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The Celtic Tiger and Ireland's Cultural Identity

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The Celtic Tiger and Ireland's Cultural Identity

Ireland's Celtic Tiger has had a series of complicated effects on Irish culture and society. The Celtic Tiger made Ireland one of the top global economies, a large shift from Ireland's not so distant past that included events like the Famine and the Troubles. Although much of the population seemingly welcomed this rise in the economy and quickly bought into the false promises of the Celtic Tiger, the economy crashed and Ireland still faces an economic recession today. The Celtic Tiger appeared to be a much-welcomed change for Ireland for a number of reasons. Ireland has a history of suffering both under British colonial rule, but also as an independent nation. The Celtic Tiger and the growth in the economy seemed to offer a new path and future for Ireland that could be a distinct break from the past. Although a great amount of literature now exists on the Celtic Tiger before and after the fall, there are still a lot of unanswered questions and issues. In *Reinventing Ireland*, Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons, and Michael Cronin explain that the dominant literature surrounding the Celtic Tiger describes economic success but "neglects the social impact of economic growth" and that such approaches "assume that economic growth results in positive social outcomes" (4). However, it has become clearer that the Celtic Tiger brought with it many negative consequences that have affected large populations of Irish people as well as the authenticity of Irish culture.

During the 1990s, the focus on nurturing the economy took precedence over nurturing a culture and identity that could both claim and understand its own history, and embrace new aspects of a modern culture. Irish culture instead became a commodity that simply served the economy. Michael Peillon states, "Not only was culture lagging behind socio-economic development; culture came to be seen as an obstacle to economic development" (40). Peillon discusses the term "neo-corporatism" stating that, "This refers to a kind of partnership in which

private groups participate in a direct way in public decision-making... This cooperation turns into collusion when the national interest is defined practically exclusively in terms of promoting Irish firms on world markets” (52). It is dangerous for culture to become a commodity because it essentially loses its function and meaning. Instead of the economy integrating around the values of the culture, culture merely conforms to fit the goals of the economy, and when culture is lost the ability to critique aspects of society are lost. Peillon affirms that, “Most aspects of cultural activity and production are now so integrated into the post-industrial economy, either as a means of production or as a means of consumption, that the very possibility of a critical stance is suppressed or, more simply, not entertained or even imagined” (52). The attempts to continue economic growth sacrifices tenets of culture and history, and previous ideas of culture and identity that are founded on history up to this point are deliberately distanced, and there are efforts to essentially erase or try to forget history before this episode of economic success.

Attempts to forge a new identity starting from the present with the Celtic Tiger resulted in revisionist narratives of Ireland’s history. Fintan O’Toole states, “The combined effect of the economic, historical and aesthetic readings of the Irish past has been to construct a narrative of contemporary Irish society in which the country is presented as a modern, vibrant economy and society which has successfully abandoned its reactionary, nationalist Catholic past” (Qtd. Kirby et al. 7). Ireland cannot abandon their past by revising historical narratives, and economic success does not provide a definitive separation from history and the present. Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin state that, “history is used as a bogeyman in a kind of rhetoric of binary terror. Either you accept the deregulated ruthlessness of the market or you will be cast back into the eternal night of emigration and high unemployment,” and further, “oppositional forces who contest this equation are variously presented as naïve, retrograde, irresponsible or ungrateful” (Kirby et al.

7). Those who are skeptical of the excessive success of the Celtic Tiger are accused of ungratefulness and wanting to return to a past that does not include economic success. Since the Celtic Tiger is seen as a distinct break from the past, reminders of the past are seen as a threat to the current economy. Barbara Misztal explains that the relationship between memory and history changes as the economy in Ireland changes. Misztal states, “The relationship between history and memory in preindustrial society was an intimate one, their interdependence underpinned by the preponderance of an oral culture and the sense that the past was bound to the present for its survival” (10). However when the Celtic Tiger peaks in Ireland, revised historical narratives are promulgated throughout the culture, if not intentionally erased from consciousness. Misztal states that nationalist politics “found its way into society through their textbooks, speeches, and lectures, and thus facilitated the construction of national memory” (11). Historians played a role in dispersing this information by focusing on selective aspects of history, demonstrating the deliberate efforts to revise narratives.

Although historical narratives seek to forget traumatic episodes of the past, that does not change history in any way, and the traumas are simply buried in history. Ryan Lorraine describes the narrative of Ireland during the Celtic Tiger as one that, “elides the painful and humiliating episodes of the national history that could potentially curb the *joie de vivre* that has prevailed until the recent economic downturn” (212). Although the narratives are constructed and promoted by elite groups that benefit from the economic surge, they are also consumed by much of the culture. Lorraine explains that, “it is the prosperity of modern-day Ireland that makes such memories so discomfiting, as they evoke ‘our own Third World memory’ of a country that ‘as late as the 1970s was underdeveloped’ (2007)” (Gibbons/Lorraine 215). Ireland as a top global economy is uncomfortable admitting and confronting how underdeveloped the nation was right

before the Celtic Tiger. Although Ireland is in a state of great economic prosperity, their recent history does not support a gradual rise to success, but rather an abrupt entrance into wealth. The abruptness with which Ireland attained wealth affects how they handle this wealth. Prosperity was not integrated into the values and traditions of culture, but culture was sacrificed for wealth. The rapid appearance of success was seen as a distinctive break from the past and a reason not to confront the recent traumatic history. Memories of these histories still exist within Irish peoples, so memory becomes a threat to the new focus on the economy. Memory is a threat, because attention is taken away from trying to achieve economic success and focuses on a history and traditions that seems to conflict with economic success.

The negative products of the Celtic Tiger have in reality often hindered the ability to create a stable economy that will last into the future, and the issues that were neglected during the Celtic Tiger are now pushing to the forefront to again be confronted. Malcolm Sen states that, “the lack of proper historical closure of the past has meant that previous histories are constantly mediating in a Victorian fashion, in present-day national and political discourse: ‘the troubles of the past are relived as contemporary events’(Mcbride 2001)” (112). It is important to focus on the issue of a sustainable economy that complements Irish culture, because it is precisely the extreme rapid nature of the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger that has wreaked havoc on other areas of life. Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin state that, “Social decay, crime, alcoholism, domestic violence, homophobia, racism and alienation are not conveniently backdated to the sins of the fathers but are portrayed as endemic to modernity itself, part of the price of catching up with advanced Anglo-American or European culture” (11). Ideally, this is not the entryway into a sustainable modernity that, intentionally or not, attempts to mirror or replicate those of other countries that have completely different circumstances, histories, social ramifications, and

traumas to deal with at the same time. The idea that “global integration is a cure” for problems that delve much deeper than the economy is a false way of thinking (Gibbons 97). The term “uneven modernity” describes the climate in Ireland, because the economy temporarily achieved a state of modernity, but no other areas of life followed or achieved modernity as a result of economic success. There has been a disproportionate development of the economy, not only in favor of “social, political, or cultural modernisation,” but often directly at the cost of development in these areas (Peillon 40). Ireland’s economy may have attained a state of modernity during the Celtic Tiger, but the modernity of culture, politics, and social development were sacrificed in order to achieve brief economic modernity. Ultimately, sacrificing development in social, political, and cultural spheres limited the life span of economic success, because uneven modernity could not sustain such a high level of economic prosperity that relies on social, politics, and culture to fall behind.

It is a fallacy to think that the Celtic Tiger defines Ireland, because in many representations it actually erases ideas of place and culture. Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin explain that, “Not least of the ironies of the new global Irishness is that what could be construed as the erosion of a sense of place, or the most distinctive aspects of a culture, is taken as an assertion of confidence and independence” (12). Creating an identity that is centered only on recent years of economic success cannot define Irishness more than all of the years and experiences prior to the Celtic Tiger. Starting history from the Celtic Tiger ignores the experience of many Irish peoples and the history of Ireland towards attaining independence. Cultural memory is important, especially during and following the time of the Celtic Tiger, because it offers the ability to reclaim aspects of identity and cultural experiences. Misztal states that, “Collective memory, then, ‘is part of culture’s meaning-making apparatus’; our need for meaning or for incorporation

into something that transfigures individual existence grants enormous importance to collective memory” (6). Myszta says that we rely on memory to “above all, make sense of our lives” (6). Malcom Sen discusses the role of sacred memory in both Irish and global cultures, and discusses the various ways that it appears integrated into society. He describes “an ideology that is motivated by modern discourses but also seeks to establish modernity’s compatibility with premodern modes of identification” as a successful use of sacred memory. Sen’s language demonstrates an important aspect about the relationship between both memory and the present, and history and modernity. Irish culture cannot remain consumed by memories of the past in order to try and use it to create identity, but they also must not lose the sacred memories in an attempt to achieve or maintain a sense of modernity that briefly came with the Celtic Tiger.

