable quotations from Dubliners⁸, one of his more accessible works. The Yeats apparition is substituted for representations of a younger, more hopeful Yeats; one who still believes in the magic of Ireland. These idealized restorations of the apparitions represent the way that a commodified Ireland would like its authors to be viewed. Barry’s metaphorical approach to contemporary dialogues with literary history matches Fintan O’Tooles’s interpretation of how modern conditions are changing the view of Irish literature. O’Toole cites the economic and cultural influences on this contemporary audience and notes how the internationality and professional nature of this audience leads to different approaches to literature. Barry deftly analogizes this by turning the issue of the apparitions into a public relations issue.

Economics, immigration, and globalization have thrust Ireland into the international spotlight, and while changing the way we view Irish literary history, these elements are also changing the way that contemporary writers choose to enter that history. Irish literature has often had a reputation for being preoccupied with the past. Irish history has several significant periods of traumatic experience: from Cromwell and British colonization, to famine and civil war. All of these experiences have become benchmark moments in Irish history that evoke an emotional

response. This emotional response has often manifested itself through literature, and has proven to be a lasting effect by remaining a pivotal part of literature throughout most of the 20th century. All of the writers mentioned in this thesis have focused on why storytelling is important and will always remain so, from giving people new perspectives to creating meaning out of the meaningless. The importance of storytelling has a close relationship with troubled history because it helps people process what has happened, and allows an opportunity for understanding, and even the chance to move forward. This thesis will proceed to investigate the ways that Ireland's contemporary culture has contributed to recent thematic and formal trends in fiction. Furthermore, this thesis will discern how these trends are being manifested by different authors and whether or not they are evidence of a new literary movement. While Barry has written works like "The Apparitions" which investigate Ireland's relationship to its literary past, he also remains interested in its future. His novel, City of Bohane, investigates the future of Western Ireland while inventing its futuristic dialect for Irish literature. Barry's contemporary, Paul Murray, has tapped into the economic and cultural causes of a shifting literary tradition and thematically implemented them in his two novels An Evening of Long Goodbyes (2003)⁹ and Skippy Dies (2010)¹⁰. Both stories show the dramatic narrative influence of an Ireland in economic flux; one that is determining its own fate in the wake of international attention. While Paul Murray uses recent economics to realistically shape his narratives into contemporary relevance, Claire Kilroy, in her novel The Devil I Know (2012)¹¹, demonstrates a different literary approach to similar issues. Kilroy also focuses on a narrative involving the Celtic Tiger and subsequent downturn; however, she chooses to display this period in a more fictionalized and mythic manner, thus representing another method of turning modern the Irish condition into literature.

¹ <http://storymap.ie>

² Kelleher, Margaret, and Philip O'Leary. *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. Print.

³ O'Toole, Fintan. *Irish Literature In English in the New Millennium*. Kelleher, Margaret, and Philip O'Leary. *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. Print.

⁴ Barry, Kevin. *City of Bohane: A Novel*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf, 2012. Print.

⁵ Barry, Kevin. *There Are Little Kingdoms: Stories*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf, 2013. Print.

⁶ Barry, Kevin. *Dark Lies the Island*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf, 2013. Print.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cbf8IryCh0E>

⁸ Joyce, James. *Dubliners*. London: Penguin English, 1993. Print.

⁹ Murray, Paul. *An Evening of Long Goodbyes: A Novel*. New York: Random House, 2004. Print.

¹⁰ Murray, Paul. *Skippy Dies*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2010. Print.

¹¹ Kilroy, Claire. *The Devil I Know: A Novel*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2012. Print.

Fictionalizing a Catastrophe: Claire Kilroy's The Devil I Know¹²

“Ah, a local historian. God preserve me from local historians.” (Kilroy 358)

How does a nation in the wake of economic catastrophe begin to cope with such trauma? In a country, such as Ireland, that is so well known for its thriving literary tradition, can a work of fiction offer any resolution to a problem that holds no direct bearing on literature? Or can fiction offer us an outlet for coming to terms with a situation that appears to have no digestible explanation or prosecutable offenses? These are the pressing and persistent questions about the Irish Economic Crisis that Claire Kilroy attempts to answer in her novel, The Devil I Know.

The darkly satirical anti-fairy-tale centers on Tristram Amory St. Lawrence, 13th Earl of Howth, a scenic fishing cape within earshot of North Dublin. After bouts of alcoholism, a plane crash, and a mysterious resurrection, Tristram has returned to Ireland following an extended period of ambiguous dispersion. Tristram conducts himself under the instructions of the mysterious M. Deauville (a double-entendre indicating Satan) who dictates that Tristram remain in Ireland to take part in the burgeoning land development schemes of Tristram's wayward high school compatriot, Desmond Hickey. Before long, various plans are drawn up, money is invested, and construction holes are burrowed into the ground. It becomes quite clear that Tristram and Hickey are acting as conduits for M. Deauville, a representation of multinational corporations, ambiguous amounts of money, and even Satan, himself. Through such elements, Kilroy has created a novel in which the lord of the underworld has acted through a faulty banking system in order to birth the Irish Property Development Crisis, a catastrophe so large that consequences remain unresolved.

In an interview with Derek Flynn of *writing.ie*¹³, Kilroy shed some light on the origins of The Devil I Know and why she choose to engage with such contemporary issues:

...I thought, now is the time to write about the Celtic Tiger, now that it's finished. So it [The Devil I Know] had started off being about the ruin of a builder...this guy, Hickey...and obviously all of us were completely unprepared for what was to come, as was I, so the more bleak the Irish situation became...the darker and more gothic the novel became...It felt like an act of journalism. I was responding to something I was hearing each day...and obviously, I'm a novelist so it doesn't come out as fact, it comes out as fiction. (*writing.ie* 1)

Kilroy acknowledges that the recession brought a swift and definite end to the Celtic Tiger, allowing a more accurate criticism of it, with its true effects having come to light. Her comments also reveal some interesting information about the way that novelists engage with contemporary issues. Although Kilroy describes her writing process as journalistic, she defines herself foremost as a “novelist,” who thus deals with issues, no matter how real, in the realm of fiction.

The novel is told through a deposition that takes place in 2016. Tristram is answering before a government appointed tribunal, some of whose members are inferred to have been accomplices in the crisis as well. The tribunal indicting Tristram is a fictionalization of real tribunals that took place in the wake of the crash. These depositions have become common knowledge in Ireland, from the “Mahon Tribunal” to the “Moriarty Tribunal,” having been publically broadcast, and listened to across the island as if they were Sunday evening radio thrillers. The narrative influence and interest of the tribunals in real life make it a clever literary device for framing the rest of the narrative.

As Tristram's inquisitors pose their increasingly pointed questions, Tristram spins the yarn of how the entire crisis unfolded, allowing Kilroy to compartmentalize a byzantine global crisis into a fathomable narrative tale. In doing so, Kilroy has created a work of literature that broaches topics that are fresh and unsolved, while portraying them in paradoxically believable

yet fantastical ways. For instance, Satan's involvement in a very real economic crisis remains a tool of magical realism; however, in a situation that poses no other acceptable rationalizations, the tool is effectively used to cause an investigation of the real forces behind the economic crisis. Kilroy approaches this by using the M. Deauville as a *fictional* embodiment of a *real* corruption of thought: “ ‘The Devil was invented by man, Dessie.’ And like the nuclear bomb, once we invented him, we could not uninvent him.” (Kilroy 254). Kilroy engages the reader in a narrative adventure in which larger-than-life characters carry out the work of the devil in order to represent the truly corrupted forces behind the Economic Crisis.

Kilroy executes her implication of Satan with certainty and consistency, culminating in a climax that curses her fictional characters to a punishment that seems poetically appropriate for those actually involved. In the introduction to *The Language of Globalization in Contemporary Irish Poetry*¹⁴ by Benjamin Keatinge, he uses The Devil I Know, to frame his introduction to the contemporary state of economic affairs and globalization in Ireland. He comments on the culmination of the devil's work and how it presents itself as a fitting end to the abuses of power and regulation: “Meanwhile, the mysterious M. Deauville, Tristram's mentor, evaporates at the end of the novel in a Faustian denouncement where all of the protagonists enter the damnation of post-Celtic-Tiger Ireland.” (Keatinge 70). Cursing the powers behind Ireland's boom and bust to eternal damnation seems like a fittingly cathartic end, despite being obvious fiction. Literature has the ability to make abstract claims, whereas political and social movements do not. A protest on O'Connell Street calling for Satan's penance would be laughed out of Dublin; however, a novelization of the same idea has the ability to reframe a realistic situation within wider and more abstract parameters.

The method that Kilroy uses has been both lauded and denounced by critics of The Devil I Know. While some reviewers have praised her characterization of the crash, others like the *Irish Independent's* John Boland have criticized the work as aimless and redundant: "The author is to be commended for confronting the hard realities of contemporary Ireland, but the book's spirited narrative can't conceal the fact that she has nothing much to say about it –or at least nothing that we don't already know from newspapers, television, radio and our own experience." (Boland 1)¹⁵. Despite differing opinions, critics are united by in their praise of Kilroy's effectiveness in employing fantastical characters, imagery and language in order to bring a complicated issue into a grounded narrative world. Steve Davies, writing for the *Guardian*, noted the power of such characters in his review: "There are no realistic characters in *The Devil I Know*, only savage caricatures. In this carnivalesque allegory of Ireland's property boom, Claire Kilroy presents a satiric danse macabre of brio and linguistic virtuosity." (Davies 1)¹⁶. Davies notes Kilroy's excess of style and liberties with realism as being effective tools for representing unbelievable figures through even more unbelievable characters in a narrative that does not necessarily follow the rules of real life.

By breaking narrative rules, Kilroy effectively highlights the breaking of the rules of economic conduct that were abused by the real culprits behind the Irish property bubble. Rampant irresponsibility among Irish opportunists and international investors led to catastrophic consequences. Furthermore, Kilroy uses the fantastical narrative in order to drive home a real narrative that Davies claims was already known, though perhaps not known to all: "Kilroy's novel is a fable whose moral we already know: Ireland, spending money it didn't have, lost everything it did have." (Davies 1). Although Davies appears to criticize the inherent nature of the fable's moral, he does not explicitly comment on the progress that her novel comes to

represent. Her novel can be viewed as a response to a necessity for catharsis in an unsolved crisis. By serving this purpose, The Devil I Know often comes to speak for itself, asserting its own significance. Contrary to John Boland's review, the fact that Claire Kilroy has written a novel based on this subject says quite a lot on its own. His criticism is based on what new information can be drawn from the novel through its narrative or characterization or commentary, but what is most significant about the novel is its subject matter. Even if the characters serve as grotesque portrayals of real life individuals, they needed bring much more to the table to have something to say. Reviewers don't seem to broach the question as to *why* authors like Kilroy have chosen to write novels that are framed around the nascent economic crisis. The narrative does not have to bring any new information to light, because its subject matter is a strong statement on its own: claiming that the crisis, like an unsolved crime, is still very much open to inquiry, and Kilroy chooses to highlight this through a work of fiction.

While the fantastic facets of The Devil I Know allow it to stand out as a notable work of fiction and an obvious commentary on contemporary Irish issues, her more grounded story elements allow the narrative to simultaneously exist within the realm of possibility. Kilroy has created a narrative that is so fantastic yet so grounded in realism that, despite its eccentricities, remains a viable analysis of the economic catastrophe. Ireland's economic downturn is an ideal situation for her to employ this method because those who have covered the situation from a non-fictional journalistic approach have had their fair share of magical allusions as well. In Michael Lewis's in-depth analysis of the crash for Vanity Fair, *When Irish Eyes are Crying*¹⁷, he notes the magical elements of an Irish mindset that contributed to the crisis:

...when nations were let into the dark room with the pile of money and asked what they would like to do with it-the Irish were already in a peculiarly vulnerable state of mind. They'd spent the better part of a decade under something very like a magic spell...[the belief in faeries] is a tactical belief, a belief that exists because

the upside to disbelief is too small, like the former Irish belief that Irish land prices would rise forever. (Lewis 177-194)

Lewis's comments about the magical thinking in the Irish psyche make it less surprising that magic is an essential part of how Kilroy chooses to fictionalize the crisis. She effectively analogizes an unfathomable economic crisis through an even more unfathomable novelization of such. The novel's realism is based on the pointed jabs that Tristram makes towards corruption and holes in Irish regulation that allowed irresponsibility to occur, while its magic is derived from the supernatural forces behind such corruption. Tristram's role as a conduit for M. Deauville involves him setting up a dummy corporation called Castle Holdings, an empty vessel through which large sums of money can flow. During some of Kilroy's more didactic prose, she enlightens readers as to what makes Castle Holdings such an advantageous tool in a time of foreign investment hinged on domestic risk:

...Castle Holdings is the treasury-management arm of a transnational corporation. Treasury-management arms of transnational corporations are permitted in Ireland to be licensed as banks in the case of most group treasury and asset financing operations, the Financial Regulator has disappplied his powers of supervision...global corporations can establish unsupervised banks in Ireland. Banks like Castle Holdings. You're routing money through the Irish State to avail a low corporation tax. (Kilroy 97-98)

During passages like this, it is hard to recall that Kilroy is the same author who simultaneously suggests that the "treasury-management arm of a transnational corporation" was ordered into being by the devil. Kilroy places elements of fantasy and realism side-by-side in order to marry both factors into a single narrative. She buttresses these more direct passages about economic responsibility with passages that share the same direct tone while adding further speculation into the cognitive corruption that spawns irresponsible decisions:

Money disrupts the cognitive process. It gums electrodes into your skull and scrambles your brain. The document was a test, I see now, of my character. A test I failed...everyone has a price...Castle Holdings was a shell company...it

returned a profit of €66 million that first year. Huge sums of untaxed money were channeled through it out to the shareholders of parent companies, which is perfectly legal under Irish tax law, as you know. I did not make the laws. You made the laws. You are the lawmakers and must shoulder some blame. (Kilroy 72-73)

While Kilroy's musings on monetary corruption (via Tristram) maintain the same pointed tone as the passages that explain detailed faults of regulation, they are actually not entirely separated from Kilroy's use of magical realism. Although Kilroy does indeed suggest that the devil is an actual figure who has orchestrated the funding for the Irish property crisis, the devil is also presented as a form of cognitive corruption. M. Deauville only communicates with Tristram via cell-phone, allowing his influence to be pervasive only in Tristram's mind. M. Deauville is undoubtedly the voice of the devil, and thus the voice of temptation. This voice is transmitted through a device representative of business and modernity (cell-phone), and the only contribution it provides besides insight, is money, another historically corrupting agent. Kilroy's novel, as well as others that I will be discussing, comments on the way that technology is used as a corrupting factor with regards to the crisis. In The Devil I Know the cell-phone and the laptop are used as literary devices that indicate a sense of corruption. Tristram's conversations with M. Deauville take place exclusively over the phone and are constantly interrupted by the sound of Deauville typing away at the keyboard of a computer: "*Tocka Tocka*. 'Indeed,' M. Deauville said." (Kilroy 99). Kilroy uses the "Tocka Tocka" throughout the entire novel, such that as the situation becomes more and more dire and the deeds darker and darker, the meaningless sound itself indicates an act of abuse and the reader knows that whatever Deauville is up to on the other end of the line, it can be nothing short of sinister.

