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"Up Like a Rocket, Down Like a Stick": The Rise and Demise of the Celtic Tiger

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Abstract. As the most globalized nation in the world, Ireland produced its own global-village idiots, who, through greed and corruption, killed the Celtic Tiger which as it collapsed plunged Ireland from great wealth to asking or not asking for massive loans. After reviewing the historical and economic background, the essay discusses relevant literary works from Brian Friel's *The Mundy Scheme* to Paul Murray's *Skippy Dies*.

Keywords: Celtic Tiger, housing bubble, corruption, greed, *The Mundy Scheme, Skippy Dies*

> The Hungarian Foreign Minister, Dr János Martonyi, says Ireland is "extremely important and relevant" for his country as its government negotiates entry to the EU and endeavors to catch up with more developed countries. . . . "Ireland means catching up can be done. It is seen in Hungary as the main inspiration, model, and image of that process. If we really want to maintain diversity we have to stick to identity—that is also the Irish message."
> (Quoted in Paul Gillespe) The *Irish Times*, 4 April 2001
>
> "Ireland was rich, its people were not . . ." (Fintan O'Toole 92)
>
> "I can take anything except another season of adolescent fantasizing."
> (Tom Mac Intyre 23)

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In discussing cultural history, especially recent cultural history, the temptation is often to ignore the human dimension in favor of broad sweeping generalizations about the times, its cultural productions and its actors upon the national or local stage. This lecture will be no exception as I yield to this temptation but before I do I would like to put a human face on the price paid for this sordid story of greed, corruption, and vanity, which we know as "the Celtic Tiger." The first face belongs to a young Trinity College student, Simon Phelan studying Civil Engineering. When admitted to Trinity, the Irish economy was growing 5.4% per year and unemployment was low at 4.4%. This spring with the economy down over the past year by 7.5%, of the 100 students in his class only two have had job interviews—that is, as of April 2010, no one has a job or been offered a job. Many in his class are searching abroad for work.

The second face is middle aged and worried because of having two young children and a thirty-year mortgage on a house. He is Robert Peelo, 35 and an Irish public servant in the Garda or Irish Police force. Previous to this year and for several years his salary rose at a predictable rate of around 6% per year. This year he received no raise but instead suffered a deep cut in salary of 18%, which means a decrease of 24% in expected income and 18% in actual income. At the same time an old Irish code of ethics prohibits anyone in the Garda from taking on any other work but that of policing. So he works all the overtime he can get, but that, too, is diminishing (Shah).

The third is a friend in her fifties who, having raised a family, went back to university and took a part-time job in an office where she quickly became a key person in increasing the office's productivity. Last January her official work evaluation gave her the highest marks, then in February she was called into the manager's office and summarily dismissed as the last-hired-first-fired—an act that will inevitably lower the office's productivity (private communication).

All three are the innocent victims of increasing unemployment, decreasing net worth, the bursting of the biggest housing bubble in history, corporate and individual greed, and short-sighted government action designed to paper-over previous inaction rather than to address the fundamental economic and political swamp that led to this economic and social disaster. At the McGill Summer School for 2009, over forty invited Irish scholars, politicians, and public figures discussed and debated the current economic turmoil and the vast majority of them concluded that the political culture left over from the British colonial period that helped create and perpetuate cronyism, a belief in being embattled, and the necessity to protect "our own" against "them" had contributed greatly to the current malaise. The exceptions to this were the Fianna Fail politicians, most notably Brian Lenihan, the Minister for Finance who, in denial mode, proclaimed that "the vast majority got something out of the Celtic Tiger. It was not something for bankers and developers"! (82). True, most people made a few euro as they plunged deeper into

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debt and dutifully paid their payroll taxes, but it was the developers and bankers who made millions and paid little or nothing into the public treasury. In a further nod to patent absurdity, Mr. Lenihan's recipe for getting out of the mess was to return to the spirit and program of "1922 when the British cleared everything but the typewriters out of the country" (90). Such nostalgia played a significant role in the demise of the Tiger and the government's obvious inability to deal with the consequences of its own disastrous economic and social policies.