The literature here does not suggest a romantic regression into the past to counter the repression during the Celtic Tiger. However, there are meaningful ways of engaging with the past. Memory is not used just to explain the past, but it is a source for identity in the present, for both individuals and groups. Myszta describes the nature of memory as “dilemmatic,” which means that memory is necessary to make sense of our experiences over time and to create continuity with the present. Memories are a valuable source for individual and cultural identity and experience, but memories do not have to, and should not have to, dominate the present. J. Habermas states, ““a historical consciousness ideally performs critical work on memory in order to undo repression, counter ideological lures, and determine what aspects of the past justifiable merit being passed on as living heritage”” (qtd. Myszta 16). Ireland can engage with the past without feeling paralyzed or re-traumatized, and they can work to create a cohesive identity that includes a continuity of experience with history and the present, rather than trying to arbitrarily separate them. Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin state that, “culture could inspire political resistance

and alternatives, using an engagement with Ireland's past to identify resources for reimagining and reinventing a different Ireland of the future" (2). If Ireland engages with their past, they can further use the past as a resource that will help rather than repress history, and can actually help create a sustainable future by combining the knowledge and experience of the past with the modern changes in Ireland and drive them towards modernity. Misztal claims that, "memory can make truth claims and can play an important role as a source of truth when, for example, political power heavily censors national history" (7). Censorship and control over the dissemination of history is a known practice during the Celtic Tiger, so memory is one way to combat and protect identity and experience from revised historical narratives that are constructed with only the economy in mind. Lorraine states that, "the Celtic Tiger narrative is deceptively utopian, as it distracts from the injustice of past and present power processes" (212). Distraction from past injustice is a critical concept, because the revised historical narratives erase experiences with oppression and injustice, and this makes people more susceptible to newer forms of oppression. The disconnect with past social injustices blinds groups of Irish people to injustice and oppression that manifests from the Celtic Tiger. Erasing the past cannot sustain Ireland's future. The creation of a healthy relationship with a traumatic past, and now present, is necessary to create a sustainable identity that is not based on economic success that is already disappearing or disappeared.

Crime and the Erasure of Identity

Tana French's 2007 novel *In the Woods* uses the crime genre to explore many social issues and cultural tensions that stem from the Celtic Tiger leading up to the recession. Andrew Kincaid states that the Celtic noir genre reexamines tensions of modernity such as "wealth and exclusion, development and nostalgia, pace and custom, rage and justice" (40). Kincaid continues to explain of the Celtic noir genre that, "it is no coincidence that it came to fruition at a time when so much in Ireland was insecure, and that beneath the apparent glamor of a postmodern society lay nostalgia, fear, and violence" (44). French is able to use the events and characters surrounding multiple crimes to critique areas of life that needed to develop proportionally with economic success, but were instead neglected during the Celtic Tiger. She also uses the investigative processes to critique cultural amnesia during the Celtic Tiger by depicting an identity that does not effectively incorporate events of the past with the present, and how this negatively affects the characters and sequence of investigation. French argues that a balance between the past and present is necessary for both cultural history and individuals. Although French does not provide definitive parameters as to what constitutes a sufficient balance, she critiques practices that are undoubtedly harmful to creating an identity that recognizes the past, but does not allow the past to negatively interfere with life in the present.

In *In the Woods*, two murder cases center on an archaeological site that is ultimately destroyed to make a motorway. The first case takes place in 1984, when three children, Jamie Rowan, Adam Robert Ryan, and Peter Savage are reported missing in the woods of Knocknaree. Only Adam Ryan is found, but he is in a catatonic state upon discovery, and has no memory of what took place. The second case takes place twenty years later when the body of Katy Devlin, a twelve-year-old girl, is found in the same woods. Adam Ryan, who now goes by the name Rob

Ryan, is one of the lead detectives on the new investigation. Rob keeps his real identity and connection to the original crime a secret from everyone except his investigative partner, Cassie. The woods have both a cultural and personal historical significance since the site contains cultural artifacts, and this is where Rob's two childhood friends disappeared. The two cases appear to be linked at times, and the murder squad tries to make connections in hopes of solving both cases. Rosemary Erickson Johnsen states that both the investigators in the novel and the readers have to share the "experience of not knowing" (Johnsen 133). Johnsen explains that French subverts the expectations of closure within the crime genre in order to "lay claim to some of the dark uncertainties concomitant with life in post-Tiger Dublin (137). Many questions and issues are unanswered and still not dealt with, which demonstrates "through the figure of the noir detective, a certain existential resignation toward moral chaos and cultural uncertainty" (Kincaid 52). Ireland faces an uncertain future, and has to again confront a history that was repressed during the Tiger, as well as the social problems that directly stem from the Tiger economy. French's novel ends in a deliberately unsatisfactory manner—Rob's childhood case is never solved, and the motorway is built over the demolished archaeological site, despite the fact that there was a satisfying solution that could preserve the site and the motorway. Through the investigative process and the conflict over the archaeological site, French stresses that it will be hard for Ireland to move forward in a way that both preserves history and sacrifices the past for future progress. History and progress need to successfully pair together, though, in order to recover from repression during the Celtic Tiger and sustain economic progress in the future.

The process of the investigation in *In the Woods* parallels Ireland's process of creating a balanced relationship between the past, which includes a history before the Celtic Tiger, and the future in order to construct an identity. Rob's difficulty in separating his personal involvement in

the first case from the current murder investigation demonstrates the difficulty in confronting a traumatic past. Rob considered the events from his childhood to be behind him, but instead he has to work very closely with the first case. Although Rob initially thinks that he can perform his duties on the current case, the new case intertwines with the old one and the two appear to be connected. Rob tries too hard to forge a connection between the past and the present cases, which disrupts both the investigation of the murder and his life in the present. Rob is traumatized through the absence of memory rather than the memory of what happened in his childhood, but this is no less dangerous or traumatizing for him. His amnesia compromises his work ethic and “thwarts his investigation of Katy Devlin’s murder” (Peterson 99). Rob’s amnesia is not self-inflicted or intentionally maintained, and this is important because it is his amnesia that preoccupies him with attempting to solve the mystery from his childhood rather than solving the Devlin murder. French uses Rob’s amnesia as a metaphor for cultural memory to demonstrate that cultural amnesia is not sustainable, and it is foolish to think that historical or past events are finite, and do not need to be dealt with afterwards. Rob initially accepts that he will never remember what happened in his childhood, and he thinks he can simply create a new identity that does not include a past. However, French makes the distinction between Rob’s amnesia and Ireland’s self-inflicted amnesia to emphasize that Ireland does not have to go through amnesia, but historical memory can still be accessed. French uses Rob to serve as a warning for the destructive effects that amnesia and unrecovered memories can have. She argues that Ireland could suffer a similar identity crisis and future trauma if memories are sacrificed for economic success rather than making efforts to preserve history and process historical traumas.