The Devil I Know combines magical realism and satirical detail in order to offer a potential explanation or an approach towards catharsis; however, the novel would not be able to

successfully do so unless it had the advantage of being convincing. An allegorical tale that was too fantastic may not have offered such obvious resonance of the crisis, whereas a droll depiction of board room meetings and tribunals would have only served to mimic what was already being covered extensively by news divisions both in Ireland and abroad. Some of the novel's pivotal scenes derive their believability from Kilroy's use of form and description to balance out her fantasy-driven thematic elements. For instance, her use of emerald imagery maintains ties to the corruptive nature of money as well as a visual association with Ireland. Furthermore, the settings she describes with emerald imagery actually demonstrate it in real life and not just the novel, legitimizing the use of color as a literary device. In a 2005 *New York Times* article¹⁸ on suspect insurance transactions in Dublin, authors Brian Lavery and Timothy L. O'Brien open with a similar description:

Dublin, March 31 –Inside a sprawling complex of emerald-green glass towers, where derelict shipyards once lined the River Liffey, financiers have helped transform this city...they have also turned Dublin into an unlikely hot spot in a growing insurance scandal...regulators around the world have followed several trails of suspect financial transactions back to Ireland, which more than a decade ago instituted accommodating tax and regulatory standards aimed at encouraging insurers to set up shop here. (Lavery and O'Brien 1)

While this piece rather innocently makes the association between color and corruption, Kilroy, being a skilled novelist, takes the sensory notion and employs it as a literary tool:

Displayed on a board like a wedding cake was a scale model of a modern urban residential and commercial development typical of and appropriate to, say, a downtown waterside location in an East Coast US city: eight towers of glass clustered in a crystalline formation. The tallest crystal was located at the most easterly point –the hotel, Hickey's Pandora's Box...Hickey drove us to a district of the city that had not existed when I had fled. The towers were build of the same jade glass as Hickey's crystalline power generator...A panorama of cranes spanning the horizon was engaged in a courtly dance. One step, two step, swing to your partner, and part...throughout the docklands and across to the opposite bank of the Liffey. Those dollar-green towers were a contagion that had ripped through Dublin. (Kilroy 119, 138-139)

Through using such descriptive imagery, Kilroy is able to make a two-pronged attack on the structures of Dublin corruption. She achieves literary poignancy through descriptions of color and direct comparison to money, as well as suggesting a dance of cranes that could be likened to the folky “dance with the devil.” In conjunction with the emerald glass buildings, the cranes have also come to directly represent the boom and bust of Ireland’s property bubble. Both in news articles and as literary devices in novels, these glass buildings and looming cranes have come to represent a dream deferred. Kilroy reiterates her approach towards realism by introducing descriptions that actually fit the authenticity of what the Dublin riverside financial district looks like:



Famine Sculpture in front of the International Financial Services Centre Dublin

Taken by: Kaihsu Tai (Kaihsu Tai allows the use of this photograph without endorsing this Honors Thesis or any of the opinions contained herein)¹⁹

This photograph shows the International Financial Services Center located in Dublin on the north side of the River Liffey. With the famous Famine statues in the foreground, this photograph captures a poignant vision of Ireland: past and present. The statues represent the country's tragic past, while the financial buildings behind represent the greed of the present, and the uncertainty of the future. The juxtaposition of the statues and the buildings has a deeper meaning with relation to immigration. The famine (commemorated by the statues) caused 1.5 million Irish to die, lowering the population (together with 1 mil. deceased) to numbers that have never been regained. The economic woes in Ireland since 2008 (represented by the emerald glass) contributed to the largest Irish emigration since the famine. According to a 2014 article in the *Christian Science Monitor*, over 400,000 people have left Ireland since 2008. (Walsh 1)²⁰. The *Irish Times*, one of Ireland's widest circulating papers has had an entire section titled "Generation Emigration," since 2011. The section is a

...forum for this most recent generation of Irish emigrants to share their experiences of moving abroad, to vent their frustrations and offer their opinions on what is happening in Ireland...Many felt they had been forced out of their own country because of the lack of employment for them here, yet had no way to air their views once they left. (*The Irish Times*)²¹.

This section's prominence in one of Ireland's largest newspapers exemplifies how important the emigration issue is to Irish culture, specifically in the 21st century.

The photo shows the emerald and jade green glass as described journalistically by the *New York Times* and creatively by Claire Kilroy. This building, and the others surrounding it have come to represent the types of financial irresponsibility and faulty regulation that contributed to the economic crisis. Kilroy's focus on the building's color and structure as literary

devices demonstrates her attempt to bridge the gap between a fictional narrative and a realistic environment.

A major reason for Kilroy's focus on the power of imagery is the association between imagery and those who were lulled into purchasing property in failing land developments. Those who bought into property schemes like the one drawn up by Hickey, and paid for by Tristram and Deauville, did so because they were promised a certain type of image: one of luxury, freedom, yet also one of utter impossibility. In one of Kilroy's most powerful passages, Tristram reels in horror at the imagery of a housing model in one of the green-glass boardrooms and how it is being set for sale to potential buyers:

...Photoshopped women with ponytails and trim bodies toting tennis rackets. Men in shirtsleeves laughing into mobile phones...a BMW X5...a smiling blonde...a smiling blonde childcare worker...A Maserati...[an] underground car park...a surf board strapped to...[the Maserati]...roof...a glittering limestone avenue with Ireland's Eye in the background a man walked a bichon frise... a representation of at least one member of the gay community...Every last one of them was dressed for a Mediterranean summer...This development promised another climate. Presiding over it all were these green glass towers, the sun glinting off their elevations in every shot...as if they themselves were the source of the light, and very possibly of the heat too, a nuclear power station. (Kilroy 120-121)

This passage stands out as one of the most powerful in the entire novel because it is one of the most obvious intersections between satire and reality. The excess and downright insanity of the imagery being sold is sharply satirical, yet entirely true to the image that was being sold during the height of the boom and the dawn of the property bubble. Things turned sour when the money ran dry, and consumers with non-retractable leases began to realize that the images they had been sold were in fact covers for shoddy unregulated building design, faulty utilities, and unlivable conditions. Kilroy treats these middle-class victims of the property crisis with the same stoic ambiguity as the power brokers like M. Deauville, Hickey, and Tristram. They were not seen as

amiable consumers in a booming industry, but simply pawns, tricked by a façade of luxury, in short, “punters:”

He [Hickey] put on his sunglasses and sat back to contemplate the sales queue with satisfaction, watching the world go by. The punters had been living in cars for three days by then and were dazed, dehydrated and desperate. The taxi drivers, their wives, anxious young couples, their parents, nurses and guards, all lining up to join the jet set, pressing coins into our palms like medieval supplicants. (Kilroy 186-188)

Kilroy makes an effort to demonstrate the attitudes on both sides of these irresponsible housing transactions. She captures the desperation of the consumers and their desire for a suburban dream world, while also capturing the vanity and greed of the businessmen who know the truly vapid worth of the sale.

While Kilroy makes it clear that the men behind these projects, such as Hickey and Tristram, are driven by the greed of the opportunity, she also makes them somewhat sympathetic. Hickey is a drunken lout who could easily be coerced by money, while Tristram is a slave to the orders of M. Deauville. The sympathetic nature of these characters turns them into puppets and redirects much of the blame on the implied “puppet masters.” In the case of Kilroy’s novel, this unseen hand is that of the devil; however, this could serve as a viable metaphor for the unseen hands in the real-life crisis, such as the regulators and politicians who allowed such damning business ventures to take place.

Kilroy’s mission is also a sensory one: what did the boom and bust of Ireland’s property bubble look and sound like? Who was involved, who lost, and who, if anyone, won? In the interview with *writing.ie*, Kilroy talks about how the most influential writers in her life have been sensory ones, like John Banville, who pay attention to the five senses and are able to translate them into the proper construction of a sentence. In her novel, she exemplifies through instances of onomatopoeia that associate sensory information with the dark fate of Tristram and

Hickey's housing plans: "The man returned to his work. *Tap tap* with his hammer, *whir whir* with his drill as if I weren't there, an exemplar of the implacability of the Eastern European that confounds the Irish psyche to such a degree." (Kilroy 69). Kilroy's concern with the sights and sounds of the economic downturn are not entirely exclusive to novelization either. News articles about the crash tend to comment on the striking imagery of empty housing developments, unused construction equipment, and barren holes in the ground. In Lewis's Vanity Fair piece he describes a situation in the village of Keel, Co. Mayo, that bears a distinct resemblance to the visual descriptions of Hickey's construction sight in The Devil I Know:

...in the middle of the tiny village of Keel, was the source of all of Joe McNamara's financial troubles: a giant black hole, surrounded by bulldozers and building materials. He'd set out in 2005 to build a modest one-story hotel, with 12 rooms. In April 2006, with the Irish property market exploding, he'd expanded his ambition and applied for permission to build a multi-story luxury hotel... 'We went away in June of 2006...we came back in September and everything had just stopped...' (Lewis 195).

The imagery of a barren hole in the ground surrounded by construction equipment is clearly very real, and is an image that Kilroy uses in order to indict the property boom as a pestilence that struck the entire island:

Everybody sees different things when looking into an abyss. I see more than most...That Hickey was digging us into a big hole. That across the country people were digging themselves into big holes, that big holes were spreading across Ireland like a pox, eating away at the heart of the island... (Kilroy 164-165)

The resemblance between Lewis's descriptions of the Keel construction site and Kilroy's descriptions of Hickey's site stand as a testament to her journalistic approach. Lewis and Kilroy even demonstrate distinct similarities in the way they describe what these construction sites look like once the money has run out and they lie abandoned, indications of a nationwide trick that everyone had fallen for:

...the physical evidence that something deeply weird just happened in Ireland is still conspicuous...vast, two-year-old craters from which office parks were meant to rise. There are fully finished skyscrapers that sit empty, water pooling on their lobby floors. There's a skeleton of a tower, cranes resting on either side like parentheses, which was meant to house Anglo Irish Bank..." (Lewis 187-188)

"The Dart passed Hickey's construction graveyard before pulling into the station. I could hardly believe my eyes. It was all still there: the tombstone blocks with their gaping doorways, the building rubble, even the forlorn tower crane, untouched except by vandals and the elements. The Claremont site had been neither leveled nor completed but simply abandoned, stranded as it had stood the day all the money ran out, a war memorial..." (Kilroy 354-355).

Through these similarities it is easy to see the way that Kilroy's lens as a novelist works. Factual information flowed in through her ears and fictional representations of such came out through the tip of her pen. With her use of magical realism, it is hard to believe that her sensory descriptions still achieve such devilish accuracy.

Beyond Kilroy's ability to describe the effects of the crisis, is her journalistic intention to investigate who caused the crash, what made them responsible, and how they were or will be punished for their crimes. When dealing with this aspect of her investigation, Kilroy shows evidence of her unique perspective as a female author: her prose suggests that there is at least some correlation between masculinity and irresponsibility with money. The nature of these charges, like her sensory observations, are also corroborated by the reality of Lewis's observations in *Vanity Fair*. Early on in his piece, Lewis remarks that, "Ireland's financial disaster...was created by the sort of men who ignore their wives' suggestions that maybe they should stop and ask for directions..." (Lewis 175). His accusation doesn't just pinpoint men as a gender, but more specifically the drawbacks of masculine sensibility that can lead to irresponsible decisions and unchecked action. Kilroy picks up on this same idea by describing the perpetrators of the crisis as men who are ruled by their vanity of wealth and the assertion of their masculine qualities:

‘I like these guys,’ he [Hickey] decided, as if the purpose of our presentation had been to make new friends. ‘These guys have *balls*.’ Assent echoed around the table. *Balls*, these guys have *balls*, and *balls* are what we need... They liked us. They liked us guys. We had *balls*... I looked at him. He believed it. All of them around the boardroom table had believed it too. They believed that the land had changed, and that they, the Golden Circle, were the agents of this change, that somehow, by linking hands around a table, or through the appliance of their *balls*... (Kilroy 140-141).

Kilroy creates a scene in which the puppet masters of the property boom are gathered in a board room, having dubbed themselves The Golden Circle. What starts as a normal board meeting devolves into a bacchanalia of carving up maps, creating funding proposals, and popping champagne corks. All of this madness is propelled by the assertion that these men are vindicated by the energy of their *balls* and the notion that the power of these *balls* is what was going to allow them to execute their desire to purchase and rent the entire island without consequence: “McGee was proclaiming that they deserved everything the Celtic Tiger had brought them because they had *balls*... McGee’s speech was met with a round of popping champagne corks.” (Kilroy 218). Kilroy’s descriptions of The Golden Circle characterize them as exactly the kind of men who would not stop and ask for directions. These caricatures of evil men are just fictional representations of real builders, bankers, and politicians who saw no impending consequences for their actions and acted on sheer ego. Kilroy goes further to describe the accused as *men* who were driven by not just masculinity alone, but also the greed that comes with it:

And then he reeled off a list of names, Public Enemies numbers one through to six six six. Builders, bankers, financial regulators, county councilors, even the serving Taoiseach [Irish Prime Minister]... Everything was about money with the class of individual on the list. It was how they measured themselves. (Kilroy 137).

Kilroy implicates movers and shakers at every level of relation to the property business. She leaves no one unscathed, unifying all of her villains through their masculinity and greed. She isn’t criticizing these characters as a female author instigating the entire male sex, but rather

acting as a detective who has recognized patterns of vice and avarice among the male dominated cultures of Ireland.

There is no doubt that Kilroy's novel is a full form indictment of those involved in the crisis. The tribunal outline of her narrative is a representation of what the narrative itself is doing to its characters. Even her protagonist is an orchestral element in the crimes that take place, and Kilroy has stated that this was indeed her intention:

...I don't do sympathetic characters...[Tristram's] not sympathetic but he's capable of perceiving the depths of his own folly and his own culpability in what has happened. He feels sorry for himself as well, but he makes a point of realising that that guy will pay for it, the guy over there will pay for it. Everyone's gonna pay for it. (*writing.ie* 1).

Kilroy notes the way that Tristram's awareness of his own crimes hardly exonerates him from their consequences. While he knows that he has done wrong, he like the real life perpetrators, reacts by pointing the finger elsewhere, finding another group of culprits "over there." Kilroy's quote leads to the lasting questions of her novel: how are those who are responsible going to pay for their actions, and if they aren't going to than who is? In his investigations Lewis discovered something about the Irish psyche that characterizes the consequences for those involved both in real life and the novel: "An Irish person with a personal problem takes it into a hole with him, like a squirrel with a nut before winter. He tortures himself and sometimes his loved ones too." (Lewis 196). It is interesting that Lewis's observations use the word "hole" which matches quite nicely with the empty holes in the ground that represent the disastrous crisis. Kilroy demonstrates agreement with Lewis's observation, adapting it, like other realistic details, through her novelistic lens. She does her best to bury Tristram into the ground for his sins, paying the devil's price for doing the devil's work. Even Tristram's own musings on his actions cannot save him from this fate, no matter how badly he wants to be rationally punished for irrational actions.

...I'll spend the rest of my life trying and failing to get to the bottom of the other agencies that invisibly and inexorably exerted their pull, and that, furthermore, the rest of my life *should* be spent this way, that all of us who were implicated *should* spend the rest of our lives this way, examining the aftermath for clues, sifting through the rubble, though I appear to be alone in this endeavour. (Kilroy 244-245)

Despite Tristram's tribunal in the novel and the real tribunals that took place in Ireland, there is no doubt that the Irish people who paid the price during the economic downturn do not feel vindicated. While some politicians have been put to shame, and the economy has seen some degree of recovery, very few tangible punishments have been witnessed. The lack of punishment is derived from the fact that despite the abundance of crimes and abuses, it is hard for prosecutors to really pinpoint where the crimes are and how they should be paid for. This remains one of the great mysteries of the crisis, and Kilroy adapts it beautifully in a penultimate scene where Tristram thinks he is about to be arrested by a Garda, only to realize that the Garda can't find any real crimes he's committed:

“ ‘I see. So when am I going to be charged?’

‘With what?’

‘I don't know yet. That's why I'm asking you. Economic treason?’

‘That isn't a crime.’

‘Isn't it?’

The garda put his hat on. ‘I don't think so. But can I check?’

‘Would you mind?’

He left the room and I waited for him to get back to me. I'm still waiting. Everyone is still waiting. That was eight years ago now.” (Kilroy 349-350)

While Kilroy can punish her characters as much as she wants, the real life culprits mostly run free while real Irish families lie and wait in houses with shoddy construction, piles of debt, and little hope for the future. Herein lies one of the primary reasons that Kilroy's novel and fiction in general are so important in the wake of this crisis: it allows her to prescribe some sort of punishment, however fictional, for those who built holes in the ground and pushed innocent victims into them before running away. She closes her tale with Tristram's acknowledgement

that there really are no victors after the crisis: everyone lost in some way, and the price for losing is years and years of trying to figure out what happened. Kilroy's novel is just one of several investigations into what could have happened, and how the Irish are still looking and may always be:

If one thing stands out about my miserable tale, it is this: that it has no winners...I was stricken by an overwhelming sense of things coming to an end, of the torch being passed on, or not passed on, just extinguished...I closed my eyes but my eyes would not close. They would not close. I tried and tried. I'll keep trying. I must keep trying. I can only keep trying. I am afraid of what I will see. (Kilroy 361)

Tristram's unyielding efforts to close his eyes represent the incessant search for guilt as well as the search for explanation or meaning. Essentially, this is the same search that contemporary Irish are engaged in, specifically writers. With an economic crisis that has affected so many people on all sides of the political and socioeconomic spectra, a vast part of the recovery is the search for what went wrong. This search is aimed at avoiding future mistakes as well as accepting the gravity of what has happened. Artists, journalists, and novelists are at the forefront of this search, because they take on a role as outsiders, allowing them to view such situations objectively and creatively. Artistic investigations can help people come to an understanding of the past while outlining hope for change in the future.