1. The historical background

Historically, Ireland went from "the sick man of Europe" in the 1980s (O'Toole 16) to the wealthiest nation in Europe in the late 1990s to one of the PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain) in danger of sovereign default in the first decade of the new century. The contemporary historian of Ireland, Roy Foster correctly observes that "for Ireland, it is the rate of change in the last thirty years of the twentieth century that is the most bewildering" (3). That and the increased social inequality brought on by the excesses of the Celtic Tiger.[1]

Ireland joined the European Economic Community in 1973 as one of the poorest nations in Western Europe and remained such until 1992 when coincidentally it joined the Euro Zone in signing the Maastricht Treaty. The Taoiseach or Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern would later—and in slightly less than one hour—easily account for this stunning change in a talk he gave round the world, "How to Grow Rich the Irish Way." He revealed all—for only a mere €30,000 speaking fee. I am, however, willing to share his formula for creating national wealth for slightly less: Ahern's formula for getting rich consisted of three main actions all to be carried out within the context of massive globalization. 1. Low personal and corporate taxes; 2. a "business-friendly government"; and 3. light business and banking regulation, if any. Now, it is true that Ireland is the world's most globalized economy and for a brief few years Ireland became very rich, but as for the formula itself, I believe it is highly suspect, if not wildly inaccurate.

Ireland became so very rich so quickly in part because it had been so unusually poor for a European country because of its own peculiar colonial history that led to its non-participation in major European economic revolutions, such as industrialization and modern farming methods. According to Ray Mac Sharry and Patrick White "[i]n 1922, over half the labour force was engaged in agriculture and two-thirds of the population lived in rural areas" (41). Little changed from 1922 to

[1] Carmen Kuhling and Kiernan Keohane in their extensively researched study, *Cosmopolitan Ireland*: *Globalisation and Quality of Life* document "the increased polarization between rich and poor . . . and . . . the dependence of the Irish economy on global, specifically US-based multinationals" (16).

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1972. Employment outside agriculture was sparse and wages were low, which led, in turn, to high immigration. "Today [2000], just one in ten work on the land, while two-thirds live in town" (41). In the 1950s tentative measures were taken in an attempt to improve the economy, but most of them failed or produced only temporary, small results.

Nor did joining the EEC in 1973 solve Ireland's basic problems of poor education, an inferior health system, meager pensions, and an infrastructure that featured inadequate roads and an antiquated telephone service. Irish education varied from very good primary education to poor quality free secondary education—the latter only recently introduced in 1967. Higher education consisted of only two universities: Trinity College in Dublin and the National University of Ireland with campuses in Dublin (UCD), Cork (UCC), and Galway (NUCG). Various attempts to change any of these deficiencies resulted in little or no progress and in the process Ireland acquired a huge national debt that ate 70% of all taxes collected in interest alone. The Irish did, however, learn from their mistakes and in the late 1980s things changed for the better.

More significantly, a new broad general agreement was reached that future European Union grants would be used to improve the foundation of Irish society through financing expensive changes to higher education, while at the same time improving Irish infrastructure. Ireland lacked significant national resources. Irish agriculture could not greatly expand. But the Irish work force could be and was fundamentally changed through free education both at the secondary and the tertiary level. To meet this exponentially expanded need all higher education in Ireland became free for all students; universities expanded, while new ones together with technical institutes became established. The result was an educated work force that became the envy of Europe as it proved a central inducement in attracting foreign investment to Ireland.[2]

Besides investing in education, government, labor, and business all agreed to "A Social Compact" that emphasized the creation of "A Caring Society" that would provide the needed education along with health care, pensions, and other social services in return for labor peace and increased productivity (O'Toole 18-19). In the political realm, political stability was achieved through a series of coalition governments.