Rob’s amnesia is dangerous because it prevents him from functioning in the present. Rob’s obsession with trying to remember what happened in his childhood prevents him from

conducting and investigating the Devlin case properly, and his attempts to regain these lost/never-formed memories destroy his current relationships and put his career in jeopardy. Cassie tells Rob that she thinks he cannot handle the case anymore, but Rob insists that he is learning how to deal with it. Rob's ability to handle the case comes directly into question when he revisits the woods to spend the night in hopes of triggering more memories. While in the woods he shifts between present and past consciousness and ultimately in both he believes he is running from something. The reader, like Rob, is unclear of what is actually happening, but the whole ordeal has upset him so much that he ends up kissing Cassie that night, and their relationship is ruined for the duration of the novel. Rob is so focused on finding the suspect to link the two cases that he does not spend the proper energy and time trying to solve the current case. The inciter behind the murder turns out to be Katy's sister, Rosalind, but Rob is blind to this possibility throughout the investigation. Not only is he blind to the fact that she is really a psychopath, but he does not truly consider her a suspect because she is too young to be involved in the case from his childhood. Rob is focused on solving his childhood case to reconcile the loss of identity that he feels that he forgets what he is supposed to be investigating, which is Katy's murder, not a connection to his childhood case. His focus on solving his personal trauma interferes with the present investigation and almost derails the entire case. Rob never considered Rosalind a possible suspect, because he was looking for someone to connect the two cases, so he was more susceptible to her psychopathic manipulations, and jeopardized the case by not properly evaluating her. Rob even nearly becomes romantically involved with her. Later on Rob states, "I think it's important to reiterate that, no matter what I may have claimed at the time, for most of Operation Vestal I was not in anything resembling a normal frame of mind" (298). Since Rob does not know what happened to him and his friends in the woods in 1984, he thinks that he

has moved past that and has created a new identity for himself, but he quickly becomes obsessed with trying to uncover his past. This missing area of his understanding of his life has disastrous consequences in his personal and professional life. French uses Rob's downfall to demonstrate that Rob's trauma, similar to Ireland's past traumas cannot be replaced with a new identity.

Rob's inability to remember mirrors cultural amnesia in Ireland, but the two diverge in terms of the source and cause of amnesia. Shirley Peterson explains that, "his psychological state mirrors a cultural amnesia obtained during the booming Celtic Tiger that represses the truth about past social injustices in the pursuit of prosperity" (100). Unlike with Rob, the danger of cultural amnesia is that it is controllable and largely self-inflicted. The cultural amnesia that is fostered by those economically invested in the Celtic Tiger ignores the experience of many Irish people and personal and cultural traumas that cannot be solved or worked through with money or economy. According to French, a functioning and flourishing economy is certainly important to the success of a nation, but, critically, it cannot heal traumas that go much deeper than the economic sphere and have psychological and social ramifications that at the very least need to be addressed both on a personal and national level. Economic success will never be sustained if traumas and social issues are not dealt and improved as well. In the earlier stages of the case when Rob begins to remember certain aspects of his childhood he states, "Nothing special, I know, nothing that helped with the case; barely worth mentioning. But remember, I was used to taking for granted that the first twelve years of my life were more or less gone for good. To me every salvaged scrap seemed tremendously potent and magical" (174). Although Rob initially thinks that remembering the events of his childhood will help lead him to the solution to the current investigation, he begins to become attached to and concerned with these memories for much more personal reasons. Initially, Rob valued his memories based on their usefulness to the

case, but in the end he realized his memories have much more significance to his identity, which is an important metaphor for cultural memory. Even if memories cannot heal or solve a problem of the present, they have bearing on identity and an understanding of oneself. Rob's memories inform who he is as a person, and without them he is missing part of his identity. Ireland needs a stable identity to complement the economy regardless of whether it is in a state of expansion or decline, rather than an identity that relies on the economy and actively disregards history, which, for French, needs to be included in Irish identity.

Despite the fact that Rob has been unable to remember anything from his childhood for twenty years now, his resurfaced memories are often accurate, and he seems as if he is on the verge of solving the past case by remembering, which might solve the current case, too. His memories do not, however, solve either case, but for a moment in time Rob is left with pleasant memories. There is no evidence to suggest that Rob consciously repressed the memories of the crime. This is an important distinction because Rob is not trying to erase his past, but he is deprived of his personal history, which is what French suggests is happening to the general population of Ireland. Ireland is deprived of certain aspects of history, which denies Irish people components of identity. French suggests that moving forward an unwillingness to accept history will create even greater confusion surrounding Irish identity. He even states, "Obviously, I have always wished I could remember what happened in that wood" (21). Rob has a sense of guilt, because he is the only one who could know what happened to his friends, but he cannot remember. Even though the memories are painful at times, they are valuable to him. At the end of the case he loses all of the memories before the crime, even the ones he had before the investigation. He states: "It was only much later, when the case was over and the dust settled on the debris, when I prodded cautiously at the edges of my memory and came up empty; it was

only then that I began to think this might be not a deliverance but a vast missed chance, an irrevocable and devastating loss” (299). Even if his memory could not solve either case, the loss of his memories are devastating to him. French indicates that the cultural memory loss in Celtic Tiger Ireland has the same devastating effect on Irish identity. Although a new identity surrounding economic success is created, this identity is unstable, and history that needs to provide a foundation for Irish identity is erased and removed from consciousness. The real harm is not in incorporating economic success to Irish identity, but in trying to make economic success the sole marker of Irish identity and erasing history. Unlike Rob, though, Ireland can still access the history that has been repressed during the economic boom. Rob realizes that the loss of his memories is much greater than any discomfort of remembering. French uses Rob’s experience with memory to illustrate that even if Ireland’s history is traumatic, it is a crucial phase in Ireland’s history as a whole and will continue to be even in the future. It is not economy that defines Irish experience, but a history that includes struggles and perseverance. Ignoring the past ignores the struggles and hardships that it took for Ireland to arrive at the Celtic Tiger, and ignores the experience of many Irish people, which is not conducive to creating an inclusive identity that French advises.

Rob lived almost all of his adult life functioning without the memories from his childhood, but he eventually realized he was missing a significant part of his life, since he could not remember anything before the age of twelve. French’s novel was published in 2007, right before the recession in 2008, but the cracks in this illusion were already starting to form. French points out that Ireland cannot afford to sacrifice the past to invest in the future or modernity, because if the investment in the economy crashes or fails, as the Celtic Tiger will, then Ireland would suffer another devastating loss to their identity. It is dangerous to construct an identity on

something as unstable and unpredictable as the economy. The economy is bound to change in any nation over periods of time, but history is a more stable force. Through Rob's attempt to uncover more memories, French advocates that memory is a necessary component to identity. Even if the remembering is a difficult act that does not always heal, it is an important act that creates a shared understanding of Irishness. Rob's experience with memory serves almost as a warning. Through no fault of his own, he is unable to remember the events of his childhood, and when memories resurfaced it negatively affected areas of his life because he became consumed with trying to uncover his past. Rob's absence of memory is what creates his skewed relationship with his past and present life. Rob's experience with memory is a metaphor for the repression of Irish history during the Celtic Tiger. Although the Celtic Tiger seems to rely on cultural amnesia, the past needs to be remembered in order to sustain any endeavors to advance the economy. Understanding hardships of the past specifically would place more emphasis on building culture and social aspects rather than economy alone. French does not want Ireland to allow the Celtic Tiger period to deny a national history. French emphasizes that if history is removed from consciousness, the memories and facts of history will only come back with a stronger need to be confronted, and likely in a way that would be re-traumatizing. Ireland has the ability to harness memories of the past to create an identity and culture that is not reliant on economic success but could sustain the economy, because the memories are not completely lost/are still accessible, but this does not happen in the novel.

The conflict between the politicians and archaeologists in the novel embody the question of how to continue modernizing Ireland and how to preserve history, and to what extent. The politicians represent the effort to continue expanding the economy, and the archaeologists work to preserve and uncover more history. The politicians responsible for the motorway have no

genuine interest in preserving Irish heritage or history, and they are an unsympathetic and corrupt group of people. One archaeologist claims, “They graciously agreed to keep a traffic island, so they can wank off about how much they’ve done to preserve our heritage” (26). French argues that history and modernity have an important place in the present and future of Ireland both in the novel and in Ireland, but attaining the balance is difficult and unclear. The history of Ireland is central to an understanding of what it means to be Irish, but it would not help Ireland to stop all efforts of modernization to essentially live in the past. It is just as counterproductive to sacrifice sacred history to continue an economic rise that has an uncertain future. Due to the rapid nature of the Celtic Tiger, it is difficult to find this balance. French suggests that Ireland first needs to achieve a more proportional development in other areas of life with the economic success rather than trying to jumpstart the economy again.