Kilroy is a pioneer of the ongoing investigation because she has created a literary hybrid that resides between journalistic realism and cathartic fictional punishment. The Devil I Know is a modern parable where there are no winners. Those who suffer in the novel represent the guilty in real life who were never properly arraigned, and the only one with a clean getaway is Satan. Tristram walks the line between culprit and victim, claiming innocence as only a vessel but guilty by association. He represents both those who suffered in real life and those who evaded punishment. He simultaneously stands for the guilty Irish who orchestrated the crash as well as

those who stood by and allowed it to happen. M. Deauville, the devil, is a common scapegoat, a unifier between the swindler and the swindled. He is a universal enemy who can take the blame that has no rational punishment. The devil suggests that readers accept disaster without reparations. While Claire Kilroy is the first author to point her finger at Satan, she is hardly the only author investigating post-Celtic Tiger Ireland through fiction. When interviewed, Kilroy was asked if she thought she was the first or only Irish author to engage with these issues, to which she responded:

“...[Anne Enright] detailed the boom and bust and its effect on a narrator my age...I think that’s one of the first of the literary novels to respond [to the crash]. Mine is possibly the second. But I do know that Paul Murray’s on the case...”
(*writing.ie* 1)

¹² Kilroy, Claire. *The Devil I Know: A Novel*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2012. Print.

¹³ Flynn, Derek. “The Devil I Know; Claire Kilroy”. *Writing.ie* 21 Aug. 2012. Web. 28 Nov. 2014. <http://www.writing.ie/interviews/the-devil-i-know-claire-kilroy/>

¹⁴ Keatinge, Benjamin. “The Language of Globalization in Contemporary Irish Poetry.” *Studi Irlandesi*. 21 Feb. 2011: 69-84. Web. 28 Nov. 2014. <http://www.fupress.net/index.php/bsfm-sijis/article/view/14307>

¹⁵ Boland, John. “Review Fiction: The Devil I Know by Claire Kilroy.” *Independent.ie*. Web. 7 Feb. 2015. <http://www.independent.ie/entertainment/books/review-fiction-the-devil-i-know-by-claire-kilroy-26886127.html>

¹⁶ Davies, Stevie. “The Devil I Know by Claire Kilroy –review.” *Guardian*. Web. 28 Nov. 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/31/the-devil-i-know-claire-kilroy-review>

¹⁷ Lewis, Michael. “When Irish Eyes Are Crying.” *Vanity Fair*. March 2011: 174-199. PDF.

¹⁸ Lavery, Brian. O’Brien, Timothy L. “For Insurance Regulators, Trails Lead to Dublin.” *New York Times*. 1 April 2004. Web. 28 Nov. 2014.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/01/business/worldbusiness/01irish.html>

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http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Famine_sculpture_in_front_of_the_International_Financial_Services_Centre_Dublin_2006.jpg

²⁰ Walsh, Jason. “A New Great Irish Emigration, This Time of the Educated.” *Christian Science Monitor*. 15 Mar. 2014. Web. 3 Feb. 2015.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2014/0315/A-new-great-Irish-emigration-this-time-of-the-educated>

²¹ <http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/generation-emigration>

A Day at the Races: Paul Murray's An Evening of Long Goodbyes²²

“...the thing was that deep down I knew she was right, about the way everything was changing, about the new money taking over.” (An Evening of Long Goodbyes 157)

If Claire Kilroy sought to pierce the heart of the Celtic Tiger with The Devil I Know, then it is Paul Murray who seeks to make a mockery of it. Whereas Kilroy uses her direct approach to unveil the demons behind the crisis, Murray takes a step back and satirizes the lavish lifestyles that characterized the boom and bust of 21st century Ireland. Post-Celtic Tiger literature is not only occupied with providing a sort of literary catharsis for the crisis but also analyzing the various aspects of it through traditional Irish wit and humor. In An Evening of Long Goodbyes, Paul Murray crafts a deft and pointed satire aimed at an entire trend of modernity rather than the Celtic Tiger alone.

The novel's bacchanalian protagonist, Charles Hythloday, spends his days drinking away at his (recently deceased) father's estate, known as “Amaurot,” a name borrowed from Thomas More's Utopia²³. His mother has gone to a lavish rehabilitation center to regain her mental capacity, while his sister, a recent college graduate, chides him while perusing her own dreams of being an actress. In most instances, this setting would sound like the genesis of an Evelyn Waugh satire or one of many jabs at regal Britishness; however, this is the 21st century, and this is Ireland. Whereas more traditional British satires of the romantic estate lifestyle would likely have been pointed at extravagance and lack of progress, Murray's satire is focused on the world that appears to be crumbling outside of Amaurot.

After a perfect storm of plotting involving Charles's refugee housemaid, years of unpaid bills, and the return of his unstable mother, Charles is expelled from Amaurot and cast out onto the cold Dublin streets to find *a job*, a notion more foreign to Charles than any: “ ‘People don't get jobs to achieve things and learn *values!* They do it because they *have* to, and then they use whatever's left over to buy themselves nice things that make them feel less bad about having jobs! Can't you see, it's just a terrible vicious circle!’ ” (An Evening of Long Goodbyes 170). Charles becomes the voice of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland because he is cast as an outsider from his own fortunate lifestyle as well as the blue-collar world around him. Characters who are removed from sheltered societies and placed outside of their elements tend to be the best observational voices, especially when used for satire.

One of the aspects that distinguishes Paul Murray's style from Claire Kilroy's is that his approach to post-Celtic Tiger criticism is less direct and more circular. Murray prefers to satirize the Tiger by making a mockery of its stripes rather than attacking it in the open. With Charles as his voice, he is able to provide commentary on the peripheral effects of the crisis at various levels of the socioeconomic spectrum. As an outsider in the blue collar world, Charles comes to realize the despair that swept across Dublin while he hid away at his estate. Moreover, as he comes to sympathize with the characters in his new surroundings, he becomes alienated from his previous lifestyle and from the new Irish Elite. Some of Murray's most admirable work is found in the early pages where he takes such great care to establish Charles as the ironical voice of a modern antihero. This voice is vital to establishing the satirical tone that carries on throughout the remainder of the novel.

Charles's commentary while at Amaurot is steeped in complete ignorance of all affairs that exist beyond his sheltered lifestyle. He has a vague awareness that something is going on

without him; however, he can't quite pinpoint what it is, and he actively evades any comprehensive understanding of it. Charles's voice as a narrator lends itself well to Murray's agenda as an author because Charles's naiveté causes him to misinterpret his surroundings. Through his false assertions and misunderstandings, the social issues around him become subject to irrational judgment. During his shut-in days at Amaurot, when he isn't drinking or hung over, Charles daydreams of leaving society to live alongside personal heroes like W.B. Yeats and Oscar Wilde. He often pictures himself on an Island with Yeats, criticizing the blights of society from afar. His early fantasies of Yeats are resonant of the poet's early years, when he yearned for a magical Ireland, an escape from what he disliked in his surroundings. However, as the novel progresses, Charles finds himself relating to a much older Yeats, one who has given up on his ambitions, marking resistance as futile.

Charles's only real ambition is a construction project on the property: he is working on building a "folly" on the grounds. This empty effort to uphold the glory of the estate becomes a device for some of his comments about the realms of construction and money that are essential for his project. He notices activist fervor in his builders, while sympathizing with them in ignorance, figuring that they are simply crusading for causes they believe to be righteous:

The builders hadn't been in all week; possibly they were on strike, they were always on strike for one reason or another. Unlike most builders one hears of, these ones were very moral. They would go on strike at the drop of a hat, in support of the nurses, or the bricklayers or some other branch of laborer, or often on more general humanitarian grounds. 'We can't work,' the head builder would tell me... 'until the UN does something about Indonesia, it's getting ridiculous' (50)

The builders are a perfect setup to get the reader acclimated to Charles's awareness of an outside world without any comprehension of such. At the same time, the action of the builders satirizes one of the side-effects of Irish globalization: international issues becoming Irish issues. One

might ask why builders in Ireland would need to go on strike in order to support a humanitarian crisis in Southeast Asia; however, this sign of international community has become something that characterizes modernism both within and outside of Ireland. One of the most revealing aspects of this passage is the way that Charles deals with issues that he does not understand. He seems to respect the builders' interest in humanitarian issues, specifically because he does not understand them. It exposes Charles's naïveté, a character trait that is going to drive most of his observations throughout the novel.

During the novel's rising action, Murray begins to point Charles's voice towards plot devices that are more cognizant of Celtic Tiger activity. These observations concern plot devices that eventually lead to Charles's expulsion, and thus they act as a bridge between two parts of the story, inciting the reader's curiosity as to whether or not Charles is responsible for his own woes, or whether he is sympathetic in his ignorance. The most significant of these woes is the realization that their (presumably) wealthy father has indeed left the children with a mysterious paper trail of unpaid bills and taxes that are suddenly being called in. However, to Charles, this is likely just an error:

‘They’re reasonable people, bankers,’ I said. ‘And we’ve given them loads of money over the years. They must have forgotten it’s us, that’s all. I mean I’m sure no one ever lost a house because they’d put the letters in the wrong cubbyhole: that’s absurd. I can go and talk to them today. It’s a storm in a teacup, you’ll see.’(58).

Charles is convinced that the banks must have simply made a mistake, and because we have become accustomed to Charles, we know that he is not saying this to make himself or others feel better, but rather because he truly believes it. This plays off of the dramatic irony that a well-versed reader knows this is likely not the case, and his financial woes are likely the result of the financial irresponsibility that has marked the modern era. However, it is this naïveté that makes

him a more realistic, interesting, and utterly vulnerable character. We sympathize with Charles to a degree out of sheer pity for his ignorance.

The opening section doesn't just highlight Murray's ability to create a sympathetic, well-voiced protagonist, but also a colorful cast of supporting characters who help support the central ironic premise of the book. Two of these primary characters are Charles's sister, Bel and her new boyfriend, Frank. Bel is the daydreaming wannabe actress, while Frank acts as the blue collar foil to Bel and Charles: truly a man out of his element. Bel operates at a level of ignorance nearly equal to Charles, despite the fact that she openly condescends to her older brother. Upon returning from one of many failed auditions, she remarks,

‘They said that while they thought that technically my reading was very good they were concerned...that it wasn't sufficiently alive to contemporary social realities. They said I didn't have enough of a grasp on...on the *world*. You mightn't think that'd be important for an actress, Charles, but you have to; they want to bring out all the elements in the play that are like life today...’ (76).

Bel's awareness of her faults in acting do not necessarily exonerate her from what they represent. They work to establish both she and Charles as characters that are utterly isolated from the vast social and economic changes that are happening around them. The modernity that she fails to tap into defines the same world that she and Charles fail to acknowledge in all other affairs.

One of the only characters who doesn't let the Hythloday high tower go unscathed is Bel's boyfriend Frank. He is clearly the product of her attempts to widen her worldview by acquiring a true blue Dubliner for a boyfriend. When Charles and Bel become aware of their financial troubles, Frank is usually found sipping tea in the background, occasionally offering subtle jabs of input to counter Charles and Bel's frustrating lack of understanding: “ ‘Me ma was plagued by them fuckin banks her whole life,’ he said into his teacup. ‘Never had a penny to her name but they'd be sniffin after it-she used to have this joke, what's the difference between

banks and the devil?'... 'In Hell they won't cut off your heatin,'" (59). Frank's input demonstrates Murray's expert ability to establish character traits through voice alone. Frank's lines, with his foul language and anecdotal speaking style act as signs of his very different background to the Hythlodays. Frank also foreshadows the unmooring of the other character being put out of their presumed socioeconomic setting. Frank sticks out like a sore thumb at Amaurot; however, once catastrophe strikes, and Charles is expelled, he takes up residence with Frank in Murray's microcosm of a Dublin slum, referred to as "Bonetown."

Stephen Amidon, writing for the *New York Times*²⁴, notes that these early sections are some of the most powerful in establishing the novel's purpose: "These early scenes in which Charles tries in vain to protect the sanctity of his ancestral home, are the novel's best. As long as he stays at Amaurot, 'An Evening of Long Goodbyes' succeeds as a spirited howl against so-called progress." (Amidon 1). However conditional, it is important to notice Amidon's association between the novel's early pages and the "howl against progress." These pages are almost entirely devoted to establishing Charles's voice and personality. Amidon is right that this section is a vital exposition; however, he fails to realize that the seeds sewn in this early part of the novel are necessary for the impact what transpires throughout. Amidon goes on to say that, "Once Murray casts his hero out into the world...the narrator begins to lose his voice. Charles's long, improbably residency...in a Dublin slum lacks the sparkle of the Amaurot sequences..." (Amidon 1). The middle section of the novel lacks the "sparkle" of the first section, because the commentary that Charles provides is no longer concerned with extravagant settings and his lavish estate. Amidon is wrong to say that the voice is lost simply because it is aimed at new targets. Murray spends so much time in the first section establishing Charles's voice so that even when he is put into new surroundings that voice remains just as biting and ironic. In fact, the

change of scenery actually works to the novel's advantage, because it gives Charles a much wider range of experiences to color with his pitiful perspective.

Pushed from the only home he's ever known, Charles is forced to take up residence with Frank in "Bonetown," and has to find a job in order to support himself, while his mother and sister take over the cause for saving Amaurot. With Mrs. Hythloday and Bel left to their own devices, it becomes clear that their impression of saving and preserving Amaurot is quite different from what Charles had in mind. While Charles was obsessed with the manor's prestige, his mother and sister seek to save it by propelling it into the modern age as a sponsored arts center:

...if we presented ourselves right we'd be eligible for all kinds of government grants. You know, if we're helping people, and then there's the cultural diversity element too, with Mirela being from the Balkans...and aside from the money, it's a chance to put Amaurot on the map again, for it to *mean* something. We'd finally be using it for something *good*...we can give classes, you know, drama classes, for inner-city kids...(An Evening of Long Goodbyes 156).

With the women in charge of Amaurot, Murray gives Charles a chance to grow, looking in on his estate from the outside for the first time. While their plan seems righteous, the tone of the passage clearly shows that Bel doesn't truly care about the humanitarian angle of the projects, but rather preserving the mansion. From the outside, Charles is able to see what a fruitless endeavor this is, and he begins to reflect on his own vain efforts to accomplish the same thing.

Charles initially directs his contempt for the family plans as a stereotype, "The house was full of women. Anything could have happened, in that kind of situation." (Murray 166) However, with Amaurot becoming an entirely new environment, Charles begins to reach a point of enlightenment in which he sees modernity entering his home, and despises it:

...the thing was that deep down I knew she was right, about the way everything was changing, about the new money taking over. You would see them at the weekend, these new people: pale and crepuscular from days and nights holed up

in their towers of cuboid offices, crawling down the narrow, winding roads in BMWs or hulking Jeeps, scouting for property like toothless anemic sharks. What if this really was the only way to secure the house from them? I tried to imagine Amaurot as a Residence, full of babbling strangers; I pictured myself at the breakfast table, the Disadvantaged sitting across from me. (157)

Charles's fight for Amaurot is rooted in history and family, preserving the glory of his late father, and celebrating the prestige of the construction itself. His mother and sister's plans, though to a similar end, are all about eschewing the manor's historical stature for an injection of modern business and art. This passage demonstrates one of the first times that we feel sympathy for Charles. The voice that claims hatred for these "new people," is not necessarily Charles's alone, but also Murray's himself, slipping beneath the veil of satire. We take note of Murray's sympathy, and we begin to become sympathetic ourselves, thus positioning the ignorant hero as a bastion against the new age. He finds solace in older movies with characters sharing his rebellion against a new era: "This was one of my favorites...the hero...is a pilot who has returned from World War I...unwilling to take any part in the postwar boom...I confess to feeling a certain affinity with...[him]...in terms of our defiant stands against the emptiness of modern society..." (192). In his *New York Times* review, Stephen Amidon notes the hero's defensive tactics saying that, "Charles's lacerating, hilarious voice proves as effective a weapon against creeping globalism as any smoke bomb or human blockade...Charles's caustic snobbery, which Bel calls his "feudal outlook," is oddly endearing..." (Amidon 1). Although Amidon notes that Charles's efforts are certainly in vain, their lack of hope infuses his narration with humor that makes him more of a loveable fool.