How much each of these efforts contributed to Irish prosperity is a matter for historians to debate. What we do know is that an educated work force combined

[2] Fintan O'Toole ruefully and rightly notes that "[a] rare reason to be cheerful after the bursting of the Irish bubble was that 42.3 per cent of the population aged 25-34 had completed third-level education, the second highest rate in the EU" (18). A high degree of foreign investment is, however, a very mixed blessing as may be seen in "the Irish microcomputer assembly sector [that] experienced serious job losses and plant closures. This reversal . . . clearly demonstrates the vulnerability to changing circumstances of a branch-plant economy such as Ireland's" (Egaraat and Breathnach 137).

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with a new Irish work ethic led to greatly increased productivity and foreign investment, a vibrant, expanded middle class, and an increase in population as Ireland began to attract rather than export immigrants.[3] All of these phenomena were capped off by the election in 1990 of Mary Robinson as President of the Irish Republic who brought with her a positive view of the value of being Irish. Thus the Irish were well on their way to having a prosperous nation of which they could all be proud when greed and corruption combined to destroy such promises.

2. The Village Idiots

The English Royal Astronomer, Martin Rees once declared that "the global village will have its global idiots," and he is surely right. As the most globalized nation in the world, Ireland produced a host of global idiots and, unfortunately, they were often put in charge of its financial and political institutions as well as its several property development companies. Through greed and corruption they killed the Celtic Tiger within a few short years bursting the housing bubble and plunging the country into steep economic decline.

It would be difficult to overestimate the role of corruption in this debacle. The *Rowntree Report on Political Corruption in Ireland* concluded in 2002 that "[c]orruption is a central theme of Irish life and politics. Ireland is now regarded as one of the more corrupt European Union countries" (quoted in Kuhling and Keohane 30). Or, as Fintan O'Toole phrased it somewhat more polemically when describing the role of "[Betie] Ahern, [Charlie] McCreevy and . . . Mary Harney," the heads of government:

> They had an opportunity that was unique in Irish history. . . . and they blew it. They allowed an unreconstructed culture of cronyism, self-indulgence and, at its extremes, of outright corruption, to remain in place, with fatal long-term consequences. . . . they practiced the economics of utter idiocy . . . (19-20).

The politicians were not alone in their rapaciousness and short-sightedness, however. Foremost among these people who epitomized greed and corruption was Seán Fitzpatrick. As president of the Anglo-Irish Bank he was never shy about making loans, especially to himself for at one time in 2007 he owed his bank 129 million euro! (O'Toole 192; see also Fottrell). Moreover, he made sure the shares of his bank traded at a good price by loaning each of the bank's 15 directors one and a half million euro each with which to buy this same bank's stock! (Fottrell). And he believed in the rapid circulation of money and so improved the bank's

[3] For a detailed discussion of the change from a net yearly loss of population to spectacular gains, see Piaras Mac Éinri.

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balance sheet through an incredibly complicated scheme that increased his deposits one year by six million euro at no cost to anyone—not even the bank and did this not once but repeatedly (O'Toole 206). Since the Irish celebrate St Patrick's Day for the better part of a week, the Guards showed considerable restraint in waiting until Thursday 18 March to arrest Seán Fitzpatrick. (For the full story, see Fottrell.)

Another paragon of corruption, greed, and bad taste, Seán Dunne was a larger than life figure worthy of the great Latin satirist Petronius, whose work, *The Satyricon* includes one of the best set-pieces in western satire, "Dinner with Trimalchio"—a marvelous exposé of Roman society at its nadir. Trimalchio, an incredibly wealthy, willfully ignorant, and somewhat arrogant man, gives a huge dinner party for the sole purpose of displaying his considerable wealth while inadvertently demonstrating his amazing bad taste. In this memorable and wildly comic set-piece Petronius succeeds in heisting the Roman *nouveau arrivé* with his own petard.