However, in this case a balance could quite easily be struck and Ireland’s cultural past could be preserved while also progressing the economy and infrastructure in modern terms. The land developers could move the motorway over, which would keep it in the same vicinity, but would allow the site to be preserved. This is not done because the politicians and businessmen have too much money tied up in the property where the motorway was originally planned. The politicians are the extreme example of moving forward at any cost—they make threatening phone calls to the leader of Move the Motorway, and systematically rip off the previous landowners. Corruption and injustice occurs in the novel, imitating the real-life inequality of justice administered during the time of the Celtic Tiger. Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin state that, “While prisons expand to incarcerate and immobilise further the most economically disadvantaged in the society, dominant economic interests are given a clear message that crime pays” in the form of tax amnesties that “rewarded wrongdoers not with one of the new prison

places but with amiable discretion and a blanket pardon” (9). In addition, “the Irish state’s fiscal policies favour the rich” (Kirby et al. 5). Similar to what is happening with politicians in the novel, the “dominant economic interests” are favored and essentially exempt from reprimand. This demonstrates that Ireland is not distinctly broken away from an oppressive past, but oppression has taken other forms within the Celtic Tiger, and certain realities in Ireland mirror the oppression towards certain classes in favor of economic interests that French critiques. Ireland has clearly broken away from an oppressive past that includes British colonialism and the strictness of the Catholic Church, but oppression has taken on other forms during the Celtic Tiger from internal institutions within Ireland such as politicians, land developers, and corporate companies. It is not the process of modernizing that is portrayed negatively in the novel, it is the way that the politicians and land developers approach and execute the process. French does not provide an answer to this debate, but she undoubtedly criticizes these methods of modernization. She is critical of the corruption involved in the efforts to further industrialize Ireland, and how the interests of politicians has become much more powerful over the interests of the community.

French confronts negative aspects of the Celtic Tiger that deal with social injustice, which is exactly what Ireland claims to separate itself from by affirming a break from the past. Ireland desires a definitive break from their historical past of suffering that includes a lot of strife for the Irish people, but in some ways the Celtic Tiger is an extension of this. Not everyone is included in the economic (re)surgence, and many people that try to participate and invest themselves in the economic bubble end up suffering even more from the crash. Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin discuss another area of literature on the Celtic Tiger which emphasizes, “how the Celtic Tiger economy has enriched a small elite while leaving the majority, the growth in whose wages has been held in check by national social partnership agreements, relatively worse off”

(5). The very nature of the Celtic Tiger demonstrates the inequality in the treatment of the general population from a select elite. The elite minority are given more opportunities in an attempt to continue economic growth, but this comes at the cost of excluding most people from this success. Although economic prosperity is welcome and necessary, in some ways the Celtic Tiger can be viewed as another almost oppressive event, where an elite minority, such as corporations and real estate developers, benefit from both the economic activity and the attempts to rebuild the economy after the crash. In the novel, four farmers held out from selling their agricultural land when companies began buying out the surrounding land from the neighbors. One detective explains: “So these lads figured they’d get the land rezoned themselves, double or triple its value overnight. They applied to the county council for rezoning—one of them applied *four times*—and got refused, every time” (French 171). However, “As soon as the Big Three bought the land—under various other names, but it all traces back to them—they applied for rezoning, and got it” (171). It is dangerous to pretend that the past has not happened or is distinctly over, because it ignores forms of oppression that still happen in some manner. Repressing and attempting to forget social injustices of the past creates a blindness to current social injustice. The rebuilding of the economy cannot erase any wrong done in the past, but in this case it directly contributes. The Celtic Tiger does not mean economic equality and there are blatant aspects of inequality, in the novel and in Ireland, demonstrating that certain groups of people benefit while others either cannot capitalize in the same way or suffer. An economy that is already susceptible to an inevitable recession due to the rapid nature and excessive margins of profit becomes even more unsustainable when it disenfranchises those not part of the elite minority. Further, identity should not be built on the economy because the economy is unstable, and not everyone experiences economic success.

One of the archaeologists, Mark, represents the other extreme of refusing to modernize, and he prizes the preservation of history. He tells the detectives: “And I don’t believe in any government. They’re the same as the Church, every one of them. Different words, same goal: keep the poor under your thumb and supporting the rich. The only things I believe in are out on that there dig” (97). However, unlike the politicians, Mark is not involved in corruption and has no ulterior motives. Mark has a genuine interest in preserving Ireland’s history. For French, Mark is a model for how Ireland should interact with history. History should not be exploited for the economy nor sacrificed in such a permanent manner for a temporary rise in economy. He has no financial interest in the site, but the historical artifacts have a personal worth to him. Cassie defends him stating: “Mark believes in archaeology— in his heritage. That’s his faith. It’s not some abstract set of principles...it’s a concrete part of his whole life, every day, whether it pays off or not” (130). History for Mark is a constant in his life, something that does not necessarily change, regardless of the current state of Ireland. French emphasizes the stability that history offers during the Celtic Tiger, because it is a time when the past is sacrificed for the promise of economic success. She brings attention to the fact that economic success is not an infinite guarantee, whereas history is much more constant. She uses this premise to further stress the danger of constructing an identity on a variable force, and intentionally disregarding a past that has formed a much greater understanding of Irishness.

The physical destruction of the archaeological site is a representation of continued efforts to erase aspects of cultural memory and historical experience, which French sees as a hindrance to acknowledging Ireland’s history in order to find the balance necessary to create a stable national identity. Misztal describes an important aspect of cultural memory: “While it is the individual who remembers, remembering is more than a personal act; memory exists through its

relation with what has been shared with others—through language, symbols, events, and social and cultural contexts” (5). Since memory is a communal act that is represented through shared experiences or symbols, the archaeological site is a physical manifestation of this type of remembering. The archaeological site serves as a source of memory for later generations of Irish culture in order to learn more about their own history. The site is representative of the experience of sharing memories and heritage, and sharing aspects of identity. The work that the archaeologists do in physically excavating the artifacts and trying to preserve the objects is a preservation of both history and identity, and the experience of memory. Oona Frawley further explains, “Thus when we speak of a recovery of cultural memory, we are speaking of the ways in which the past is accessed when the usual continuum that is cultural memory for a particular culture has been broken: such access can come through the physical recovery of objects in archaeological work” (31). It is ironic that recovering archaeological work is one way to reclaim identity, especially after colonization, but this type of work and cultural effort is directly suppressed in *In the Woods* when the archaeological site is destroyed. French is concerned with the creation of a stable identity as well as a moral one. French critiques and warns against the combination of unquestioningly sacrificing the past while at the same time favoring an elite minority that is corrupt and immoral. There is really nothing in place to keep either force in check, which is dangerous.

Again, French does not provide the reader with a solution to the argument over whether to preserve the site or let the motorway take its place. However, the morality of the characters that represent the two sides of the debate reveal that intention is important in the way that Ireland proceeds. Despite the fact that Mark’s desires are much more honorable and sincere, the motorway is ultimately built over the site, and nothing happens to the land deals or the

politicians. The police captain even orders a member of the murder squad to erase the tape that reveals political corruption. French not only critiques the corruption that is ever present during the Celtic Tiger, but she demonstrates that the memory of Irish experience and cultural history are at stake during the Celtic Tiger. Central parts of Irish heritage and history are sacrificed without thinking of future consequences. French considers this a dangerous practice, because the focus is still too centered on the economy, and there is a blind aggression from groups like the politicians and land developers to push Ireland forward into an economy that it is not ready to sustain. The rapidness of the economic growth cannot continue and is counterproductive if efforts are not made to preserve history and cultural development at the same time.

Invasive Economy and Historical Memory

In Paul Murray's novel, *Skippy Dies*, the problems that manifested in the height of the Celtic Tiger leading to its downfall, continue into the recession. French warned against sacrificing history in favor of economic success, but, now that economic success has left Ireland, history becomes even more taboo. In *Skippy Dies*, history is repressed and carefully curated to fit a nationalist narrative. History becomes a commodity and merely another avenue to achieve profit. Commodification is "a process by which things (and activities) come to be valued primarily in terms of their exchange value, in context of trade, thereby becoming goods (and services)" (Kaul 706). There is still an unsuccessful pairing between preserving history and attaining economic success, but in *Skippy Dies* the two forces begin to merge mainly through the history teacher, Howard, and the influence he has on his students. Memory is also suppressed in *Skippy Dies*. Unlike in *In the Woods* where Rob was desperately unable to remember, the students in *Skippy Dies* are deprived of a history that they would never learn if it were not for Howard, but they only learn a more comprehensive history at the end of the novel. Greg, the Automator, pretends to be interested in the history and tradition that is rooted in Seabrook College, but his real interest is to capitalize on the college's image in an economic manner. Throughout the novel, the students are ignored and seen as a hindrance to the Automator's attempts to use the school as a commodity by marketing its tradition. He ignores the internal problems at the school, as he is only concerned with the school's image and reputation.