When Charles moves in with Frank (and Frank's recovering junkie cohort, Droyd), he temporarily turns his back to Amaurot and casts his newly enlightened eyes on Dublin. His mind afresh, Charles begins to observe the signs of socioeconomic change that were not previously

visible to him in his castle. Frank helps him along in adjusting to the new lifestyle, in which drinking brandy in a bathrobe on a chaise lounge hardly counts as an occupation. Frank and Charles find common ground when Frank explain how he makes his living:

...evidently it was a good time to be in architectural salvage. Half the city was being demolished and built over; things could be picked up for a song and then sold on at a premium to all the people with new pubs and new hotels and new houses who wanted to give their property a touch of authenticity... 'People don't like things just bein new. They want to be reminded of bygone days and that.' (An Evening of Long Goodbyes 188).

Frank's occupation in architectural salvage gives him a greater sense of depth. While he and Charles hail from opposite ends of the economic spectrum, Frank has greater insight into the changes sweeping the city in the wake of the Celtic-Tiger. Charles relates to the customers of Frank's salvage business through his obsession with the past; however, it also causes him to question whether preserving the past is a worthy pursuit. If the "new money generation," he so strongly despises is accessorizing through nostalgia, then how is Charles any better than they are?

The more that Charles wavers between modes of society, the more of an outsider he becomes. This makes him a more effective satirist, because as he becomes more dejected from society, he is able to see things more clearly. He comes face to face with his enemy when searching for a job in Dublin. Charles's pitifully unsuccessful job hunt is one of his first battles, in which he is ironically unqualified for positions that are revealed to him to actually be representations of the new era he despises:

...it's Ireland's highly educated, highly motivated young workforce that's made it such an attractive prospect for foreign companies seeking to invest. The information-technology revolution is making things happen that a couple of years ago seemed like science fiction, and here in Ireland we've been able to put ourselves at the forefront of that cutting-edge technology. Charles, would like a mochaccino?...They might call us naïve, or utopian. But we say to them, the future *is* utopian. And we're in the business of making the future. The changes we

see around us in the city now –the new cars, the new hotels, the restaurants and sushi bars –owe their existence to the technology revolution... (204-205)

Charles's haphazard interview with information-technology recruiter, Gemma, is laid out like a sparring match between Charles and the "pale anemic sharks," of modern Ireland. Charles's lack of qualifications provides the dramatic irony that pits him against the modern boom. He sees his objection to the lifestyle Gemma is selling as the barrier between him and a job, rather than his lack of any proper training or education in information-technology.

While the first section of the book establishes Charles's satirical tone and the second section allows that tone to grow and mature in a new environment, the third and final section puts Charles head-to-head against the legions of modernity that have laid claim to his beloved Amaurot in his absence. Through the programs set up by his mother and sister, Amaurot has become a hub for contemporary theater, consequently letting in business executives as financial sponsors. These sponsors hail from the cellular corporation, Telsinor Ireland, a name borrowed from Shakespeare, positioning Charles as a sort of Hamlet, fighting for the keys to his castle:

'...This is the new Ireland, and it's all about *communicating*. It's about youth and young people talking to each other and turning over the old ways of doing things. And at Telsinor Ireland, we see ourselves as providing the equipment for creating that vision...art, so-called big business, at the end of the day what they're both about is *people*...it's about inclusivity and diversity. It's east meets west, coming together in peace and harmony, young people forgetting about the past, turning their backs on war and politics and saying, it's our turn now, and we just want to have a good time.' (300)

Objectively, Telsinor's intentions would have seemed righteous or at least well intentioned. However, by this point in the novel we have become accustomed to Charles's lens, in which the role of Telsinor Ireland is a direct representation of everything he resists. This is the final straw in what Charles sees as abuse of his beloved Amaurot, and he is determined to win back the property and save his home through a fateful day at the dog races.

The novel's climax takes place at these dog races in which Charles has placed the entirety of his funds on a (literal) underdog named *An Evening of Long Goodbyes*. The dog is competing against the favorite known as *Celtic Tiger*. For the climax, Murray throws his previous subtleties to the wind and uses the race as a sort of "final showdown," between Charles and the forces of modern Ireland. Charles's decision to bet on *An Evening of Long Goodbyes* comes after a soliloquy in which Charles recalls the changes in his own perspective, for the first time acknowledging what may be his own personal growth:

An Evening of Long Goodbyes, indeed. Put all our money on that...it appeared that the bookmakers were giving outlandishly long odds not just against proven reprobates like An Evening of Long Goodbyes but against all the dogs...bar one. This dog, one Celtic Tiger, was favorite by such a distance that a return on his victory would be miniscule...the prudent thing would be to treat it as a low-risk investment: Bet on Celtic Tiger and take the minimal return...The prudent thing: Generally –although it might at times seem otherwise –I had always done what was prudent. I had clung to things –to people, beliefs, certain modes of living. I had tried to hold them still. I had tried to shore them up against the vicissitudes of fate. Where had it got me? Everything I had tried to hold had escaped me. Perhaps the secret was to do the opposite: Perhaps to keep the things one loved one had to gamble on them; one had to give all the heart, live in the aleatory moment...I reached for the pencil and filled out the betting slip.
(367-368)

Charles demonstrates growth without giving away his own principles. He does not necessarily believe that it is futile to hold onto the past that he so longs for, but rather that to save it one must risk losing it. Naming the favored dog Celtic Tiger, the sure-thing who everyone bets on, is hardly even a plot device. Murray comes right out and says that the Celtic-Tiger is where modern Ireland has placed all of its marbles and if disaster strikes, all those who have gambled are going to lose. The excitement over Celtic Tiger is palpable in the crowd as the dog is ushered to the starting line:

It took two men to squeeze Celtic Tiger into its trap. It must have weighted a hundred pounds, consisting primarily of haunches and gnashing fangs...Celtic Tiger seemed to inspire an almost religious fervor. The punters looked to it with

the worshipful, desperate love of a parched country for the annual rains, ‘God bless you, Celtic Tiger,’ said a worn man next to us at the window, his weathered cheeks wet with tears. I realized that for these people, Celtic Tiger must be one of the few certainties in life... (368)

Celtic Tiger the dog comes to represent exactly what the economic movement came to represent in real life. A sure-thing, a fine bet, and a singular degree of certainty for scores of people who felt that they had little faith in industry and progress. The sweetness of Celtic Tiger’s confidence, only makes a more pitiful irony of the fact that the dog, just like its namesake, is doomed to fail at some point. Murray proceeds to explain the race as a high-speed parable for the contemporary economic history of Ireland. As the race is about to start, Charles notices that *An Evening of Long Goodbyes* is not focused on the finish line, but rather a sandwich being eaten among the spectators. As he is about to fill with panic, Celtic Tiger abruptly bursts its muzzle and violently latches on to *An Evening of Long Goodbyes*’s throat:

...the whole stadium was silent except for the yelps of *An Evening of Long Goodbyes* and the murderous snarls, snaps, and tearing noises produced by Celtic Tiger...[who] wasn’t even running anymore, it was being dragged by the smaller dog, who struggled gamely on toward his sandwich even with Celtic Tiger latched around his neck... (369-370)

From the start of the race, Murray sets the obvious analogies in place: Celtic Tiger, while crowd favorite, is driven by violence and excess, to the point of literally devouring the competition. Whereas, the unfortunate and battered *An Evening of Long Goodbyes* persists towards its modest goal, despite the savage attack. Celtic Tiger’s violent outburst represents the inane economic competition of the Celtic Tiger, while *An Evening of Long Goodbyes*, like Charles, carries on as a “howl against progress.” Once *An Evening of Long Goodbyes* earns its sandwich, Celtic Tiger finally lets go and lashes out at the other dogs. While the crowd is distracted by the violence, *An Evening of Long Goodbyes* begins to stir:

At first no one noticed –everyone was too busy trying to convince the renegade favorite to rejoin the race...the dog picked himself up...stood there blinking at us in wonderment...as Celtic Tiger was ushered into a cage by two men with cattle prods –[An Evening of Long Goodbyes] now wagged his tail and began to trot toward the finish line... (369-372)

The long drawn out race seems like an independent story in itself. As the crowd had once vested all confidence in Celtic Tiger, they now saw the dog for the bloodthirsty hound it was, as An Evening of Long Goodbyes overcame the odds and won the race. The scene appears as a sort of violent abstraction of the Tortoise and the Hare. If treated carelessly, the pivotal scene would come across as a trite cliché of a “dog eat dog” situation; however, Murray paints the portrait convincingly enough that it stands on its own. The scene is described over the course of several pages, with sensory details that make it one of the most believable environments in the book. The race plays a pivotal role in the plot, and Charles’s desperation is palpable. The detailed description protects the scene from being overshadowed by its analogous overtones. We celebrate alongside Charles, as he has successfully gambled against the dog of modernity in order to protect his own values and those of the past. In a brief magical hallucination following the race, Charles sees the stadium as transported in time to the golden age he has always longed for:

I saw the rainy stadium filled with men in top hats and tails, with black dickey bows and carnations in their buttonholes, cheering on the dog they’d bet against as the voice behind me mused, ‘What was it Oscar used to say? *In a good democracy, every man should be an aristocrat.* (372)

As part of the winner’s circle at last, it becomes clear that Charles’s combat against modernity really stems from a longing for a romantic vision of the past. An Evening of Long Goodbyes represents his contribution to the fight of his spiritual ancestors like Oscar Wilde and W.B. Yeats.

The novel comes to a close by revealing the personal side of Charles's longing for the past. Among his affectations, he bears a very guarded despair for his unrequited love and old schoolmate, Patsy Olé. She is the symbol of everything he has fought for, yet as they rendezvous in the novel's final moments, Charles begins to realize that their ideologies could not be more disparate. She complains about her father's financial troubles post-crash, and how he is forced to appear before a tribunal. She curses modernity for prosecuting her father, allowing Charles to realize the truly artistic and spiritual foundations of his own crusade:

'...do you know what these tribunal lawyers get paid? They get paid *heaps* more than Daddy paid himself...it's so wretchedly tiresome...' She said, narrowing her eyes in judgment of the whole civilization... 'it's this damn country...we should all just give up on this ghastly place. Move to some tropical island, and start our own superior society there. You know, we could have a beehive, and a polo ground and so forth.' '*Nine bean-rows will I have there,*' I recited absently, '*a hive for the honey-bee...*' 'What?' 'Oh, sorry. Yeats. Sorry. Had a sort of similar notion, back in the 1900s. Couldn't stand this place. Had this idea of a magical mystical Ireland, wanted everyone to come along. Utopian sort of a thing. Didn't work, needless to say. Never does.' (423-424)

Charles finds a spiritual ancestor in W.B. Yeats; however, when quoting him in conversation with Patsy Olé it seems that for the first time he realizes that the effort to fight against modernity is doomed to failure. He no longer relates to a youthful, hopeful Yeats, but rather an older defeated Yeats. The novel leaves him as a man who has not abandoned his mission, but realized its inherent futility. While *An Evening of Long Goodbyes*' racing success could be seen as a small victory, it does not fight the overarching theme that modernity is here to stay. Part of the reason that the new Ireland is so hard to fight is that it actually resembles Charles and Yeats's alternatives. The utopia that Yeats yearned for is no different than the utopia that Telsinor Ireland seeks to create through economic progress. Just like the utopia that Charles found in Amaurot proved to be empty and fruitless. It's as if Charles's rebellious dreams have been stolen and repackaged by his enemies, in order to be commercialized and sold to his peers. The novel closes

with Charles's future unclear, yet he is commendable for being slightly less daft than he began. There is no doubt that he has plenty to think about as he continues to come of age.

Paul Murray's An Evening of Long Goodbyes is ultimately an exercise in creating the perfect character to satirize a generation. In Charles, he provides readers with a leader who is equally despicable and praiseworthy. The more of an outsider Charles becomes, the more pointed his perspective becomes. As an author, Paul Murray is an obvious observer, an artist at the periphery of society. He uses Charles as his voice for his own objective observations on a contemporary society that appears to have gone slightly mad. Seven years after An Evening of Long Goodbyes, Murray published his sophomore novel, Skippy Dies. In an interview with *Irish America*²⁵, Murray shared his thoughts on how Skippy Dies is a thematic follow-up to his first novel; however, with an entirely new toolkit of literary devices to create the narrative. "My first book was a first-person narrative so everything was tied together by a single voice. But it was also limiting because this one character couldn't really express all the things you might want him to see and feel... When I came to the second book I really wanted to write in the third person; I wanted to go to different places..." (*Irish America* 1). With Skippy Dies, Murray sets his sights on a generation slightly younger than Charles's. These are the children of the Celtic-Tiger, those who have only known Ireland in brief periods of great prosperity and great loss. As younger characters, they are not convicted enough to be warriors against modernity, like Charles. They bear their similar naïveté, stemming from their young age, but they represent a new generation, one searching for understanding and growth, without being provided the answers they deserve.

Superstory Theory: Paul Murray's Skippy Dies²⁶

“ ‘For in some ways, is our modern way of life not comparable to one of these doughnuts?’”
(Skippy Dies 468)

Post-Celtic Tiger literature does not necessarily have a preoccupation with contemporary economic climates, but rather the larger influence of cultural changes in Ireland. Paul Murray's second novel, Skippy Dies, is one of the most comprehensive investigations of peripheral cultural changes in the post-Celtic Tiger era. The novel takes place at a prestigious south-Dublin school for boys, effectively capturing what it's like to come of age in contemporary Ireland. In an interview with *Irish America*, Paul Murray elaborated on why he felt that this demographic was a prime case-study of the modern era:

...I would argue, teenagers are the ones who experience the changes in a society most directly. What we adults experience as a change, they experience as a reality. In the 90s and 2000s, Ireland changed really drastically. The morality imposed by the church was overturned and was replaced by this new, very materialistic kind of thinking. Many people were at sea in this new kind of world, but for their kids these changes were presented as established, finished facts. It was the Celtic Tiger, and the kids of this generation were known as the 'tiger cubs.' They were the first generation...in Irish history that had never known widespread poverty...all those things that had haunted Irish society for the last one hundred years didn't exist for them. Then the way they thought the world worked turned out to be a total fiction and now they're the ones who have to bear the brunt of that. I found school to be a really interesting way of looking at all the crazy changes. (*Irish America* 1)

One of the strongest statements drawn from this interview is that Murray acknowledges the vast changes Ireland experience around the turn of the century. These changes were interpreted through economics and business to educated adults; however, to children they were accepted as inherent replacements of more traditional Irish history. Once the Celtic Tiger ended, the fictitious veil of prosperity was pulled away from an entire generation who knew nothing outside of it. By setting Skippy Dies at a school, Murray is able to investigate both sides of this change. Through the faculty and school administration, he analyzes the way that adults implemented the necessary

changes, whereas with the students, he analyzes the way that these changes were manifested as a lack of guidance during a pivotal period of growth.

Skippy Dies reveals its climactic moment in both the title and opening pages of the novel. 14 year-old student, Daniel “Skippy” Juster and his roommate Ruprecht van Doren are having a doughnut eating contest when Skippy collapses to the ground, scribing the words, “Tell Lori...” in jelly on the floor before dying. From this point, the novel is set up as a non-traditional detective story. Readers are instantly plagued by questions about how and why Skippy met his demise, who Lori is, and what she is to be told. When removed from the narrative, these questions seem trivial; however, like many of the affairs of a 14-year old boy, the most trivial things seem to be life-changing, and for Skippy, life-ending. After the brief prologue, the novel backtracks several months to establish the characters and setting, with these vital questions never far from the narrative.

As with An Evening of Long Goodbyes, structure is extremely important to the narrative in Skippy Dies. The novel is neatly split into three sections: “Hopeland,” “Heartland,” and “Ghostland.” These sections all have a similar sub-structure, with paragraphs moving from character to character, student and adult alike, all leading up to climaxes that bridge the sections. The bridge between “Heartland” and “Ghostland” is a more detailed recollection of the prologue demonstrating Skippy’s demise. This narrative structure is pivotal in Murray’s efforts to tell a story that is both a sprawling epic and an intimate character study. Certain releases of Skippy Dies even highlight the importance of these sections by publishing the book divided into three volumes, each containing one of the designated sections. By the novel’s conclusion, it is clear that Murray’s attention to structural detail is also aligned with his narrative ambitions. While the story is both a coming of age tale and a mystery, by the end it’s really a story about storytelling.

Murray and his characters have a fascination with history and memory especially in the wake of trauma. For the characters in the novel, this trauma involves the death of a student, but for the novel and Ireland overall, the trauma is the Ireland's larger transition into a modern era.