In a similar period of excess in turn-of-the-century-Ireland, as the Celtic Tiger grew in strength fueled by Irish taxpayers' money, driven by greed, and sustained by corruption, much of society succeeded in reaching new heights of extreme bad taste. Trimalchio might have felt right at home in this Ireland of omni-present ostentatious displays of newly acquired "baubles, bangles, and bright shiny [hotels]," with huge fleets of high-end automobiles creating traffic jams, newly-constructed houses on their way to becoming palaces, million-euro multi-day and -night parties, and jet-setting politicians who eschewed prop airplanes, trains, or automobiles to jet around the tiny island of Ireland in real jets.[4] In all this rampant extravagance, one Irish person stood out above all the rest, one who would prove worthy of being named "The Trimalchio of the Celtic Tiger Era," and that was property-developer, bon-vivant, and host-extraordinaire, Seán Dunne. Seán Dunne built many hotels and houses whether they were needed or not (O'Toole 116). He conceived of the enormous Dockland development project planned to include the new home for the Irish National Theatre—the Abbey Theatre. With three other developers he bought the *Christina O* "venue for the wedding receptions of Onassis and Jackie Kennedy in 1968 and of Grace Kelly and Prince Rainier in 1956" (O'Toole 2). The four Irishmen bought Onassis's famous yacht, however, using taxpayer's money to finance 80% of its purchase price. But all these schemes pale in comparison with the extremes of his wedding and his subsequent reckless investments in land.

First the wedding: Seán Dunne's wedding took place "in a seventeenth-century villa on the Italian Riviera" with a highly select invited guest list of "bankers and footballers, designers and theater directors, not to mention . . .

[4] For example, Mary Harney in eighteen months took two dozen flights "to exotic destinations like Galway, Cork, Kerry and Shannon" (O'Toole 90).

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political deal-makers" gushed the newspaper that employed the bride (quoted in O'Toole 1). Fintan O'Toole summarizes the extravagance:

> The party cost 1.5 million, but was merely a prelude to a longer, more lavish nuptial celebration. . . . Forty-four guests were taken on a two-week cruise around the Mediterranean. The cost of chartering the yacht is 65,000 a day, not including food, drink, and fuel. The fuel charge was 575 an hour. (1-2)

When he returned to his native Ireland Seán Dunne went on a land-acquisition buying spree purchasing two famous Ballsbridge hotels that he planned to demolish and replace with a grandiose highrise. He paid €260 million for the pair—a fabulous price—and then completed the land parcel by acquiring a small piece of ground for what was "believed to be one of the highest prices paid for a piece of real estate ever, anywhere". . . [at] "€195 million an acre" (O'Toole 3). I dwell on this example to give some idea of the extravagance to which greed and unbridled lust for wealth could and did lead. What interests me as a student of literature is how Irish writers reacted to this unparalleled situation—How did such Tiger-excesses transmute into literature and in what forms?

3. The Taoiseach and the Irish theater

Brian Friel in a 1969 far too-neglected play, *The Mundy Scheme* presented some of the weaknesses and the greed that would lead to the rise and demise of the Celtic Tiger. The leading character, also a Taoiseach, is F. X. Ryan, a compilation of all the conniving politicians that ever cut a deal or betrayed a colleague in the name of financial gain and/or increasing their power. Long before the Tiger began his long slouch towards the Golden Euro, Friel dissected the greed, irreverence, ambition, and extravagance that would feed it. In *The Mundy Scheme* he pillories Irish cupidity, especially in its politicians—a subject apparently no longer welcome on the Irish stage (see the negative contemporary reviews of Sebastian Barry's *Hinterland*). The premise of the scheme developed by a Texan-Irish-American Homer Mundy, Jr. and therefore appropriately named after him (196) is simplicity itself: Irish Americans long to return to Ireland, to return, as they put it, to "the old sod." So why not make it possible for them to do in death what all of them wished to do but so many failed to do in life by turning the sparsely populated and useless West of Ireland into a huge American cemetery. The scheme has everything to recommend it: an increase in scheduled Aer Lingus flights landing in the west, a boost for the political party in power, more income for the Church, fuller employment for the impoverished west, and not least, of course, returning a sizable profit to the various politicians and bureaucrats involved in conceiving of and implementing the scheme.