In *Skippy Dies*, Ireland's focus on attaining economic success causes blindness and repression of the past. Attempts to recover from the economic recession following the Celtic Tiger result in an obsession with economics, and the commodification of areas of life that should remain separate from the economic sphere. Murray suggests that Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland is

facing an internal problem that is halting their progression towards modernity. The Irish have constructed a large part of their identity as an independent nation around the success of the economy during the Celtic Tiger. Ireland's economic success during the Celtic Tiger masked the recent period of The Troubles, and even historical events as far back as the Famine. However, now that the Celtic Tiger has fallen, Ireland is again faced with the question of what it means to be Irish. Nicholas Miller in his critical text, *Modernism, Ireland, and the Erotics of Memory*, states that "optimism about Ireland's financial independence affirms disconnection from the past as both an instrument and, indeed, a desired outcome of Ireland's contemporary autonomy" (qtd. Downum 76). The Celtic Tiger was exactly the success that the Irish needed to assert themselves as a self-reliant nation, but in the face of the recession, they have to reconstruct an identity as a nation.

In *Skippy Dies*, the failure of technology is one of the main symbols illustrating the damaging effects the Celtic Tiger has left in Ireland. In the novel, technology does not work well, and there is a crude expression and criticism of technology. The increase and availability of technology in Ireland is not representative of Irish culture or the Irish peoples' relationship to technology. The booming economy ignored the struggles in the personal lives of the population. Technology is typically associated with modernity, but for Murray, technology does not always function this way in Ireland. Technology is a modern concept, but for the characters it is a regressive tool. Two students, Ruprecht and Carl, especially embody this issue. Ruprecht attempts to use scientific inventions to both escape his real life and solve emotional problems that he is unable to cope with, and Carl is constantly consumed by his computer and his text messages in a way that fuels his violent behavior. In *Skippy Dies*, the characters do not know how to properly function with technology or use it to help them, but they use it in ways to try and

connect them to their past. Technology haunts Ireland and represents something that they have not fully attained, even after the Celtic Tiger. Instead of trying to rebuild the economy with the rapidness of the Celtic Tiger, a new identity should be created that is not dominated by, or dependent on, economics, but can incorporate economic success with other aspects of identity such as history. The Celtic Tiger was solidifying Ireland as a modernized nation, but the economic boom was too rapid for other areas of life to complete the transition, so Ireland is left on the brink of modernity.

In *Skipper Dies*, the recession following the Celtic Tiger causes a paralysis in the Seabrook community, which is a microcosm for Ireland's struggle to, again, confront traumatic history and form an identity in order to move forward as a nation. In the past, Ireland's paralysis has stemmed from external forces and a lack of progress. Now, however, the paralysis stems from too much economic activity that rose and fell too rapidly for any proper adjustment. In Seabrook College, the Automator represents the efforts to regain economic prosperity, and to center identity on this economic success, even at the cost of the wellbeing of the inhabitants and attendees. Money replaces meaningful instruction and moral guidance in the college. The image of history and the traditions of the school are exploited in order to modernize the school and make more money off of the school. Rather than trying to understand the underlying causes of the problems that are occurring within the school and community, the problems are covered up. This causes destructive behaviors from the characters that keeps them stagnant and inhibits development and improvement in their lives. Murray argues that the college community cannot just repress history and events that do not serve the image of the college, but they need to reflect and understand in order to solve the underlying issues and move forward as a nation. They need to stop commodifying history and tradition because doing so leads to concern only about

financial matters and ignores other areas that are necessary for a successful, modernized nation to emerge, such as sexual attitudes, quality education, proper history, and constructive coping mechanisms.

Within Seabrook College, the Automator's focus only on economic matters is injurious to the Seabrook community. Although this is a private Catholic college, the power and influence of Catholicism is essentially dead when the story begins. Father Desmond Furlong, the school principal, is ill at the start of the novel, and an economics teacher replaces him. This is the first time in Seabrook's history that a "layman" has taken control of the school (Murray 13).

Immediately it is clear that the church is being replaced. In the novel, the Church is losing any power and influence it once held, and the priests "are dying out" (13). One of the Automator's first orders of business is to rebuild the oldest hall in the school. He wants to advertise it as the oldest structure of the college, while modernizing it at the same time. He directly states that Seabrook is competing with other top secondary schools: "Profit is what enables change, positive change that helps everyone, such as for example demolishing the 1865 building and constructing an entirely new twenty-first-century wing in its place" (91). In this moment, the structure and the image of the college becomes a "good" that is only valued in terms of potential profit. Greg wants to sell the image of the hall's history and tradition, but plans to do so by updating the building, which renders the fact that that it is the oldest building moot. The Automator tries to convince Howard that the Paraclete Fathers are not suitable teachers for the students. However, he is not actually thinking about what is best for the students' education as he states, "In a competitive market economy—to be perfectly frank, Howard, you've got to wonder whether some of our older priests are even aware what that *is*" (90). The Automator's language demonstrates that he values the school only in economic terms as he describes the college as a

part of competitive market economy. Economic success and history are not always oppositional, though. Murray criticizes the Automator, because he does not try to unite economy and tradition, but he is willing to sacrifice tradition. Murray establishes that the Automator is not wrong to try and attract people to Seabrook College by using its reputation and tradition, but he is wrong to manipulate the image in a way that removes the tradition simply to try and gain a profit.

The Automator's exploitation of Seabrook College voids the school of any principles it had left. He continues to boast about how Seabrook is the oldest Catholic boys' school in Ireland, and explains what this means for the school: "It stands for a particular set of values, values like heart and discipline. A marketing man might say that what we have here is a product with a strong brand identity" (91). The Automator again demonstrates that he does not care about fostering any real values for the school, but he uses values as a marketing tool in order to sell the image of the college. For the Automator the school is just an avenue to gain profits. Rather than focusing on using education standards and quality to compete with the other schools, the Automator commodifies the school, and education loses its meaning. Murray uses the Automator's treatment of Seabrook to critique the way that economy replaces the development of moral guidance and values during the Celtic Tiger, and how economy harmfully pervades non-economic institutions. With the Automator in charge, Seabrook College is not concerned with the level of education that the students receive. Michael Peillon explains that, "Commodities no longer satisfy needs, but are consumed as images and signs" (50). The college becomes an empty entity when it is only seen in terms of its economic value. Seabrook merely becomes a symbol of tradition and reputation, but is completely divested of the purposes that it needs to serve as a school and that it fails to serve to the Seabrook community. This is a problematic representation of Ireland, because if education and religious tradition are exploited

merely for economic gain, Ireland will not be able to recover from the recession. There will be no institutions that are not affected by the economy, and if all institutions are vehicles to drive the economy there is nothing to return to and no refuge from the economic collapse. If all institutions are exploited to benefit the economy or regain economic profit, the institutions are not serving their purpose, and Irish culture is still sacrificed. The recession is a statement on the unsustainability of the Celtic Tiger, and in *Skipper Dies*, problems that resulted from The Celtic Tiger are not addressed but are exaggerated by the attempts to reignite the economy.