Murray is justified in saving his overt ideas on storytelling for the conclusion because progress and scope are important facets of his conclusion. For instance, with the Celtic Tiger, conclusions could not be drawn until the entire spectrum was revealed. An analysis of modern Ireland during the boom is drastically different from one delivered several years after the crash. For the bulk of the novel, the narrative is heavily invested in characters and settings rather than conclusions. Murray crafts each of these characters with great care and detail, while pulling them together through a singular setting, Seabrook College. The main cast includes male students Skippy, Ruprecht, and their posse of immature testosterone tanks, Mario, Dennis, Geoff, and Jeekers. However, this gang only represents one of the perspectives in the story. There is also Carl, the school bully and drug dealer with a troubled home life, and Lori, an equally disturbed student at Seabrook's sister school, St. Brigids. On the adult side, we learn about various faculty members through the perspective of Howard "the coward" Fallon, a former Seabrook student, who has returned as a history teacher after a brief stint working at a London financial institution. Howard and his colleagues represent what the book dubs the age of the "kidult." The Kidult is proposed as a product of modernity that has adults seeking answers to the same questions as their younger counterparts. This notion makes for an interesting parallel between the storylines of students and faculty. As Skippy swoons for his seemingly unachievable co-ed Lori, Howard so too sets his sights on the titillating new substitute teacher, Aurelie. We come to question whether the students will ever be able to achieve catharsis or reach conclusions if their adult counterparts are still struggling with the very same issues. The novel questions maturity, and whether or not

children aren't striving for it, or aren't being given the opportunity to achieve it. With Howard's return to Seabrook, he is granted a second chance at these unanswered mysteries, and through his perspective, we are able to investigate whether the students, faculty, or both are the cause of the problem.

Seabrook College is an interesting setting for Murray to toy with because it is the locus for most of the activity in the novel. Unlike the settings in An Evening of Long Goodbyes, it is harder to achieve architectural or cultural differences within a single location. In his previous novel, Murray was able to juxtapose the lavish and isolated Amaurot with the rundown and cramped streets of Bonetown. However, juxtapositions between places remains equally important in Skippy Dies, regardless of the narrative's centralized setting. Rather than creating differences in physical place, Murray divides Seabrook into places that are colored by the types of inhabitants who occupy them. By switching between character perspectives, he is able to explore the wide variety of lenses through which Seabrook can be viewed. To Skippy, Ruprecht, and the other boys it is both kingdom and cage: they roam the grounds freely, while peeking over the walls and out of the windows, thirsty for glances at St. Brigids girls. For Howard and the other faculty, Seabrook is a transient place, one that represents a liminal period between "old" and "new" Ireland. For the religious leaders, The Holy Paraclete Fathers, it is a castle under siege, an institution of tradition and value that is under attack by a new era.

Undertones of a battle between religious traditionalism and modernism are central to the various aspects of Seabrook life. Paul Murray has noted the importance of these clashing ideologies in interviews, saying that they are key parts of contemporary change in Ireland: "The morality imposed by the church was overturned and was replaced by this new, very materialistic kind of thinking..." (*Irish America* 1). Murray's thoughts on this conflict are manifested through

the undertones of the novel, and sometimes overtly referenced by characters. The novel starts during a politically fueled staff change at Seabrook where power has been taken away from The Holy Paraclete Fathers:

The priests are not immortal. The Holy Paraclete Fathers are experiencing the same problem as every other Catholic order: they are dying out...when the school principal, Father Desmond Furlong, fell ill at the beginning of September, it was a layman –economic teacher Gregory L. Costigan –who took the reins, for the first time in Seabrook’s history.” (Skippy Dies 13).

The specification that an *economics* teacher has taken the reins is no accident, but rather Murray’s way of analogizing changing power in the modern era. A shift from traditional religious values to values driven by wealth and business are extremely influential in the realm of education. By creating this undertone, Murray uses Seabrook as a microcosm for all of Ireland, in which noticeable changes are taking place.

Murray doesn’t always keep thoughts about moral redirection on the back burner. Certain characters make direct references to these issues, establishing a potent air of power struggles and shifting morals. When the newly appointed acting principle (known as “The Automator”) argues to one of Seabrook’s seasoned religious leaders that times have changed, Father Green responds with a biting criticism of the lack of religious moral influence on new generations:

Ah yes. Go easy: the motto of the age. For these children, as for their parents, everything must be easy. It is their entitlement, it is their *right*, and anything that infringes on it, anything that requires them to lift themselves even momentarily from their cosy stupor, is *wrong*. They will live their lives without ever knowing want or hardship, and they will take this as no more than their due, sanctioned, somewhere in the vaporous satellite-strewn heavens, by the same amorphous god who brings them Swedish furniture and four-wheel-drive jeeps, who appears when summoned for weddings and christenings. A kindly, twinkle-eyed God. An *easy* God. (114)

The crisis that Father Green brings to light is not actually about a society of godlessness, but rather a society that has readjusted its moral scale to fit materialistic desires. The way that

Murray italicizes “right” and “wrong,” is a direct call on the way that religious morality used to determine the definitions of those words, specifically in Ireland. Entitlement has become right, and inconvenience has become wrong. Green blames the parents, the Celtic-Tiger generation, for accepting this moral perversion and thus providing their children, the tiger cubs, with a society that has no knowledge of hardship and no value for work ethic. While Father Green represents a generation of disenfranchised religious leaders from pre-Celtic Tiger scandals, he makes a strong argument against the opulent easy going morality of modern life in Ireland. This lack of moral guidance is a strong contributor to the helplessness of the children and the cluelessness of the faculty in how to help.

Howard is frequently used as a conduit between these two generations. He represents one of the last generations to have been influenced by more religious based morality, yet he finds himself at sea even in adulthood. When he sees the confusion that plagues his students, he wants to help them but fails to understand the new world they live in, from their short attention spans to their misguided aspirations. A colleague remarks to Howard:

‘That’s History. This is Biology. These kids are fourteen. Biology courses through their veins. Biology and marketing...they’ve got broadband at home. They probably know more about sex than I do...they want to hear it confirmed officially that for all our talk, the adult world and their subterranean sex-obsessed porno-world are basically the same, and no matter what else we teach them about kings or molecules or trade models or whatever, civilization ultimately boils down to the same frenzied attempt to hump people. The world, in short, is teenaged.’
(63)

Howard finds himself lost, determining whether or not his perspective has changed because he is an adult and his pupils are teenaged, or because they are truly growing up in a world that is different than the one he grew up in. He begins to realize that his colleague is right, and that it’s actually a combination of both. The price of modernity has caused a fusion between the worlds of adults and children in which there are primal links of confusion and sexual frustration.

What Howard observes in his students is really a manifestation of the same observations made by Father Green. The students aren't necessarily at fault, because it is the Celtic-Tiger generation before them that has infused them with faulty goals and morals. A society that is plagued by marketing and mass-media has turned them into bodies that are highly selective about what they hear and think, all of it hinging on whether or not it contributes to their childlike dreams:

Credibility is not the issue for these boys that it might have been for previous generations. A lot of contentious arguments have been resolved in the last decade, a lot of old ideas swept away; it is now universally acknowledged that celebrity is the one goal truly worth pursuing. Magazine covers, marketing deals, artificially whitened smiles, waving from behind barriers at the raving anonymous multitude –this is the zenith of a world now uncluttered by spirituality and anything you do to get there is considered legitimate. (277)

Passages like this, presented through third person narration from Murray, are infused with flaming bitterness and cynicism. We can feel Murray's anger and frustration at a generation of overgrown children who are struggling to raise a generation of actual children. As with An Evening of Long Goodbyes, there is a very strong air of Yeatsian criticism. Modernity has created multiple generations in which the center cannot hold, and some sort of impending cataclysm hangs overhead. Murray channels these frustrations into the narrative by forcing both of these generations to deal with a situation that tests their durability and hopefully leads to self-reflection rather than capitulation: the death of a student.

The descending spiral that leads to Skippy's death is a concoction of love, despair, and hidden abuses that come to light. Skippy has dire infatuation with Lori, a smiley-faced St. Brigid's student with far more demons than she lets on. Lori has found herself caught up with Carl, Seabrook's drug-dealer and overall demon in training. At a climactic moment between the first two sections of the novel, Skippy's infatuation comes to fruition as he and Lori finally kiss.

However, this rendezvous is not without its darker edges: the two young students engage in their acts during a wild stupor from Skippy's "stress pills," which Lori finds as an acceptable substitute to what she previously got from Carl. Although we remain happy for Skippy, there is a darker layer of mystery beneath his smiling face. Throughout the second section, "Heartland," it comes to light that Skippy's mother is dying, which led to a doctor prescribing his pills. Skippy's relationship with his father grows tense as his father scolds Skippy for losing interest in his sport of choice: swimming. The crux of this mystery is tragically revealed when we find out that Skippy has been consistently molested by his swim coach who, like Howard, is a staff member and Seabrook alumnus. This whirlwind of anguish culminates in Skippy taking a handful of pills and joining Ruprecht for a doughnut-eating contest.

Skippy's death is not only central to the plot because of its own assertion of significance, but also because of the way that it encompasses all of the disparate parts of the narrative. It includes his friends, his lover, Lori, his nemesis, Carl, his family, and abuse by way of the Seabrook faculty. All of these factions are drawn together through a tragic event, and thus run through a gauntlet of how an educational institution with moral instability deals with such an issue. The post-climax section of the book marks both tonal and topical changes: The student-based narrative shifts to Ruprecht and his struggles to cope with Skippy's death, while the faculty narrative, still centered on Howard, is tinged with bitterness as Howard lashes out at his colleagues for their lack of aid for Skippy, and lack of punishment for the swim coach who contributed to Skippy's depression. Both of these narratives become very focused on subjects, like classes found in school. Ruprecht's narrative is based on Science, while Howard's is based on History, the course he teaches. Ruprecht devotes his previous obsessions with string theory and multiple dimensions to building a time machine that can bring back his dead roommate.

Howard tries to use history to focus on the World War I, drawing comparisons between the Irish soldiers then, and the young Irish students now.

Howard's narrative becomes increasingly filled with Murray's love for Yeats, specifically late Yeats. Yeats wrote his seminal piece "The Second Coming," immediately after World War I, in which an entire continent had plummeted into chaos, and sleeping giants of history had awoken to eruptions of violence and chaos. Through Howard, Murray makes comparisons between that age and modern Ireland, posing it as an unstable society in which a crisis, like the death of a child, can cause similar eruptions to a World War. Howard becomes something of a caricature among fictional portrayals of teachers. As his frustrations with his coworkers increase, his in-class lessons become increasingly focused, and eventually obsessed with this World War I period. Howard becomes the obsessed teacher because he sees no other way to help these boys. He knows that they are dazzled by the violent aspects of War, and tries to use it as a way to teach them about how they are not so different from the Irish soldiers at that time:

'The fact is that, after the Easter Rising and the War of Independence, the Irishmen who'd fought in the Great War didn't fit the new way the country imagined itself... The existence of these soldiers seemed to argue against this new thing called Ireland. And so, first of all, they were turned into traitors. Then, in a quite systematic way, they were forgotten.' (556)

Although most of the boys fail to understand Howard's connection, he at least makes an attempt to enlighten them as to how they are being treated by their older generation. The tigers have abandoned the cubs, and Howard seems to be the only one who notices, yet his frustrations only rise because the generation he would like to enlighten has been indoctrinated into modern society to the point of blindness.

The futility of Howard's cause becomes palpable as he becomes more discouraged. He continues his obsession with the World War I lesson plans and analogizing the students to Irish soldiers; however, as his fervor grows, so too does his guilt. He comes to the point of acceptance that it is indeed his generation's fault, and that he is not exonerated from guilt simply through his efforts to reach the children:

...but recent events have brought home to him just how greatly he'd misjudged...[the students]...Every day he watches them yammer to each other...the events of –what, three weeks ago? Long vanquished from their memories, and eventually he understands that they simply do not have the capacity to relate to the past, their own or anyone else's. They live in a continuous sugar-rushed present, in which remembering is a chore left to computers...he doesn't blame them for it, the mistake was his. (541)

Howard is left with little resolve on how to reconcile his pupils, because he realizes that the illness he is trying to cure in them is not specific to his classroom, but much larger. The problem with his students is a generational issue in which both they and their elders are at fault. However, Howard is mostly disturbed by the way that these generational consequences have caused the class to have seemingly forgotten their dead classmate, only three weeks after his demise. His obsession with history combats the students' lack of respect for even their own personal histories. While Howard seems to be the only one even tangentially arguing for Skippy's memorial, he is foiled by the other administrators who have much more commercial ideas for memorialization.

The final section of the book hinges on the upcoming "Christmas Memorial Concert." This event is proposed to mark the passing of former principal, Father Furlong, with a memorial of Daniel "Skippy" Juster tacked on as a side note. To the Automator, this concert is not actually about remembrance, but about ushering in a new era. His interpretations of what it means to memorialize are littered with satire direct from Murray:

‘Memorial concert’s all about remember, right? What better way to remember than with a special-edition commemorative DVD? Let me break it down for you. You put on an event like this, you’re going to get parents coming along with their cameras wanting to film it. Psychology of the twenty-first-century crowd: people like to capture the spectacle, own it...not only will they be getting white-knuckle rock’n’roll by classically trained musicians, French horn playing of the very highest caliber, a patriotic ballad in our national language, Irish, and more, all on the same unique historic bill, but with the proceeds they’ll also be investing in Seabrook’s future...’ (395-396)

The Automator’s aspirations for the memorial concert are dripping with the language of commodification. He notes that the parents want to take ownership of the so-called memory of the concert, while making an *investment* in Seabrook’s future. This language, coming from the former economics teacher turned principle, is hardly surprising and clearly infuriating to Murray. Most of this anger comes directly from how justified and blinded the Automator appears in his actions. He believes that even though he is ushering in an entirely new business-like approach to school management, that he is still upholding the values of the previous religious leaders:

...whoever steps into Desmond Furlong’s small and somewhat effeminate shoes will have to be able to reckon with the realities of twenty-first century life...although the Paracletes may be gone, for all intents and purposes, their values will live on. Maybe the men upholding them will wear a suit and tie instead of a dog collar; maybe they will carry a laptop instead of a Bible, and maybe ‘common business model,’ not ‘God,’ will be the name of the bridge they use to bring communities together. But although appearances may change, the values themselves remain the same... (607-608)

The Automator’s thoughts on this transitional period are entirely infuriating because they could not be more false. They are representative of the very façade that they invoke, and the reason that children are being emotionally and intellectually abandoned by their elders. What the Automator sees as a face-lift and a change of appearances, Murray clearly sees as changes representative of a new era. This new era has a new set of values that travel with it, and most disturbing of all, these values do not include memory and history. With less than one-hundred pages remaining in the novel, things have turned utterly dark and it appears that the students are going to be a

generation in peril, without a leader. However, as Howard casts his final thoughts on his class, he comes to the realization of something that can save them, and at this very moment, the novel transitions to focus on Ruprecht, and how he can be the key to this one saving quality: friendship.

Howard makes a final address to his class about history and the World War I era when he realizes that the one thing Irish soldiers in the war were able to reconcile was the bond that they had made with one another:

‘...They had joined up as friends, and when they got out to the front, when the grand words evaporated, that bond between them remained...in the end [it] was the only thing, was the one true thing, that was genuinely worth fighting for.’ He smiles summatively at the boys; they gaze mutely back at him, in their grey uniforms for all the world like an incorporeal platoon, materialized out of the winter clouds to scour the bare park for someone who has not forgotten them. (557)

This realization occurs to Howard like a form of enlightenment: he sees them in their uniforms like the Irish soldiers, and sees them at a complete loss. Like the soldiers who were disconnected from the harbingers of war, the students are disconnected from the generation of teachers and parents. Friendship was a bond that was able to outlast the destruction and chaos of war, and perhaps it could be the one thing that would keep these boys together in a time of grief and adolescent chaos.

With Skippy dead and Howard admitting defeat, the novel seems at a complete loss for someone to unite the student body. However, this is where Murray allows for a chance to create a hero out of Ruprecht van Doren, ironically the boy who (without Skippy) really doesn't have any friends anymore. Ruprecht keeps to himself after Skippy's death, burying himself further into his experiments and investigations of multiple dimensions and the origins of the universe. Throughout the novel these theories have evolved in a way that echoed things going on around

him. This evolution is clearly manifested through Ruprecht's assumptions of what the universe is actually comprised of. While Skippy is infatuated with Lori, Ruprecht surmises that the universe could be comprised of love. However, after Skippy dies, Ruprecht speculates that perhaps the universe is actually comprised of loneliness. His theories about the universe are Murray's way of letting us inside the mind of an introvert, these theories reflect Ruprecht's emotions when he is otherwise unable to convey them. After hitting the lowest emotional level of his theory, he hatches a plan that ends up bringing the old group of friends back together.