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What is prescient about the play is Friel's notion of turning a profit by filling vacant land with cemeteries. Slightly less than thirty-five years later developers would hatch a similar scheme that would fill the vacant land in and around small villages with large tracts of houses ostensibly for rent but in reality built almost solely to collect a state subsidy for the building itself. The result is that dozens of villages are, in effect, more empty today than they were before the building spree (O'Toole 116). The County of Leitrim, for example,

> ended up with almost one in three of its houses empty and with hundreds of houses built in villages like Dromod or Leitrim village that recorded only a very small increase in actual population. It is a strange housing boom that leaves such places literally emptier than they were before.
> The state . . . [subsidized] around €2 billion in all—the building of houses whose purpose was to provide shelter, not for real people, but for the taxes of their builders. (O'Toole 117)

Unfortunately thus far such Celtic Tiger excesses have yet to produce a Petronius with his unfailing comic vision or a Juvenal with his righteous outrage—though Fintan O'Toole does come close at least in his outrage—and thus far no Horace, gentle but barbed. The office of Taoiseach itself was lampooned by Tom Mac Intyre in *Only an Apple* (2009) by focusing on the Taoiseach's vanity and self-importance, but leaving untouched the issues of greed and to a less extent, corruption. When Sebastian Barry's fine satiric play, *Hinterland* earlier debuted in Ireland in 2002, however, many reviewers panned it—not because of its dramatic qualities or failings but because its target, Charles Haughey, the former Taoiseach at that point had lost his wife to cancer and was rumored to be not too well himself. (The play suggests he has prostate cancer, hence its multiple-punning title.) Reviewers thought it unfair to kick a man down on his luck even if, according to the Moriarty Tribunal, he had taken payments of "€11.56 million between 1979 and 1996 (equivalent to €45 million in contemporary [2006] values and 'granted favours in return'" (Foster 89; see also O'Toole who notes that this sum equaled "171 times his total salary payments as a full-time politician" [27]).

For the retired Taoiseach, Johnny Silvester in *Hinterland* "politician" becomes a term of contempt even as he abuses the public trust to line his pockets believing that simply his being the head of the government of the country and bringing about economic well-being justifies his taking whatever he can for himself. By definition as head of state he must be above the law. There is one law for the small and the weak and the middling, another for the powerful, and yet another for the one on top, such as himself. Barry is clear that this Taoiseach has indeed made sacrifices for his country. He is no Tricky Dickey Tierney who'd "sell his country for four pence—ay—and go down on his bended knees and thank the

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Almighty Christ he had a country to sell," as Joyce so memorably pilloried the sleazy Dublin politician of another year (102). No, this is a man who believes he is entitled by the sacrifices he made of family and friends to help himself to the public coffers. Nor, as he says, do the Irish people begrudge him wealth but see it as deserved. Only the media—those archetypal begrudgers—object, or so he would have us believe. "I've gone from king to criminal in the space of a couple of years. Did I not serve this country well? Did I not create this plenty they now enjoy? I couldn't have done what I have done without being the man that I am. . . . There is not a drop of blood on these hands" (32).

As the historian Roy Foster documents, by the time he became Taoiseach in 1979 and throughout the rollercoaster ride of the next twelve years, Haughey never lost his sense of entitlement. In some ways [reflected in the play] he kept it to the end of his life" (77).

Later in Act Two, Johnny grants an interview to a spirited young undergraduate, Aisling, who is doing a term paper at UCD. In the course of the interview he reveals the convoluted way he laundered money (54). Aisling, in her turn, asserts that her father, who teaches Modern Irish History in the Hinterland of Galway, was also precocious when young and that he also held considerable promise, but, unlike Johnny Silvester, he never sold out for cash. He thus represents many of those who believe they have been betrayed. To which Johnny rejoins:

> Look, I made this country. How you live, how you are, the clothes on your pretty back, even your damned confusion in the face of reality—you owe it all to me. I made you, Aisling Dwyer. Asked the hard questions, long ago. The father of the nation. . . . I have the whole country against me now. . . . They will never understand. It's because they're comfortable, afflicted by comfort. (59)