The tension between the adults and the students in Seabrook represents a larger tension between the values of the older and younger generations in Ireland. The Automator represents the desires of the older generations that push for economic success and do not want to accept that Ireland faces a recession. The teenagers did not live through many of the traumatic events from Ireland's past, but are likely suffering right now from the fallout of the Celtic Tiger even if they are unaware. The younger generations, represented by the students at Seabrook, are deprived of history, but history is especially important for them post-Celtic Tiger, because the only conception they have of Irish identity surrounds economic success that this is now gone. It is the adults who desperately cling onto the success of the Celtic Tiger, because they are aware how much Ireland needs the economic success. The adults' awareness and willingness to sacrifice the memories of traumatic episodes of history can be partly explained by what Frawley terms postmemory. Frawley states that, "'Postmemory' suggests the extent to which individual memories, and, particularly, traumatic ones, can shape cultural memory for generations to come even if the receipt of those memories is at a distance" (30). It is the adults in the novel, and in Ireland, who are the recipients, and who are in turn willing to sacrifice the memories without considering the consequences for future generations. In the illusion of prosperity during the

Celtic Tiger, historical memories were considered finite, and post-Celtic Tiger there is a refusal to re-acknowledge aspects of history that do not support the image of an independent Ireland. Denell Downum describes Ireland as “a society willing to sacrifice its past on the altar of future prosperity” (87). However, it is the students that need to learn about the past in order to understand the present and to connect with something bigger than themselves. As Misztal explains “Collective memory, then, ‘is part of culture’s meaning-making apparatus’; our need for meaning or for incorporation into something that transfigures individual existence grants enormous importance to collective memory” (6). Learning about the war is what allows the students to participate in this idea of collective memory, and eventually allows them to connect to a larger cultural event that they find value in.

Howard differs from the Automator, because he recognizes that history is a valuable resource for the students, and he works to counteract the economic efforts within the school that result in repression of Irish history. At one point Howard considers, “that they 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...If the war briefly caught their imagination, it was only as another arena of violence and gore, no different from their DVDs and video games” (541). Howard persists in using Ireland’s history to make the students care about more than themselves and help them learn the importance of coping. The boys in Howard’s class are eventually interested in Ireland’s history and Irish involvement in events such as WWI, but the Automator says that it does not matter because it is not part of the curriculum that they are going to be tested on. He even asks Howard “Why the hell would you want them to connect with it?” (561). The Automator further commodifies the traditions of the school by highlighting only the marketable aspects of its history, which furthers the repressive attitudes within the school.

Teaching a selective history contributes to the collective historical repression prevalent during the time following the Celtic Tiger. In the novel, the Automator refuses to allow the history of World War I to be taught in the college. The history of Irish involvement in WWI is intentionally repressed because it does not fit the nationalist narrative of Ireland. The nationalist narrative of Ireland that is taught at Seabrook attempts to separate itself from any involvement with Britain. A narrative of independence is stressed with the arrival of the Celtic Tiger in an attempt to assert the newfound success as an indicator of what Irish independence looks like. As Howard points out, “The existence of these soldiers seemed to argue against this new thing called Ireland...Then, in a quite systematic way, they were forgotten” (556). Irish involvement with the British is often repressed, and WWI complicates this even further, because Irishmen fought alongside the British, who were supposed to be their enemies. It especially does not fit the narrative of Seabrook College, since the school does not want to admit that Catholics and alumni were some of the participants in WWI. The Automator refuses to acknowledge this history and does not want it questioned. The idea that Seabrook College produces students that fight alongside the British is not an image that the Automator can sell. For Murray, it is detrimental to repress this aspect of history, because otherwise it is a dishonest version of history that ignores an important Irish experience. Burying this experience actually ignores the fact that this involvement then led to the Easter Rising, which is taught in the school as part of nationalist history. Seabrook College tries to shape the cultural memory of the students by teaching a selective history. Downum states that Irish cultural memory exhibits an “‘intentional amnesia,’ in which events that trouble the smooth arc of nationalist history are excluded from the narrative” (80). The boys only learn nationalist history curated by the Automator, and Irish fighting alongside British does not fit the narrative that the school is trying to instill. This historical event

does not adhere to the image of an independent, self-reliant Irish nation that is still trying to be constructed post-Celtic Tiger. The repression of Ireland's colonial history is exaggerated during this time, because Ireland again wants to distance themselves from their colonial history. Despite this, Howard teaches his students about the deaths of Irish soldiers in WWI, and he states, "people coped with their grief by *remembering*" (Murray 556). Howard recognizes the value of remembering and that it has the ability to heal and move forward, but this sentiment is lost on the authority of Seabrook College, and they promote repression. Murray argues that it is critical for Ireland to remember and engage with history following the Celtic Tiger. This includes acknowledging a pre-national history that involves colonization, the Troubles and the role that the Catholics played, and the current decline in economic success. If Ireland selectively chooses what events to build their history and identity on, this ignores the trauma that many people suffered and a sustainable, inclusive identity cannot be produced. Misztal points out that, "memory can make truth claims and can play an important role as a source of truth when, for example, political power heavily censors national history" (7). This scenario is precisely what is at play in both the novel as well as the culture at large. The Automator specifically represents the censorship of certain aspects of history. If it were not for Howard, the boys would have never had the valuable lessons on the war and remembering, and the role that memory plays in grief and coping. Howard is a metaphor for how education should function both in terms of formal education, as well as how history should be disseminated in a truthful and comprehensive manner that addresses all aspects of Irish experience and identity. This is why preserving memory is still crucial following the Celtic Tiger.

For Murray, money is repressive when it is exchanged for silence. The Automator uses money to coerce silence, and handles problems internally in order to avoid scandals that would

ruin the college's reputation, which would cost them money. The Automator's actions are a metaphor for how economic success functions and represses any threatening aspects that would hinder economic growth. At the school dance, one of the students spikes the punch with sleeping pills, and as a result, the students go into a general frenzy both vomiting and removing their clothes. The Automator gives the students orders not to say anything to their parents about what happened at the dance. He does not address the underlying problem, which is the rampant drug use in the school. By failing to address the problem, he fails to help the students. The students are not treated merely with neglect, but the problems that they cause are deliberately suppressed as the Automator tries to maintain the reputation of the school. As a result of this lack of action, the drug problem continues to spiral out of control eventually resulting in the death of Skippy, one of the students, from a deliberate overdose. The students continue to use drugs as a manifestation and also perpetrator of the stagnancy in their emotional development. The students use drugs to cope with their lives, but the drugs merely mask symptoms, they do not solve anything. Skippy uses drugs to avoid his emotions related to a sexual assault from his coach as well as his mother's illness. Luke Gibbons states "the ravages of drug abuse, alcoholism and domestic violence reappear in urban or suburban settings as the collateral damage of modernity" (220). Murray points out that the rapid transition into a modernized economy does not necessarily mean that all other areas of life follow. The social and moral transition cannot move as rapidly as the economy, which results in Irish citizens having to cope with swift changes in their lives. The students' drug use illustrates the collateral damage of modernity that Gibbons describes, and the destabilizing effect of the rapid transition into a successful economy and even quicker into a recession. The students' status as teenagers represents this transitional period in Ireland as they are physically in a transitional period of life, and the drug use represents an

inability to cope with transition. Roisin Ni Mhaille Battel in her article “Ireland’s ‘Celtic Tiger’ Economy,” states that “one of the worst features of modern Irish society” appears in the form of drug culture” (107). Drug use is common for many of the students at Seabrook. The drug use represents the excess of wealth, as well as the attempt to fill a void once this excess wealth is gone, especially since the students have nothing else to fill this void of identity. Since the Automator is only focused on the image and lucrative aspects of the college, the students are neglected and are left to deal with their lives, and this leads to drug use, rather than any sustainable healing such as Howard suggests. Murray uses drugs to represent stagnancy, and drugs are specifically keeping the students, who should be emotionally developing, emotionally stagnant.

Ruprecht, another student at Seabrook College, embodies some of the most important issues concerning Ireland’s relationship to technology in the time following the Celtic Tiger. Throughout the novel, Ruprecht is interested in the idea of parallel universes and specifically how to prove their existence and how to access the other dimensions. Ruprecht spends his time not only learning about the work of scientists in this field, but he also works on his own inventions to try and prove the existence of parallel universes. Initially, Ruprecht’s interest in this field of scientific technology takes the form of an interest or hobby, but he later becomes desperate to create working inventions. His actions demonstrate the push forward in science and technology, but this becomes another dangerous coping mechanism and Ruprecht does not understand the limits of science and technology. Earlier in the novel, Ruprecht gathers his friends to witness him create a small black hole in the basement of Seabrook in an attempt to confirm that there is a parallel universe in the room. After the experiment the boys believe they successfully teleported an action figure to another dimension, but it was really just the work of a

power outage and prank from one of the boys. Even when the boys fail to recreate this experiment and try to understand what happened, Ruprecht and the others firmly believe that the first experiment proved the existence of another dimension. Skippy, Ruprecht's best friend, searches online for information regarding their experiment, and comes across website named *The Druid's Homepage*. After Skippy shares what he finds, the boys now believe that, according to Old Lore, the school houses mounds called "tumuli" that were created by extraterrestrials who used these as gateways to travel through universes (Murray 320). The boys use mythology to try and explain modern science, instead of thinking realistically about what happened. They do not have the means to fully grasp what happened, so they look to the past for answers instead. The problem for Murray is that there is not a successful pairing of history and science, which is necessary for Ireland to come out of the recession.