Ruprecht decides that it should be possible to construct a time machine that can bring Skippy back to life. If not by returning to a moment before his death, by bringing him into being from another dimension in which he is still alive. Initially, these plans are laughed off by the other boys; however, somewhat mysteriously, they all climb on board and team up to follow Ruprecht's plans. These plans lead up to a climactic moment in which the boys will play a specific frequency at the Christmas concert, allowing a window into another dimension to open. As the previously dissenting group of boys become more involved in Ruprecht's scheme, we begin to wonder why they are actually there. To Howard, it appeared that the boys had hardly noticed the absence of their fallen friend, but it then becomes clear that maybe this sadness and this need for memory was actually just buried under the surface. Even though the scientific aspects of Ruprecht's plans are obviously futile, the union between the boys is in itself a testament to Skippy that grants him a sort of revival. The novel concludes following the Christmas Concert, as Ruprecht reunites with another unlikely companion, Lori. She indulges him as he shares his dimensional theories, as he would with anyone, oblivious to any teenage intuition that says he should speak to girls differently. Through his union with Lori, Ruprecht makes his final theory of what makes up the universe: Stories.

Reviews from the *New York Times*²⁷ to the *Telegraph*²⁸ to the *Independent*²⁹ all unanimously agree that Ruprecht van Doren is the book's best and most carefully crafted character. Ruprecht's obsession with studying the origins of the universe through complicated fields like M-Theory and Superstring Theory cause him to retract into his own intellectual world while things begin to crumble around him. While Ruprecht's withdrawn studies are at comedic ends with his lack of engagement in the physical world, they are actually a major part of what makes him such an interesting character. Ruprecht's studies are primarily engaged with finding meaning in a seemingly chaotic world. He has various theories on how the world could be made up of multiple dimensions or how there could be intangible connections between inhabitants of the same world. While these studies pull him away from the narrative at times, they actually offer a lot of insight into how Murray is able to craft such a sprawling novel. As readers, we question how Murray is able to make such a large cast of believable characters and put them through a narrative that captures the pain, humor, and growth of the teenage experience. As we investigate Murray's storytelling magic, and Ruprecht investigates the invisible mysteries of the universe, the two coincide as Murray uses Ruprecht to offer one of his most poignant ideas about the nature of storytelling:

“Maybe instead of strings it's stories things are made of, an infinite number of tiny vibrating stories; once upon a time they all were part of one big giant superstory, except it got broken up into a jillion different pieces, that's why no story on its own makes any sense, and so what you have to do in a life is try and weave it back together, my story into your story, our stories into all the other people's we know, until you've got something that to God or whoever might look like a letter or even a whole word...” (654)

There's a lot to digest in this excerpt from the penultimate pages of this extremely long novel. While Ruprecht has spent nearly all of his time studying theories to make sense out of his fictional world, he ultimately comes to a conclusion that says quite a bit more about the novel

that houses him. This brief approach at meta-narrative works like a silk red bow, tying up and justifying all that has come before: the superstory being the epic novel that has just concluded, and each different little piece being one of the lonely teenage or “kidult” characters wandering within. At the same time, Ruprecht’s explanation also provides possible answers to the more tangible mysteries of growing up that he and the other characters have been struggling with, specifically love and friendship. There is perhaps no better way to analogize teenage love than lonely lost stories wandering around looking for their counterparts in order to form words, sentences, and eventually meaning.

Ruprecht’s theory of storytelling is comparable to the way that Paul Murray feels about the role of authorship in the Celtic Tiger Era. Throughout the satirical points of Skippy Dies, Murray noted the emptiness of modern forms of memory and historicization like video recordings, memorial concerts, and mass-produced photographs. As the Automator made clear, these modern technologies are not real forms of memory but commodified snapshots of things that have happened. They do not contribute to history, because they don’t tell a story. They are pieces of evidence in an investigation, rather than a narrative. As Ruprecht concludes, if the universe is made up entirely of stories, than forms of memory that are devoid of narrative have no place in the universe. Murray sees modern Ireland as a primary example of a society that needs to be infused with narrative. The vast changes from the Celtic Tiger to the Recession need to be understood, and they cannot be understood through the technologies that these eras have produced, but rather through more traditional storytelling. In his interview he spoke about what it’s like to be a writer during and after the Celtic Tiger, and why it remains a vital profession:

I think that Ireland was actually a very difficult place for writers during the Celtic Tiger. The country was just so nakedly obsessed with money...Ireland became, very quickly, quite an uncaring place. And one corollary, another effect of the boom, was that culture became sort of unimportant...many people just weren’t

interested in introspection or looking into their souls or what it is to be alive because it seemed like we had the solutions to those questions...Artists were out of the frame in a really strange way...since the crash...people are turning back to art again...at times like this the outdoor hot tub no longer ticks the boxes and you find yourself needing to read a book or a poem or go for a walk in the park –you need those things more than you did in times of plenty...Maybe people will become a little bit more alive to what’s going on around them. Hopefully there might be a recovered sense of community and place that was lost in the feeding frenzy of the Celtic Tiger. (*Irish America* 1)

In this revealing statement, Murray demonstrates a very intimate relationship to his latest novel. His personal thoughts about the Celtic Tiger era can be seen in several different characters from the novel including Skippy, Howard, and Ruprecht. Simultaneously, Murray demonstrates an understanding of the faults of the era through characters like The Automator. A union between the thoughts of Murray and Ruprecht would likely come to the conclusion that the universe is comprised of the things that can transcend an era of economic prosperity. In a time of plenty, it is easy for people to think that their happiness is derived from the things that they own, which they could not previously afford. Luxury appears as satisfaction, when really artistic expression, community, and storytelling are the things that have persisted through periods of both economic prosperity and loss. Perhaps the most important takeaway from the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger is that the champions of these persistent art forms never gave up. Murray and others continued to write and pursue their beliefs regardless of economic climate, becoming living proof that their works represent bigger and more vital aspects of life than those characterized by periods of wealth. However, while Murray and Kilroy have taken on the modern era with fantasy, narrative, and satire, another author has dealt with modernism by looking at another time period entirely: *The Future*.

²² Murray, Paul. *An Evening of Long Goodbyes: A Novel*. New York: Random House, 2004. Print.

²³ More, Thomas, and Luigi Firpo. *Utopia*. Napoli: Guida, 1979. Print.

²⁴ Amidon, Stephen. "An Evening of Long Goodbyes': This Man is an Island." *New York Times*. 5 Sep. 2004. Web. 16 Feb. 2015.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/05/books/review/05AMID01.html>

²⁵ Langan, Sheila. "Your Irish Writer Part 3: Paul Murray". *Irish America*. Feb./Mar. 2011. Web. 30 Sep. 2014. <http://irishamerica.com/2011/02/young-irish-writer-part-3-paul-murray/>

²⁶ Murray, Paul. *Skippy Dies*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2010. Print.

²⁷ Kois, Dan. "Ghost, Come Back Again". *New York Times*. 3 Sep. 2010. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/05/books/review/Kois-t.html>

²⁸ Womack, Philip. "Skippy Dies by Paul Murray: review". *Telegraph*. 9 Mar. 2010. Web. 28 Feb. 2015. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/7404852/Skippy-Dies-by-Paul-Murray-review.html>

²⁹ Gibbs, Jonathan. "Skippy Dies, By Paul Murray". *Independent*. 12 Feb. 2010. Web. 28 Feb. 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/skippy-dies-by-paul-murray-1896640.html>

“All Our Yesterdays”: Kevin Barry’s City of Bohane³⁰

“In the Bohane creation, time comes loose, there is a curious fluidity, the past seeps into the future, and the moment itself as it passes is the hardest to grasp.” (City of Bohane 60)

The City of Bohane does not exist, and perhaps never will. It is a hack-and-slash blueprint of Western Ireland in the future, yet it bears a vital pulse, its streets and their denizens have a strange air of familiarity. They are markedly fictional, at times outrageous, yet never unrecognizable. The novel is a product of the post-Celtic Tiger era; however, this period is never mentioned in ‘Bohane Creation.’ This is most likely because Bohane, is just that –a creation. The city is an alternate universe where all of the time between the present and the future has been either wiped from history or deeply repressed. The novel takes place in 2053 and 2054; however, this detail isn’t revealed until halfway through the book, marking its casual unimportance. Kevin Barry did not set out to write a portent of future Ireland based on the evidence of today, but rather a different world altogether, where remnants of our familiar present can be identified and at times, seen, heard, and felt.

The unifying piece of Barry’s scattered narrative is his construction of the city itself. He is constantly conjuring up sensory imagery that makes the place feel realistic, but at an evasive distance. Bohane is also a hybrid between a place that is identifiably Irish, yet also a globalized metropolis. Most of the city’s “Irishness” is tied to the landscape that surrounds it: the city ‘feeds’ off of the Bohane river, a geological staple that seems to feed into the lifeblood of all the city’s inhabitants:

Our city is built along a run of these bluffs that bank and canyon the Bohane river. The streets tumble down to the river, it is a black and swift-moving rush at the base of almost every street, as black as the bog waters that feed it, and a couple of miles downstream the river rounds the last of the bluffs and there enters the murmurous ocean...it is all of it as bleak as only the West of Ireland can be. (City of Bohane 7).

Barry references the river several times throughout the novel, often associating it with a 'taint' that marks the city's residents. The river is both the fuel of the city and the emotional drive for those who live within its borders. The opening lines of the novel establish the qualities of the river like character traits, and he fuses the river with his protagonist in a telling marriage between geography and humanity: "This is the Bohane river we're talking about. A blackwater surge, malevolent, it roars in off the Big Nothin' wastes and the city was spawned by it and was named for it: City of Bohane...The water's roar for Hartnett was as the rushing of his own blood." (3) The link between the novel's setting and its focal character makes for interesting development throughout: his actions, like the city itself, are fueled by vice and tainted with darkness. As we learn more about the city so too do we learn more about its inhabitants, as they at all times, mirror one another: they are both products of the city and those who shape it.

Barry's construction of the city as a believable (if not realistic) landscape is based on his knack for constructing spaces. He creates spatial divisions within the city that work like recollections of the various inspirations for his writing. Certain areas evoke the filmic space of a dark neo-noir, like the vice-filled streets of 'Smoketown:' "Was a hell of a place in the black night –a sad-dream world across the footbridge...this Smoketown you take one brick from the pile and whole heap'd come tumbledown...a tight, small, squashed-up place, hard-pressed its airways, its troubled lungs, and the air had an oily feel in the night." (69). His vivid imagery is so cinematic that at times it sounds as if it could be the descriptions of a set for a 40s noir film. The other genre he captures is the American Western: the inner city is full of Saloon culture, while

the outskirts of the city (called the ‘Big Nothin’) resemble the ominous frontier: “The bog was dried out and above it a shifting black gauze of midge-clouds palpitated and the turloughs had drained off and there was that strange air of peace in the hills: never-changing, sea-tanged, western.” (60-61). The beauty of this brief passage is that the ‘western’ notion Barry is going for actually has a bilateral meaning. It reflects the cultural western or ‘wild west,’ yet at the same time it also reflects the specific nature of the West of Ireland. This is an area on the island where the weather has a dramatic impact on the landscape as well as the people, and Barry proves Bohane to be no exception: “Too little has been said...about living in windy places. When a wind blows in such ferocious gusts as the Big Nothin’ hardwind, and when it blows forty-nine weeks out of the year, the effect is not physical only but...philosophical...The result is a skittish, temperamental people with a tendency towards odd turns of logic.” (25). While on the surface, Barry is attempting to shed some light on the attitudes of the Bohane people, he is also making a sly statement about the real inhabitants of Western Ireland. Some of the more quaint communities in these wind-beaten areas are known for their quirks and could serve as cultural ancestors to the people of Bohane.

The ‘Irishness’ of the landscape, with its bog water and bleakness, contributes to the Irish identity of the characters; however, they and much of the inner-city geography reflect a more globalized culture. While the history of globalization in Ireland is tied to the late 20th century, a time when there have been influxes of immigration since the 1990s, Barry never overtly spells out this connection. We are left with our own assumptions about what happened between present and future, or if the ‘2014’ of Bohane’s timeline is even our own. In his essay, “From Ireland, in the Coming Times: On Barry’s ‘City of Bohane,’”³¹ Greg Londe notes Barry’s aversion to making a clear link between present and future, thus blurring the lines between fiction and

reality: “If the multicultural riot of the impoverished future bears reference to Ireland’s recent past –the boom and bust of the millennial economy, and the influx of Eastern European, Asian, and African immigrants since the 1990s –Barry certainly does not want to trace some sociological vector...” (Londe 1). Barry’s unwillingness to make overt parallels between modern-day Ireland and his fictional future distinguish him from his contemporaries. Whereas Kilroy and Murray made obvious jabs and satires of the present economic crisis, Barry, by setting his fiction in the future, allows for much more mystery and ambiguity. This style is unique, yet not entirely surprising as Barry is tapping into the uncertainty of an unstable present, while crafting a world in the future. Economic fluctuation and globalization have created a contemporary Ireland in which writers and artists, like the general population, are unsure of what is to come. However, as Paul Murray has noted, in the wake of the crash, the Irish are once again turning back to artists for something more persistent and meaningful in their lives. Barry has responded in City of Bohane by offering a fiction that is simultaneously distracting, entertaining, and familiar.

Most of Bohane’s familiarity is obviously intentional; its narrative, like the design of the city itself, draws from gangland epics and wild-west films. Its characters are like actors playing archetypes who have been given a makeover by the bleakness of the Bohane river. These characters are not altogether different from grown versions of the children found in Skippy Dies, except that they have grown into a dark and violent future. Londe notes in his essay, “...those no-future felons seem to have grown homicidal and feral...Barry’s novel is their costume party, in which the revelers dress in Dashiell Hammett’s hand-me-down-rags and John Ford’s costume department castoffs...” (Londe 1). These familiar characters vie for gangland territory, participate in love-triangles, and wonder about mystery outsiders to Bohane territory.

The plot follows Logan Hartnett, head of the ‘Hartnett Fancy,’ the gang that holds sway over most of Bohane. Hartnet rules from his throne with his aging wife Macu (from Immaculata), while his 90 year-old mother, ‘Girly,’ truly runs the show from a high-rise loft which she seldom leaves. As Hartnett prepares to go head-to-head with a rival gang, ‘the Cusacks,’ he is also plagued by rumors of a returning character known as ‘The Gant Broderick,’ who has been wandering the outer-city wastes for 25 years since Hartnett usurped his throne and won over Macu from him in the process. Early on, the narrator claims that, “...too long and persistent a Calm might be no good for the city. A place should never for too long go against its nature.” (City of Bohane 30). Bohane’s nature is fueled by bloodshed, and the recent calm has turned the city into a tinderbox waiting to erupt into violence once more.

Like the novels and films that inspired it, City of Bohane is also populated by a variety of supporting characters, each with their own agendas and specific ties to the Bohane taint. These characters each serve a particular purpose, like ‘Wolfie Stanners,’ ‘Fucker Burke,’ and ‘Jenni Ching,’ the primary soldiers of the Hartnett Fancy. While they bear signs of loyalty to Logan, this younger generation is also prone to betrayal and secret initiatives for personal gain. In the more neutral territory, characters like ‘Big Dom Gleeson,’ orchestrate the events of the city to keep its residents happily accustomed to the violence they crave. Gleeson, the editor of the city’s only newspaper, *The Bohane Vindicator*, propels the plot forward by publicizing the love-triangle between Hartnett, Macu, and The Gant. While each of these characters appears to be playing a very specific role in service to the narrative, Barry keeps them from becoming caricatures by introducing them with vivid physical descriptions and granting them unique voices. In a review for *Guardian*³², Scarlett Thomas commends Barry’s deftly executed vernacular and its importance in bringing life to the characters:

Barry's vernacular, like his plot, is a wonderful blend of past, present, and imagined future. He doesn't overdo it. His characters all have different voices, and his free indirect style changes as it moves across the city. Sometimes the words are doing backflips and spinning on their heads. Sometimes they are just watching...that Barry has control over all these registers, and makes them his own, is quite astonishing. (*Guardian*, 1).