This encounter between Johnny and Aisling relates explicitly to Barry's theme of the Great Man of Our Time—the politician who comes from humble beginnings, rises through the ranks to govern the country, but who along the way succumbs to those temptations presented to people in positions of power. Such temptations are usually classified in newspaper and television accounts primarily under the headings of money and sex but which Barry more carefully groups under the rubric of hubris—hubris that dares identify the good of the country with the good of the man governing the country. "I am the giant of the modern era. The age of Silvester will take up many a chapter in the history of Ireland. Whatever you do to me now, no one can erase me" he boasts (82). Thus Barry, like Friel before him, strikes at the hypocrisy of this genial paragon of corruption who amassed a fortune but not from his Taoiseach's salary.

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4. Property developers, immigrants, Tiger children, and novels

Thus far no writer has taken on the property developers who butchered the rural landscape causing untold future ecological disasters and current economic and aesthetic ones. Those developers made their money solely in *constructing* the houses not in selling or leasing them. Thanks to outrageously generous government subsidies engineered by their friends in high places, developers never had to take seriously the capitalistic prospect of selling their new houses in order to turn a profit. Such Potemkin-like tracts remain today a potent symbol of the Tiger's cynical greed.[5]

And it is exactly that cynical selfish greed that Anne Hagerty coruscates in *One Day as a Tiger* (1997). In Hagerty's novel an entirely irresponsible, feckless young man causes the death of his brother and indirectly that of his parents, betrays everyone who attempts to befriend him from his Trinity tutor to his one-time girl friend. Worse still, he seduces his sister-in-law then runs away with her to France where together they live it up in five star hotels, indulge in glamorous clothes and extravagant meals, and spend their days at the racetrack backing losers putting everything on the credit card. The novel's title, *One Day as a Tiger* reflects the little time needed to destroy love, friendship, husbandry, while indulging in waste, revenge, greed, and extravagance—that ubiquitous leitmotif of the Tiger.

Much of the Tiger's economic prosperity was fueled by relatively cheap immigrant labor, personified in the UK by the "Polish Plumber," but there also were Polish bartenders and bouncers, Hungarian laborers and cleaners, Lithuanian pimps and prostitutes. Chris Binchy in his third novel, *Open-handed* (2008) delineates how such immigrants become exploited by various Irish hotel owners, landlords, managers, and sex-traffickers. Yet the most memorable character in the novel may well be not an immigrant but the Irishman Sylvester who sees himself as a most sophisticated operator wise to the ways of the world and whose grand plans for gaining a Tiger fortune hinge on his being admitted into a consortium formed in order to buy Prague real estate. His grand plan unravels, however, thanks to his naïf belief in his superior knowledge of the world and in his ability to access important potential business partners by impressing them with his business acumen. At the conclusion of the novel, as he leaves a hotel having tipped extravagantly a Polish prostitute, he discovers that his precious yellow bag

[5] The Irish scheme is reminiscent of that of Grigory Potemkin, a Russian minister who in 1787 built fake villages in the Crimea to impress the Empress Catherine with the worth of her new conquest along the banks of the Dnieper River. Irish developers built row upon row of new homes which unlike Potemkin Villages were real as far as construction went but fake as housing for real people. The vast majority were never sold and never occupied and the result was the creation of desolation and not as in Potemkin Villages to hide desolation.

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containing €100,000 is missing. Losing a sum that large is serious enough, but, far worse for Sylvester is the fact that the €100,000 is not his money but belongs to his four partners in that Prague real estate scheme. He only had it in trust as he was responsible for personally couriering the cash to Prague—an assignment given him by his "partners" that should have immediately set off alarm bells. Unfortunately, he is too blind to see that these euro notes must be part of an elaborate million-euro money-laundering scheme involving deflated Prague property which the reader realizes involves money from the drug trade. Binchy makes use of the well-known Irish phenomenon of "family businesses established in the heroin-trading flats . . . [that] cemented their money and power in these years: the black economy of bundles of cash transported in sports holdalls operated across the social spectrum" (Foster 85).