When Skippy passes away, Ruprecht invents a complicated operation that he believes will allow them to travel back in time and bring Skippy back to the present alive. Dennis, who pulled the prank in the earlier experiment that lead the boys to believe the experiment was a success, seems to be the only student who understands what is really going on: "None of the stupid bullshit we do to distract ourselves is going to *help* anymore" (480). Dennis is the only student who recognizes these actions as merely distractions. Attempting to use time travel to bring Skippy to the present is a failed coping mechanism that allows Ruprecht to focus on technology and avoid dealing with his emotions surrounding the traumatic death of his friend. Howard tries to prepare Ruprecht for the likely failure of this experiment, but he thinks to himself, "This was a world that had literally gone crazy with grief. At the same time, it was an age when science and technology promised they could deliver all the answers" (580). Murray sympathizes with Ruprecht, because it is not Ruprecht's fault for thinking that his experiment to

communicate with the dead and parallel universes will work. Instead, Murray reveals that Ruprecht is a victim of this failed educational institution that is a product of the Celtic Tiger. Ruprecht is a teenager that has been brought up in a Celtic Tiger world that emphasized progression and move towards modernity, one way being through technological advancement. He represents a generation of younger people who have been deprived of shared history and an understanding of how to relate to history, since he only knows the realities of the Celtic Tiger. He represents a generation that is left behind and unable to adjust in the fall of the Celtic Tiger, while people like the Automator continue to focus on the economy. Ruprecht's generation has grown up in a time where there has been a push for this type of modernization and focus on the future. The events take place in a post- Celtic Tiger world, and the push to rebuild the economy is even stronger. This attitude permeates into the culture, and, consequently, Ruprecht fails to understand the current limits of science. Howard tries to explain to him that it is extremely unlikely that Ruprecht will be able to communicate with a deceased Skippy, so he tries to offer him a more realistic solution and explains the benefit of remembering. However, Ruprecht wants to continue with his plan and justifies the science behind it by stating "in fact, when you looked at it, almost all twenty-first-century communication technology originated in scientific attempts to speak to the dead" (586). Ruprecht only knows how to problem solve by using science to try and discover something new and progress forward, but Murray suggests that in some cases it is necessary to stop and reflect and use the past to heal. Howard suggests Ruprecht do this by remembering Skippy and valuing his memory rather than trying to bring Skippy back from the dead or communicate with him in some way. If Ruprecht continues to try and rely on scientific technology to communicate with the deceased Skippy, then he is going to remain emotionally stagnant as the experiments inevitably continue to fail. However, if Ruprecht comes to grips with

the loss of his friend and remembers Skippy, as Howard suggests, then he will be able to cope with this tragedy, because he can actually begin the process of healing rather than treating the loss as a problem to be solved. Science and technology have their rightful place and value in Ireland, but Ireland still has to deal with memories and problems that technology cannot solve or replace for them. As Howard says, “This was a world that had literally gone crazy with grief,” and technology cannot provide the answers to dealing with such an intimate, emotional problem. Instead, Murray uses Howard to propose that memory is necessary to cope with loss. For Murray, the emphasis on memory is important not only to the Seabrook community, but to Ireland as a whole, because the Celtic Tiger came with many losses and used economic success to overshadow both past traumas and its own negative by products.

In *Skippy Dies*, Carl is a central example of the negative consequences that rapid economic growth has on a societal and personal level. Battel also states that “unprecedented economic growth has also seen social changes such as an increase in single-parent families” (107). Carl’s parents are going through a divorce, which deeply disturbs Carl and leads him to destructive behaviors. Carl is also involved in selling drugs, and he uses his possession of drugs to gain sexual favors from female students, and also uses drugs himself. Max Horkheimer states, ““Machinery requires the kind of mentality that concentrates on the present and can dispense with memory and the straying imagination”” (qtd. Gibbons 183). This is representative of the way that Carl interacts with technology. Carl uses technology in an attempt to cope with the changes surrounding him in his everyday life. His use of technology serves as a distraction and prevents him from processing what is going on around him. Carl’s consciousness is erratic throughout the novel, and his focus often shifts between sensory information from the present as well as flashes of text messages or images on a computer screen. When he hears his parents

fighting, Carl is watching graphic pornography. In between hearing the insults that his parents yell at each other, Carl describes the pornography on the screen, and he uses this to distract himself, and essentially remove himself from the present. Carl's use of technology as a distraction is similar to the way that Ruprecht uses technology because he does not know how to confront his feelings or use memory to help him cope with the death of Skippy. Murray does not criticize all technology, but he criticizes the way that it is used in the novel, because technology acts as a boundary to using memory, which prevents Ruprecht and Carl from coping. Technology was rapidly introduced to Ireland's economic sector, and was similarly introduced to Irish culture just as quickly. Instead of advancements that were made in the technology sector to improve or complement Irish culture, the reverse essentially occurred, and technology has altered Irish culture. Technology is a modernizing force that contributed to the rapid growth of the economy in Ireland, but Murray argues that technology is not successfully modernizing Ireland, and is instead halting the progression of social and cultural development.

Text messages are also pushed to the forefront of Carl's consciousness and in between dialogue the reader is presented with the contents of the messages that Carl receives. When his mother is talking about the divorce to Carl, she is relegated to the background when he gets a text in the middle of her talking. The text messages further disrupt Carl's consciousness in everyday life, because even after he has received the message, certain texts reappear on the page throughout his thoughts, and these texts often fuel his increasingly violent behavior. Carl is too interconnected with technology to the point that it constantly interferes with his thoughts. Although Carl becomes violent and deviant and even starts a fire in the school, Carl is also a victim. Carl, like Ruprecht, only knows the technologically advanced Ireland that he grew up in despite the recession now. Carl is similarly failed by Seabrook, largely because of the

Automator, who ignores issues like the drug use and molestation of a student in order to preserve the reputation of the college. Hardly any of the adults in the novel help the students navigate their problems or help them cope. Battel goes on to explain what else is necessary to address this issue: “The social changes needed to give equal access to the benefits of the Celtic Tiger economy will need more than economic intervention and involve such unquantifiables as political and social leadership, public debate about societal ethics, and changes in social mores” (Battel 107). Social changes are not fostered or addressed during or after the Celtic Tiger, and the focus is only on fostering the economic growth. This is detrimental to the characters, especially the students, in the novel. The students display the most destructive behaviors in an attempt to cope with a partially modernized society that they are unable to participate in. The students represent the harmful consequences of disproportionate development that result from the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger.

Farley is another character who understands how the adults in the novel negatively impact the students. He admits that the adults were not looking out for the kids and that is largely why Skippy is dead. Farley says that if people had paid attention and cared to what was actually going on with Skippy and the other students, then this could have been prevented. Farley states, “no one cares, instead we just pay lip-service to caring, like we pay lip-service to charity and all those Christian values we supposedly stand for while we’re slumped in front of our incredibly high-resolution TVs” (472). In this moment, Farley almost equates the loss of values with the presence or replacement of technology. Tom retorts how, “decent people are putting their heads down and getting on with the job and doing the best that they can” (473). This line of thought—thinking you can just put your head down and keep working as if nothing is changing or nothing wrong is happening in the world— is flawed according to Murray, but it is common in the novel.

In Murray's argument, passivity is akin to neglect and complacency which does not bring about any change. The ignorance that Tom represents is no better than actively participating in the suppression of history or repression of trauma, because it still does not take any action towards addressing problems at the school and it does nothing to redress traumas in Irish culture.