We can see this in the way Barry describes Logan's soldier, Jenni Ching. She starts building up her own female gang of followers in the city, and they are tied to her by their dress and demeanor, solidifying the elements that define specific characters in Bohane: "This was the year all the girls in the Back Trace started to dress like Jenni Ching...you were a girl in Bohane, in the springtime of '54, you had a shkelp in your inside pocket, and a stogie on the chomp, and you walked the wynds with that Ching-patented S'town glide. And you did not kowtow to no fuckwad boy-chil'." (*City of Bohane* 207). While this passage exhibits the importance of imagery in character development, it also demonstrates Barry's attention to language. The voice of Bohane is a multi-faceted language of futuristic slang, traditional Irishisms, and stream of consciousness rants in the tradition of James Joyce.

Bohane's ties to Joyce are not in language alone, but also in physical description. Bohane's seedy 'Smoketown' neighborhood has a main drag, 'De Valera Street,' that bears a noticeable resemblance to 'Araby' from Joyce's *Dubliners*³³. The sensations of De Valera Street are described like the global mecca of the Araby bazaar: "The paseo whirl: one might trouble one's dainty snout with a whiff of the taleggio displayed in an artisanal cheese shop, or run one's nails along the grain of a silvery hose shipped in from Old Lisbon...or take a saucer of jasmine tea and knuckle of fennel-scented snuff at the counter of buffed Big Nothin' granite." (*City of Bohane* 51). The wonder associated with a global marketplace resonates with the young boy who goes to Araby in Joyce's short story. In Irish literature of both the past and present, there is a specific allure found in a global camp set up somewhere such as Ireland. While those familiar

with the Irish literary tradition might notice these references to the past, Barry never tries to hard to make them apparent. Bohane is a place all its own, yet the more we recognize its origins, the more real it becomes. In a review for the *New York Times*³⁴, Pete Hamill effectively summarizes this feeling: “None of it is real, yet it all feels true.” (*New York Times*, 1).

While there are echoes of Joyce in both language and description, there are even more peculiar references to Irish figures without indications of who they are or were. They are accepted as household names in the City of Bohane, just like the De Valera in De Valera Street. No one ever mentions the Easter Rising participant, former Taoiseach and President, yet he is ever-present, at the heart of the city’s affairs. There are tenement buildings named after Seamus Heaney, Patrick Kavanagh, and Louis MacNeice, as well as a “Kevin Barry Square,” that is never mentioned in the novel, but delineated in a map included in some publications. These names appear to mean nothing to the characters in the novel, and are never referenced. Since they serve no significance to the characters, they have clearly been included for the benefit of the reader. They are part of the active contribution to making the environment familiar to a modern day reader. Bohane’s legitimacy does not necessarily rest on its believability, but rather its familiarity. The knowledge gap between readers and characters mirrors the time gap between the novel’s publication and its narrative. However, both of these notions lead to a similar question: what happened in the time between now and then? While characters in Bohane never openly acknowledge the references to the present, they do frequently refer to this mysterious time gap. It is an integral part of both the city and the characters, and is referred to ominously as, ‘The Lost Time.’

The Lost Time is the ultimate source of mystery for both readers and characters. For readers, it is the period that holds answers to questions Barry refuses to ask: why is there no

modern technology in Bohane? How have these specific global trade routes been established? (Bohaners have a penchant for Portuguese goods) What happened to the world outside of Bohane? Is the lost time the connection between present and future, or a period of alternate history that actually has no connection to the present day? This elusive period is both absent from the novel and always present. It is a spectral history that contains the answers we thirst for and a time that the Bohane people long for. In the *New York Times* review, Pete Hamill notes how this dramatic period of absence is both important to the characters and lacking in any finite connection to present day Ireland:

...for almost everybody in this novel, such hopes are just other types of drugs. Even the younger characters are afflicted with the presence of the 'lost time' in Bohane, the collective memory of a period without dates, when something calamitous happened that is never spelled out...the 'lost time' neither refers to the rise, or the fall, of the Celtic Tiger. All the rest of Ireland is offstage. And Bohane lives an insular saga of recurring violence. (*New York Times* 1)

While Hamill is right that in a way Ireland is offstage for most of the novel, he doesn't acknowledge the fragile presence that it does have. The 'lost time' is not a force that blocks out the Ireland of yesteryear, but rather a period that obscures it, making us question what the actual relationship is between Bohane and the past. To say that Ireland is entirely offstage is to underplay the worthwhile investigation of what elements of Ireland can be found in Bohane creation.

As Hamill suggests, the 'lost time,' does not directly refer to the Celtic Tiger or subsequent economic crash. In the narrative timeline, this period is somewhere between those events and the events of the novel. However, the palpable presence of nostalgia in Bohane makes this period one of the book's most intriguing elements. Through the 'lost time,' Barry eludes analysis of the Celtic Tiger by making a prediction of the aftermath a few decades down the line.

The presence of the ‘lost time’ is even woven into the *narration*, one of the book’s more elusive elements, and one that is not explained until midway through. The novel is told from the perspective of the curator of the “Ancient and Historical Bohane Film Society.” We don’t know when this narrator is telling the story of Bohane, or to whom; however, in a single brief chapter, Barry allows him to speak freely, in first-person, to introduce himself as the guardian of nostalgia in Bohane:

It is not often that I get a good-looking woman in here. It is more usually men who are my patrons. The women can keep their feelings tamped a little more. But the men get to a certain age and it becomes too much for them. They must reach again for the whimsical days of their youth, and for the city as it was back then. (City of Bohane 178)

The curator’s commentary on the men of Bohane proves to be true as some of the novel’s main characters, Logan and The Gant, are eventually swept away into their own dreary nostalgia for the ‘lost time.’ For the inhabitants of Bohane, the ‘lost time’ is a powerful and unavoidable drug. However, it is not something that is swept under the rug or denied entirely. The people of Bohane shamelessly yearn for the ‘lost time,’ and what little media they have caters to this desire. The curator’s role as the narrator not only highlights his importance as the gatekeeper of nostalgia but allows him to act as a conduit for Barry’s cinematic style. The filmic spaces that Barry develops are described by the curator and thus even their graphic qualities come across as authentic descriptions rather than appropriated clichés.

Dom Gleeson, the editor of the *Bohane Vindicator* becomes increasingly intrigued with The Gant’s return to Bohane. The Gant is representative of the gaps in time that make nostalgia so appealing to these people, and thus he is a worthwhile source for the newspaper. The media in Bohane is so devoted to this nostalgia that it even has entire section devoted to it:

‘All Our Yesterdays’ was by far the most popular and prestigious column of the *Bohane Vindicator*. It was penned by Dominick himself, in a limpid and melancholy prose, and its stock was reminiscence and anecdotes of the Bohane lost-time...the queue for it formed early outside the paper’s office and snaked far down the streets of the New Town. (196)

‘All Our Yesterdays’ is the most telling information that we get about the City of Bohane. While Barry uses imagery and language to discern the setting and characters, the feeling of nostalgia is what gives this place and these people another dimension. It gives them a drive and adds intention to their actions; it shows why they carry on through the miserable lives they lead in this violent rundown city.

For his most recent column of ‘All Our Yesterdays,’ Dominick Gleeson decides to set up a secret rendezvous with The Gant, feeling that his reason for returning to Bohane has something to do with the ‘lost time.’ His assumption is proven correct as he proceeds to interview The Gant, and realizes it’s all the man wants to talk about:

They spoke then at length of the Bohane lost-time. They talked of the great feeling for it that had drawn the Gant to the creation once more. They talked of those who had passed, and of how their spirits persisted yet and carried always on the air of the city...the Gant...smiled, and he began to speak again, softly, of the lost-time, of the old butchers and bakers who had premises once on De Valera Street, of all the shebeens and herb-shacks, of the life of the street as was...Dom would be happy to talk about the old Bohane until the clock came down the stairs...when reminiscence got going in the Back Trace nights, it worked like a freestyle morphine jazz. (198-201)

The vividness of nostalgia and fervor of reminiscence is the most telling detail about what Bohane actually is. Bohane is a place where the best days are always in the past. The city has a future only out of necessity, and one that will be plagued by violence. No one in the city would disagree that the past is where any and all shreds of happiness lay, and all they can be thankful for is that with each passing day, the past becomes more abundant.

The closest thing to the drug of nostalgia in Bohane is the evidence of rare but enthusiastic turns towards religion. The gangs that control Bohane wield the power of religion to calm the city's citizens after waves of violence. When the Hartnett Fancy successfully wards off the warring Cusacks, they set up makeshift miracles in Cusack territory in order to set off a religious revival. When this happens, we get the feeling that it is something that has happened in Bohane many times before, something that comes in waves. This religion is also not entirely futuristic: while it appears more cult-like in practice, its origins are overtly Christian:

...there was an outbreak of Sweet Baba Jay mania on the Northside Rises. In defeat, of course, they very often turned up there to religion. An SBJ revival needed no more than a little prompting. And within days of the faked stigmata...miracle gave onto miracle –as is the way –and...Sweet Baba Jay was showing up all over. Was said His Likeness had smiled down from the gable wall of an avenue grogpit. Was said his Likeness had appeared in the shape of a cloud over Louis MacNiece Towers. (223-224).

The lord and savior in Bohane is referred to as “Sweet Baba Jay;” a Bohanification of “Sweet Baby Jesus.” The themes associated with SBJ are as recognizable as all of the other elements in Bohane. The importance of religion in Bohane society is not altogether unrelated to the ‘Irishness’ of the setting. In Ireland, there has been historical evidence of conflict between religion and vice that is also reflected in Bohane. Religion is implemented after periods of violence because of the way that it curbs that sort of activity: “Swearing all but disappeared. Beards were trimmed. Fornication...was confined now to marital beds, and soberly practised, missionary-style, and swiftly, wordlessly concluded.” (225). The presence of pervasive religious tradition that resembles past and present day Ireland makes a statement about what endures in Irish culture. Through the Celtic Tiger, the crash, the mysterious lost time, and Bohane chaos, Barry insists, there are still inherently Irish ties to religion, nostalgia, and culture.

Even though Bohane is a futuristic city that is posited only 40 years ahead of our own time, it seems to have a history all its own. The pervasive Irish traditions that have persisted through Bohane culture have historical resonance that aids Barry's goals of making the place familiar. The curator of the Ancient and Historical Bohane Film Society watches an old reel from the 'lost time,' noting the lack of change in the city:

...and though I have watched this reel thousands of times myself, I was always drawn into it. I was put under a spell by the roll and carry of the Dev Street habitués. If all had changed in Bohane, the people had not, and would never. That certain hip-swing. That especially haughty turn-of-snout. That belligerence. (80).

This stands as a testament to what elements of culture Barry sees to be the most durable throughout history and his projected future. The people and the culture, especially their rhythms, their speech, and their beliefs, these are the things that survive catastrophe, whether it be an economic disaster, like in reality, or some other hidden secret of the 'lost time.' The cinematic elements of the narrative from the noir to the western all show that affection for these styles of art has persisted while all else has changed. He proves that a society without technology can still long for and latch on to cultural modes that were created by it. The novel is allusive and intertextual, reflecting the way that the society of Bohane is intertwined with 'the lost time.'

In "From Ireland, in the Coming Times: On Barry's 'City of Bohane,'" Greg Londe praises Barry for his groundbreaking way of looking into the future. He notes that he really is one of the first Irish fiction authors to do so: "...*City of Bohane*, takes place in the future. In this, it is almost unique in the history of Irish literature, which has generally confined itself to mirroring the perpetually traumatic present, or attempting to resuscitate the dead." (Londe 1). He is correct in praising Barry for looking forward where most have look sideways or backwards; however, there is another dimension to Barry's creation of Bohane: the novel and the city itself

are not just about the future, but what elements of the present are currently shaping that future. Londe goes on to say, "...While Irish housing firms were building the estates that now crumble for want of buyers, Kevin Barry was building Bohane. Both are sites of dangerous play, dreadfully intriguing to watch from a distance." (Londe 1). Barry's construction of Bohane is not entirely turned away from the economic crisis that took place during its inception, but rather it works as reaction to that crisis. Whether the novel takes place in some alternate history or our own, Barry's creation demonstrates his theories on how present crises shape the future. As further evidence of this, Barry is no stranger to Irish culture in the present. The same values that he sees as persistent through time in Bohane, he has also observed in his prose that concern the present. Before City of Bohane, Barry's short story collection told tales of a modern and contemporary Ireland that celebrate the same aspects of Irish culture he delineates in Bohane.

Mythbreaking: Kevin Barry's There Are Little Kingdoms³⁵

"The village so quickly ran out of itself: it turned into rough ground, rose to the hills and dark sky. The ground was taking wounds up there." (There Are Little Kingdoms 65)

Kevin Barry's City of Bohane put him under the international spotlight as a burgeoning Irish writer; however, many of its themes are visible in his first publication, There Are Little Kingdoms. The stories in this collection frequently deal with marginalized members of society both in Ireland and abroad. The goths, drug addicts, drinkers, and clinically depressed are Barry's heroes in these works. They are both symbols of modernity, and symbols of hope despite their apparent failures. As in City of Bohane, Barry's cinematic style creates characters that are both believable and sympathetic. He focuses on how people dress, and the feelings that can be

drawn from certain spaces. In an interview with Jonathan Lee of the *Paris Review*³⁶, Barry commented on how he feels the sensory information evoked by specific places: “My suspicion is that feeling escapes from people and seeps into the stones of a place...each place gives off its own very distinct feeling and sometimes it’s light and sometimes it’s really fucking dark.” (*Paris Review* 1). The settings that Barry uses in the short story collections certainly explore the full spectrum; however, they tend to err towards darkness. His marginalized characters work both within and without the settings, feeding off the land’s mood while contributing to it at the same time. Through his descriptions of sites and sounds evoked by settings and the moods and presentations of his characters, he creates a collection that captures the elements of modernism and Irishness that stand the test of time between the present day, and his futuristic Bohane.

There are Little Kingdoms is all about establishing different spaces in modern Irish life. He discerns these spaces by crafting detailed characters and casting them out into the landscape, allowing their perspectives to mold the ways that each space speaks, changes, and breathes. Many of these descriptions are in direct dialogue with what Barry does in Bohane, both literally and thematically. In one of the key stories, “Ideal Homes,” he describes the misadventures of two young girls who belong in Bohane, but are trapped in a once-quaint town on the verge of modernity. He establishes the setting, very specifically, as a liminal village, straddling history and progress. Like Bohane, this setting is also influenced by a river: “There was an insignificant river, brown and slow, and granite hills beyond –these, it was said, gave the place a scenic charm but in truth, it was forlorn. The people were terraced in neat rows and roofed in with grey slates and were themselves forlorn, but they wouldn’t easily have said why.” (There Are Little Kingdoms 62). Barry’s preoccupation with rivers has an interesting consistency; rivers, as natural parts of the landscape are flowing and forming. They are incessant, always moving, like

progress towards the future, using the water to carve the landscape they plow through. The river and hills in “Ideal Homes” are said to give the town its charm, but now have marked it as a “forlorn” place. These natural parts of the landscape represent things that are out of control, mirroring the progress that has turned the quaint town into a village with neatly rowed identical homes. The citizens don’t question why or how this has happened, but like accepting the flow of a river or the presence of hillsides, they simply “go along” with it.

Barry continues to analyze the relationship between the citizens and the changes of their surroundings, by noting how they treat the changes in their lifestyles with similar stoicism: “The village by quiet consent then entered the age of security, and its citizens were particularly pleased with their dead bolts, their strobe alarms and their attack dogs when they twitched the curtains of an evening and saw Donna and Dee approaching, with that evil, vivacious, whistling air.” (67). Donna and Dee, the trouble-making youth at the heart of the story are representations of the fear that has pushed this place into the modern security age. Donna and Dee are products of unquestioned progress, and representations of a newer, more irresponsible generation. Their presence, and the reactions of the townspeople work back and forth moving both the people and the land to a place of unchecked progress: a place marked by dangerous youth, secure societies, and an indifferent countryside.

Barry relates the battle for the countryside to the approaching influence of the city. The village is described as being nearby a rapidly growing city, and it’s the vice associated with the city that drives the girls to rambunctiousness: “There was a view south to the city: it was ever spreading, quick approaching. It was ten miles wide of sodium light, a sea of promise laid out beneath them. They drank it in and tasted faster nights to come.” (71). The girls feed off of the city’s influence, like vampires feeding on blood. The growth of the city contributes to the “faster

nights” that drive them to the drinking, drugs, and thievery that plague the more subdued residents of the nearby village. These girls mark the connection between the growing city and the changing country landscape. They are a bridge that shows how growth and progress in a place such as Ireland may spring from metropolitan areas, but inevitably spreads into the countryside causing wide-spread change in landscapes and characters.