Sylvester's role is, therefore, only that of a convenient tool for these drug lords, his erstwhile "partners" who will not be happy with *his* losing *their* money. A small man acting out a tiny role on a large stage littered with pitfalls and trapdoors none of which he sees let alone recognizes as dangerous. What links *Open-handed* to *One Day as a Tiger* is the similar focus on the leitmotif of Tigerish greed, blatant disregard for other people, and blindness to the consequences of impetuous actions.

Paul Murray's *An Evening of Long Goodbyes* (2003) also satirizes Irish greed, innocence, extravagance, excessive self-interest, and naïveté and does so with wit and satire. As Chekhov one hundred years ago, so Murray satirically lambastes the *nouveau arrivé*, with special attention given to the huge fortunes made in mobile phones. "In mid-1999, a series of linked government measures was announced, designed to get Ireland into a leading position in the race to become the country of choice in Europe for electronic-commerce business" (Mac Sharry and White 298). As Barry had done in *Hinterland*, Murray dwells on the consequences of unimagined wealth that brings in its wake corruption, scandal, and the ever-present tribunals. The dead father in *The Evening of Long Goodbyes*, for instance, like Barry's retired Taoiseach made a lot of money that he carefully hid in various bank accounts located around Ireland—an action that Charles Haughy was famous for. Charles's father put money in trust funds under various names and in off-shore blind accounts in order to avoid taxes or worse. The checks for his mortgage payments were never drawn on the same bank twice. He hid the money so well that his heirs in desperate need of funds to avoid foreclosure on their house and lands cannot locate a single account.

But worse, the father, who for Charles epitomizes ingenuity and wisdom, becomes progressively identified with sleaze reflected in his various sexual adventures with under-aged models. To compound his offences, while blatantly illustrating both his stupidity and contempt for others' opinions, he often conducted such escapades in the family home.

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As Charles discovers the unsettling truth that his is actually a house of financial, moral, and artistic decay, the axes ring in the orchard as the bank forecloses. The dystopian reality of his family so apparent to the reader slowly if partially dawns on Charles forcing him to acknowledge his beloved sister's death or, at least, permanent absence, his ineffectual, alcoholic mother and depraved and probably crooked father, and, perhaps even more difficult, his own hopes deferred or cancelled. The Celtic Tiger's promise of largess lies elsewhere and with others as Charles at the end of the novel labors at long last in a real, if menial job. Like an old dog, he, too, has been tossed out on the rubbish heap, but without hope of rescue.

Murray's second novel, *Skippy Dies* (2010) paints a far darker, far more tragic portrait of the price the Celtic Tiger has exacted on families and particularly on the young. An excellent portrayal of the world of wealthy Irish teenagers at the time of their initiation into experience, the novel spares no one charged with caring for or educating the young. Time and again this Tiger absents itself leaving its cubs to raise themselves in a hostile environment with little or no protection from predators. Or, to change metaphors, this is the under-belly of the Celtic Tiger where parents neglect children and/or keep them out of sight by enrolling them in high-priced boarding schools leaving themselves unencumbered and free to play, make money, enjoy life. But as in the disaster brought on by the demise of the Tiger itself, the result for the young ranges from death and maiming to insanity and neglect as their boarding school, like the proverbial house of cards or the Celtic Tiger itself, collapses—"up like a rocket and down like a stick" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 371).

Hopefully, Irish fiction and drama will continue to examine the demise of the Celtic Tiger bringing before the public the corrupt, inept, and callous. Perhaps someday soon an Irish Petronius will appear to answer the very real need for biting satire. For today, there are few or no cranes to be seen on the Dublin skyline as the building trades remain idle, banks have collapsed including all investment banks and a few of their officers have been indicted, several multi-nationals have left for greener pastures and cheaper labor, while far too many small firms, such as Hughes & Hughes bookstores have closed their doors. Houses have lost so much value that a high percentage are now "under water," while those people with mortgages they can no longer pay have lost their homes. Far too many innocent people, such as those three with whom I began this essay have paid and are continuing to pay a fearful price for the greed and corruption of others. I hope that this part of the Irish model will not continue to be what inspires Hungary or any other country.

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