In the novel there is a lot of disagreement about how to become a more modernized nation and the relationship that the past should have to the present and future. During the construction of the Science Park, an archaeological site is dug up, and construction is halted. One of the men working on the site claims that construction should continue and the historical site should not be preserved. He explains, "Because what we are trying to build here isn't just a Science Park. It's the economic future of our country" (574). He argues that preserving this ruin is not worth it, or we would never move forward into the future. There needs to be a balance between technology and human nature, between moving forward but not at the cost of losing something central to one's identity, remembering without trying to replicate, problem solving without repression. Perhaps Ireland, like the teenagers in Seabrook, needs outside help.

Understandably, Ireland might be hesitant to accept assistance since they are still asserting themselves as an independent nation. Ireland is still a relatively new nation, not even 100 years old, so they are still developing as a nation. Although Ireland may want to create an Irish identity solely based on one episode of success as defined by economic growth, Irish experience extends back far beyond the creation of the nation. Ruprecht's obsession with hyperspace and parallel universes is one example of not looking inward. Lori explains to him, "They're so busy trying to find their way somewhere else they don't see the world they're actually in. So this guy's saying instead of searching for ways out of our lives, what we should be searching for are ways *in*" (652). Instead of focusing on improving the community and school, the focus is only on material

matters and the economy. This is a microcosm for Ireland, and Murray urges Ireland to reassess values in order to create a more stable national identity that is not dependent on the success of the economy. The Seabrook community fails to do this, and as a result is surrounded by a traumatized population and the death of a student. Rather than educational systems whose primary goal is to compete with other schools, the education system needs to prioritize students and the quality of education that they receive. The Automator focuses on creating a marketable image to advertise Seabrook College, and in order to do this, he alters the curriculum to cater to a nationalist image of Ireland. Seabrook College embodies the way that history is disseminated in Ireland following the Celtic Tiger. Unlike Howard who represents how history needs to be disseminated according to Murray, the school represents the propagation of revisionist historical narratives that excludes certain aspects of Irish experience. Murray also critiques the economic institutionalization of the school, because it prizes profits over education. In the real world, a focus on the quality of education would produce students that have valuable skills and knowledge that can contribute to society in Ireland. Instead, as seen in the novel, when education is neglected in favor of wealth in the schools, students do not develop and they only continue the cycle of paralysis in the community and in Ireland. The students represent the inability for Ireland to recover from the recession as long as there are attempts to rebuild the economy without addressing the detrimental aspects of the Celtic Tiger.

Murray is not merely criticizing the structure of the educational system, he also criticizes the way that institutions function in a post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. Ireland overcompensates for economic recession by making everything function as a purely economic institution. The economy permeates every aspect of life, and devalues institutions' original purposes and functions. Groups of people and experiences are ignored in order to preserve image and money.

Gibbons states “cultural memory has indeed been one of the casualties of the Celtic Tiger” (222). Ireland needs to understand the pre-national history and accept it as part of their own history. Even though Ireland is still newly independent, Irish experience did not definitively begin at the moment of independence, but Irish experience extends much farther back in history. Although the participation in WWI and The Troubles are difficult to confront due to their traumatic nature, these events cannot be erased from history, just like the recession cannot be ignored now. If Ireland does not remember and accept this, then the cycle of repression will continue. Repression only causes stagnancy and it is in the moments that Ireland remembers that that progression forward is possible.

The arguments that Tana French and Paul Murray make through the texts are important to understand in Ireland's current cultural and economic climate, because the texts address unresolved issues that stem from the Celtic Tiger. Ireland remains in an economic recession and still struggles with the fallout from the Celtic Tiger. Roy Foster quotes economist Denis O'Hearn to explain that, "The state 'abjectly failed to mobilise the fiscal resources that were created by rapid growth in order to reduce inequality and improve social welfare,' instead tunneling these windfalls back through tax reductions that favoured the wealthier members of Irish society" (10). An increase in economic viability cannot automatically be considered economic success. The Celtic Tiger economy did not act as a modernizing force for Ireland, and in some aspects it can be considered regressive, especially in the way that individual and cultural memory are repressed. Although economic success is generally linked to modernity, the two texts illustrate that it does not promote a sustainable modernity in Ireland and it has hindered the development of other necessary components. A modernizing force should work to bolster culture, not hinder its development.

French and Murray similarly criticize the construction of an identity that is centered on economic success. They instead suggest that identity needs to include memory and the preservation of history. With the creation of an identity, both French and Murray are concerned with the intentions of characters. French criticizes the politicians and land developers for the corrupt manner in which they obtained land and oppressed those against their plans for development. Murray similarly criticizes the Automator, who like the politicians and developers in *In the Woods*, is concerned only with the profits that can be gained from exploiting history and has no hesitation sacrificing history. Diarmaid Ferriter explains that there was a "failure to question the moral basis of the Celtic Tiger version of modern Ireland, which was rooted in the

inadequacies of those who sought to modernize the country,” on what John Waters describes as ““exclusively materialist principles since the 1960s,”” (171). Attempts to modernize the country solely through attempts to modernize the economy does not lead to sustainable practices. The intentions of the politicians, land developers, and the Automator lacked a necessary moral aspect, as well as long-term vision for the country. Ferriter poses that, “The challenge after the crash was not just to get to the truth of what happened and why but also to respond to it with some new vision...Crucial themes—fairness, public service, and the nature of society—were undoubtedly neglected during the boom” (185). A new vision that focuses on rebuilding Irish cultural identity is still necessary for Ireland. In order to create a vision, culture cannot be altered in order to fulfill the needs of the economy, but economic prosperity should happen as a result of sustainable practices that complement the way that Irish society and culture function. An identity cannot be rebuilt on economy, but attention still needs to be directed towards the “crucial themes” that were neglected.

The Celtic Tiger does not define Ireland in terms of success or failure. Although the two novels demonstrate some of the negative by-products and cultural shocks of the rapid economic rise, French and Murray emphasize that it was the investment in the economy combined with the sacrifice of culture and history that makes the recession so devastating. In an interview, French states, “I think because we never got together a new Irish cultural identity within the Celtic Tiger, we were just so confused, this sudden recession is just such a shock; it’s a double whammy””(Coughlan 337). There was still confusion surrounding identity when the Celtic Tiger took place, and the Celtic Tiger acted as an even more destabilizing force for Ireland. French interestingly observes that Ireland is “still very much a teenage nation, with all the lack of identity which that entails” (Coughlan 340). Ireland is still a relatively new nation whose identity

will continue to develop. It is unreasonable to think that identity can be defined so definitively by a recent episode of economic success, especially when this success comes at the cost of sacrificing history that preceded it. Of course, Ireland did not choose to have the boom and bust, but many people “were encouraged to borrow beyond their means” (Ferriter 185). The grasp for economic success is understandable, but the practices that came about in order to try and maintain such an excessive margin of economic profit is what French and Murray critique, and what made the Tiger even more destabilizing. Although a certain group of elites are criticized in both novels, there needs to be more widespread cultural awareness confronting the realities of the Celtic Tiger during the recession, rather than trying to cover up problems with efforts to recover the economy. It will be difficult to accomplish one sweeping movement that addresses all of the issues, but *In the Woods* and *Skippy Dies* both focus on efforts within individual communities, Knocknaree and Seabrook. The efforts that need to be made, according to French and Murray, begin with individuals. In *In the Woods* it is Rob who learns the necessity of memory to identity, and it is characters like Mark who try and protect historical memory from destruction. In *Skippy Dies*, it is Howard who risks his teaching career to teach his students more than the Automator’s nationalist history of Ireland, and who refuses to ignore the emotional struggles of his students and the underlying problems at Seabrook.

There is not one solution provided in the novels, because there is not simply one formula that Ireland can follow. Undoubtedly, a sustainable identity needs to be created while repairing the damage caused by the Celtic Tiger’s rapid expansion and decline. French and Murray move toward solutions and demonstrate the efforts that can begin this difficult process. Although damage has been done, in the novels and in Ireland, it is not too late to work on fixing the

damage and learning from it. It is just as crucial to prevent further cultural destruction and repression while in a recession.

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