In another work in the collection, “Party at Helen’s,” Barry demonstrates another literary device that has become a marker of his style. In City of Bohane, Barry often crafts his characters by first going into great detail about what they are wearing. In a society that focuses on image, the importance of one’s dress becomes increasingly important for projecting one’s personality. In “Party at Helen’s,” he uses this same tool to describe clothing that marks a modern generation, no longer donning the same traditional garbs of Irish dress: “The girls wore lycra and had their hair styled in blunt retro fringes, like Jane Fonda in *Barbarella*. They wore clumpy shoes and tiny silver dresses, or flight jackets with heavy fur collars, they wore Lacoste, Fila and Le Coq Sportif.” (There Are Little Kingdoms 82). His descriptions of characters through dress taps into a few of the different aspects that mark his style: firstly, the connection between dress and film that is also found in City of Bohane. He compares the style of dress to Jane Fonda in *Barbarella*, just like the characters in *Bohane* are described as dressing in John Ford costume throwaways. The connection between dress and film says something about the influence of projection through dress for contemporary citizens. Where do these characters get the ideas for how they want to dress? They find the ideas in films, new and old, marking this medium as a key influence on how they would like to be perceived. Further in the passage, he marks the specific brands donned by these characters, showing a style of dress that has been commodified. The brands are not important simply because of what they evoke in economic status, but because of the way that

brands are capable of characterizing someone's dress. Barry's attention to dress gives the reader insight into the intentions and self-consciousness of these characters. If they choose to style themselves in the fashion of old films or to don high-quality brands, we are able to craft our own assumptions as to why they do so and what it says about their personalities. Brands have become unavoidable factors in contemporary society, specifically with relation to wardrobe. The way that certain brands have the ability to present a specific image serves as an example of a commodified culture.

Barry's knack for clothing description is about marking intentionality and modernity, but it is also about the deconstruction of myth. Part of post-Celtic Tiger literature is about reacting to the myths that have come before as a result of colorful Irish history, writing, and culture. In a particularly magical story, "Burn the Bad Lamp," Barry deconstructs the myth of genie in a lamp by describing the genie's first appearance in surprisingly ratty fashion:

The manner of the apparition is much as we have been led to expect. There is a puff of purple smoke and a male figure floats up out of the lamp in a comfortably cross-legged sitting pose...but then the smoke clears and the genie separates from legend...he wears a pair of troubled chinos, an overcoat with fag burns on its lapels, a pair of scuffed Nikes and a leery, self-satisfied smirk. He's one of those small butty fellas, fortyish, thinning up top, and a the bit of hair that's left could usefully be introduced to a bottle of Head 'n' Shoulders. (There Are Little Kingdoms 110).

While the description of a genie is not something that is specifically Irish, Barry destroys it all the same. The genie's worn-down look could place him homeless on a street corner in any modern city, and certainly stands at odds with the "high power" he is inferred to have based on reputation. This confounding character description says a lot about how myth and mythical figures function in contemporary society. They have become broken down and washed up, and are encountered by people who are no longer fooled by the mythical aspects that gave them elevated status. The deconstruction of mythical figures is important to Barry, but also to all

contemporary Irish writers who have set their works in the present day and the future. Focusing on current and future affairs is partially the result of a deconstructed Irish mythology. The history and folklore that once drove an entire culture, and wove its way into various works of literature, has become less believable in a modern world. Like the appearance of the genie, the results of mythology have simply become disappointing. With a broken mythology, Barry and other writers have decided to look at things as they currently are, investigating why and how this mythology has been broken, and what we are left with when we no longer believe.

One of the ways Barry has focused on modern societies is by creating microcosms of culture. *Bohane*, is an example of a futuristic society, yet it is still only a single focused example. Barry's story, "The Penguins," represents another way that Barry has taken the disparate elements of contemporary society and put them under a microscope. The story is about a plane crash in the Arctic in which the survivors are forced to walk circles around one another, like penguins, in order to survive. Barry uses this story to investigate what happens when you take the variety of people in modern Ireland and pack them into a small container before casting them off into an Arctic wasteland. While still on the plane, he establishes the global society of passengers:

In the top row-of-six: The babymamma of a Lithuanian gangster. A nervous African priest. A pair of square-jawed corporates in casual flight wear. A leathery Balkan ponce. A sour-faced French hottie with the tiniest feet, who wrinkles her photoshop-perfect nose... There are fat Italians, amused Indians, Germans amplifying sternly, irritated Swiss. Put us in a tin can at 28,000 feet and we become so obviously our own breed. (*There Are Little Kingdoms* 147-148).

Barry packs an entire global community into a single confined space and plagues them all with the same disastrous situations. He notes how this confinement causes their "breeds" to become especially noticeable, and while he is specifically describing the environment inside the plane, he could just as easily be describing a modern Irish city: the influx of immigrants, and disparate

sub-societies, that messily co-exist. Once the plane crashes, and the characters assume their penguin-like roles, they form an entirely new sort of society. Whereas they stood against one another on the plane, marking differences, they stand together on the ice for survival: “We are all together on the ice, a true democracy: flight crew, cabin crew, cheap seats, business... We form on the ice into concentric circle. We move about, we rotate, we get the hang of the penguin stuff real easy...” (151). When Barry takes this microcosm of modern society and puts it on an even keel, he forms something new, a “democracy,” as he describes it. Whereas the differences were once made obvious by their the subtle class structure of plane-tickets, the even-handed brutality of Arctic ice brings them together. Like penguins, they become related, they become singular. In a way, Ireland is like one of these compressed societies, a small landmass that has seen a large influx of immigration, and been thrust into the global spotlight. When all of these different people are put in this confined place, what once could have been described as Irish, becomes mythical, and the new global Ireland takes its place. The economics, weather, and landscapes of Ireland create the communal setting for this global society, and within it they, like the penguins in the plane crash, become a new “democracy.”

Kevin Barry, like his contemporaries, is preoccupied with the role of storytelling and fiction-writing in contemporary Ireland. In an interview, Paul Murray spoke about how he thinks that novels are regaining value in modern Ireland because of the way that stories are more permanent in a world of fleeting wealth.² Kevin Barry builds on this theory by commenting on how stories help us cope and gain meaning: “I think literary fiction is in danger of turning into opera. A rarefied, protected, subsidized species that’s enjoyed by an elite. But we’ll always need stories in some form. Stories are the only things that give any meaning to our pointless, shapeless

² <http://irishamerica.com/2011/02/young-irish-writer-part-3-paul-murray/>

lives. So storytellers will have a future somewhere.” (*Paris Review* 1). Barry may not see novelists as having the same wide appeal that Murray does, but he still acknowledges their undying importance. Storytellers are pivotal figures for making sense of a world that marked by confusion. In a world without myth, people look to the present and the future, and how are we to digest these fleeting rapid moments without stories? Stories help us remove ourselves from the world we inhabit, and understand, criticize, and comment on exactly what is happening to us, even as it is happening.

³⁰ Barry, Kevin. *City of Bohane: A Novel*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf, 2012. Print.

³¹ Londe, Greg. “From Ireland in the Coming Times: On Barry’s ‘City of Bohane.’” *Los Angeles Review of Books*. 8 Sep. 2012. Web. <http://lareviewofbooks.org/review/from-ireland-in-the-coming-times-on-barrys-city-of-bohane>

³² Thomas, Scarlett. “City of Bohane by Kevin Barry –review”. *The Guardian*. 13 May 2011. Web. 10 Mar. 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/may/14/city-bohane-kevin-barry-review>

³³ Joyce, James. *Dubliners*. London: Penguin English, 1993. Print.

³⁴ Hamill, Pete. “‘City of Bohane’ by Kevin Barry”. *New York Times*. 29 Mar. 2012. Web. 10 Mar. 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/01/books/review/city-of-bohane-by-kevin-barry.html>

³⁵ Barry, Kevin. *There Are Little Kingdoms: Stories*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf, 2013. Print.

³⁶ Lee, Jonathan. “Jumping Off a Cliff: An Interview with Kevin Barry.” *Paris Review*. 12 Nov. 2013. Web. 10 Mar. 2015. <http://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/11/12/jumping-off-a-cliff-an-interview-with-kevin-barry/>

Conclusion:

Literature and Economics

Ireland has had a reputation throughout history as being a nation that produces significant works of literature as a key product of its rich culture. Throughout that significant history, various economic conditions and cultural shifts have contributed to literary trends in both narrative and style. Modern economic conditions have been no exception in the impact they have had on literature. While growth in Ireland during the Celtic Tiger era was represented through economic changes, foreign business investments, and some cultural change, there has been very little written about how this specific period of globalization has affected literature. Nobel Prize winners from Ireland like Yeats and Beckett are as legendary now as they were throughout most of the 20th century; however, it remains extremely important to investigate these artists through a 21st century lens. The current economic and cultural conditions must be considered, even when considering famous authors from the past. Barry's "The Apparitions"³⁷ and *Storymap Dublin*³⁸ are significant examples of how contemporary critics and authors are reassessing Irish literary history through changes that have recently affected Ireland. *Storymap Dublin* establishes the link between literature and tourism in a modern context. Although this relationship has been present throughout history, *Storymap Dublin* represents a modern revival to bring Dublin's literary history into public prominence. While Barry satirizes this in "The Apparitions," he makes an important statement about the price of commodifying authors, and what we are left with when we make limited choices about how we would like to commemorate them.

Tourism and foreign investment are essential to the contemporary Irish economy, and literature is a valuable commodity. Ireland is a country with a well-established global reputation for literature, yet a very young reputation for global business. This newly discovered reputation

has capitalized on the pre-established relationship between economics and literature. The famous figures of Irish literary history have become pivotal components in the commodified cultures of tourism and business. These writers have had their careers curated in a way that makes them acceptable and attractive to a global tourist audience. For example, W.B. Yeats's career is often separated into various periods that represent changes in the themes and attitudes of his works. However, the complexity of Yeats's career arc does not give him the most digestible image as a commodity. The young, hopeful, fantastic Yeats is far more attractive as a tourist attraction, than the older more pensive and exhausted Yeats. In Barry's "The Apparitions", he represents the complexity of major authors' careers by focusing on their more eccentric qualities (i.e. Beckett's anal fixation, Joyce's disturbing drunkenness, and Yeats's casual drug use). By presenting these qualities as a problem, Barry is able to satirize the modern "cure" for the problem: picking socially acceptable facets of an author's career in order to represent his entire persona. In the story, when they decide to cover up the apparitions with images and sounds that they see to be more appropriate, they are not necessarily censoring the artists, but rather picking certain aspects of their careers to serve as larger representations; presenting the positive and eschewing the controversial. A tourist-friendly, economically driven Ireland, is one that wants its well-known artists to be presentable in both their work and appearance. Authors are given the same treatment as any other tourist attraction, like a monument or historical site. Monuments are often memorials of persons or events with a specific angle that highlights what exactly is being commemorated. Authors are presented in such a way that the most commendable highlights of their careers are picked out and put on display so as to make them more attractive tourist attractions.

When artists that were known for their radical lives and careers have been turned into family-friendly tourist attractions the true history of Irish literature and its champions becomes diluted and inaccurate. Although these authors are still being represented through admirable merits, the selection of specific aspects of their careers fails to acknowledge the full picture of who they were. Ignoring less presentable aspects of major Irish literary figures is comparable to the deconstructions of myth that Kevin Barry focuses on in his short story collection. An Irish literary culture without myth is disillusioning and lacks inspiration. Thus Barry and others like Kilroy and Murray have stopped looking behind, like so many of their predecessors. Instead, they have become as much investigators as storytellers, taking precise looks at the present and the future of Ireland in order to find out why this specific time and place has caused us to become so disillusioned by the past. Why is now the moment of mythbreaking? Why is now an important moment for storytelling? And what should modern Irish stories be about?

The Celtic Tiger era and its subsequent crash are new issues for Ireland. The dust has still not settled: debts are still being collected, housing developments still lie dormant and empty. However, advances in technology and communication as well as the rapidity of change in a globalized country have caused the writers under investigation here to look closely at the Celtic Tiger and crash in a fictional form. Kevin Barry, Paul Murray, and Claire Kilroy are examples of what could perhaps be a larger trend in Irish literature. They have been set apart because of the ways that they have engaged with contemporary issues in unique ways and gained significant attention for doing so. However, they are part of a larger group of contemporary writers who share the opinion that current conditions are worth being explored through fiction. Donal Ryan and Kevin Power are just two examples of authors who have followed in the footsteps of the others in deciding to focus on issues affecting present day Ireland. With contemporary focus as a

trend, the question remains as to whether or not, this focus and the stylistic elements that contribute to it are the beginnings of a new literary movement.

Post-Celtic Tiger Literature as a Movement?

Barry, Murray, and Kilroy are connected by the subjects they deal with and by the contemporary applicability of their prose. However, their novels and short stories also vary widely in form and in stylistic innovation. Kevin Barry has dealt with both the present and the future in short stories and long prose through noticeable powers of creation with characters and settings. He has created spaces that are changing, like modern Ireland, and places that carry the effects of that change, like Bohane. Barry crafts the citizens of these spaces by highlighting the sensory aspects that tie the people to the settings. He concentrates on the way that his characters dress, the types of music they listen to, the sounds that the cities and villages make. Between Barry's works set in the present and in the future, he has created two very distinct societies. His work dealing with the present day shows the effects of globalization and rapidly changing spaces. His work dealing with the future shows a society that has become dangerously stagnant yet unwaveringly longs for the past. He employs humor and grit in his works making them strong works of entertainment beyond their newsworthy criticism of the present circumstances. His approach to storytelling shows that he thinks writers are essential for making sense of things. His skill with characters and settings shows his attempt to make sense of modernity and the future, while his wit and entertainment value allows his works to be attractive to the public.

Paul Murray and Claire Kilroy have taken on the effects of post-Celtic Tiger literature in more direct ways. Murray has created characters who all show the direct effects of the modern economic situation. These characters reflect these effects in different ways: some deal with it

through satire, others deal with it as a consequence of the world they are being raised in. Murray also uses humor and narrative to make his stories entertaining and attractive for a larger audience. Kilroy uses satire and magical realism in order to make the most direct approach to the actual crash of the Celtic Tiger. Her narrative allows readers to use literature in order to gain understanding about topics that have not been treated by modern authors. It provides people with an outlet other than newspaper articles and TV news in order to understand the crash. While her abstractions of what actually happen make her storytelling less accurate than a news report, her recognizable details and journalistic approach make the fictional elements seem slight. Her style is like that of a journalist who truly believes that there are darker magical forces behind an economic crisis.

If these three writers are focusing on similar topics, establishing unique forms of style, and promoting storytelling through the circulation of their works, are they the beginnings of a movement? It is challenging to characterize what the beginning of a literary movement looks like, because movements are usually designated through academic criticism some time after the works have been published. The most telling sign that these writers are indeed the beginning of a movement is that they are markedly different from those who have come before. They all acknowledge that Irish writers who have become historically famous are viewed differently today. They have revolted against the views of these writers by walking a different path entirely, and analyzing the culture that has redefined past Irish writers. They are among the first wave of writers in Ireland to focus on the present crisis, and posit theories about future societies. They comment on these contemporary issues in unique ways that establish them as distinguished authors among their contemporaries. Finally, they all demonstrate a wholehearted belief in what they are doing, even when being experimental.

Barry, Murray, and Kilroy have demonstrated conscious efforts to incorporate contemporary issues into fiction. They show a forthright yearning to spread their commentaries, yet most of all, they show a desire for storytellers like themselves to remain relevant. By advocating storytelling and demonstrating stylistic prowess, these authors have gained critical attention; however, they have not been subject to widespread study. Ironically, while they stand out for engaging with contemporary issues involving globalization, they have gained the majority of their critical fame in Ireland. If these authors continue to grow in the international spotlight, they have the potential to be representatives of modern Irish literature around the world. Although it takes time for literary periods to gain academic attention as “movements,” all of the precursors of one can be found in the works of Barry, Murray, and Kilroy. If these authors and their contemporaries continue on their current trajectory they will be remembered as those who spawned the Post-Celtic Tiger literary movement by approaching critical contemporary issues with wit, creativity, and innovation.

³⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cbf8IryCh0E>

³⁸ www.storymap.ie

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