Crises of Rural Irish Identities in the Age of Globalized Capital

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Rural Irish Literature as a Signifier of *Tradition* During an Era of Rapid Capitalist Modernization

In the opening chapter of The Country and the City, Williams denotes a dichotomy in England between the two predominant locales suggested in the title. Upon each has settled certain ideas: "On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved center: of learning, communication, light." [1]

These labels, for Williams, are less accurate markers than they are stereotypes, with the unintended result of maintaining the country as a place (as opposed to a non-place) despite its rapid literal and figurative disappearance as cities became more ubiquitous, grow, and sprawl outwards in 19th century England. Because of these ingrained memories of country and city, one continues to associate with each locale characteristics outdated in light of vast demographic shifts, if those characteristics were not already inaccurate at their inception.

This notion can be extended to the perceived radical difference of an era: as Cleary claims, each era views its cultural production as innovative and new, despite the fact that each era typically has its own innovative and new production. These two formulations hint at the difficulty in perceiving one's own time, as well as the tendency for cultural production to root itself not in reality, but in perception of reality. In order

to minimize generational differences and bolster consistent, timeless identities, the memories of the past will always intimately impact the present. This introduces a curious paradox—if one perceives their own time as irreconcilably different than that which came before, one will immediately seek out ways to link these diverse periods together, as to divert various crises of identities that may arise from generational discontinuity.

For Williams, this attempted linkage contains the justification of producing in an artistic mode (the pastoral) which is not so much mimetic as it is nostalgic in the period he is reflecting upon. Despite the vast industrialization and urbanization of England in the 19th century, Williams notes that:

it is a critical fact that in and through these transforming experiences, English attitudes to the country, and ideas of rural life, persisted with extraordinary power, so that even after society was predominantly urban, its literature...was still predominantly rural. [2]

In this formulation, Williams is hinting at a notion which is not only true of England; one could argue that rural or so-called traditional identities persist globally, even and perhaps especially in states that have faced mass migration from the country to the cities over the past several centuries, as a means of preserving the cultural identity and national imaginary in geographical locations which have encountered various crises in the nature of those traditional identities.

One example of these crises in the contemporary moment can be gleaned from Irish cultural production, owing to the drastic changes it has gone through over the past century —politically, demographically, and economically. A report from Ireland's Spatial Planning Unit illustrates simply how rapid urbanization has occurred in Ireland. Shipman Martin speaks of Dublin, for instance, in terms of a 50-kilometer radius. As he writes, "In 1936, over 80% of the urban population was actually located in the 0-7 kilometre [radial] band." [3] This continued with only minor changes for the next thirty years. However, "The 1970s witnessed the five and six-fold increases in many places beyond the main built-up area" constituting the shift of populations from both the city and the country to suburban areas, considered "urbanized" in this particular context because of the city's role as a job creator, regional cultural center, and logistically central due to the infrastructural lack of links between the burgeoning suburban areas. This rep-

resents a dramatically changing landscape of Dublin "from a compact 'Slum city' at the beginning of the twentieth century, to what Horner describes as a 'Globalised City Region'" at the beginning of the twenty-first, which spreads out into several surrounding counties. [4] Such a robust shift in so short a period of time undoubtedly changes how the state relates to the citizens, the land itself to the citizens, and those citizens to each other and themselves. The most provocative to me is the final of these three relationships—how citizens relate to each other and themselves.

Due to Ireland's uniquely strong bond to literature, a literary study is necessary to track changes in this respect.

Recent literature illustrates, on the one hand, the resistance in the Irish population to morph their identity wholly to their newly-urbanized state and, on the other hand, their attempt to hold onto the rural past—despite over 60% of the

population now being urbanized, and likely many more reliant on cities on a day-to-day basis. This presents a problem—the cultural identity and imaginary of the Irish have failed to modernize along with the vast changes in the state and its space.

The goal of this paper is to look specifically at how Irish literature based in the country has found its niche as an anachronistic representation of days of yore within a context of extremely rapid urbanization, maintaining a distinctly Irish and distinctly rural flavor despite the importation of Anglicising, secularizing, and urbanizing values and the influx of global capital in the Celtic Tiger period, as a means of preserving and reforming those identities which Irish populations continue to view as Irish.

This anachronicity is touched upon by Cleary, particularly in his chapter "Capital and Culture in Twentieth Century Ireland." He identifies core issues that are concomitant with this major shift in the demographic makeup of Ireland. He points out in particular the issue of critiques about modern and contemporary cultural pro-

duction—"that Irish studies still lacks serious materialist attempts to historicize Irish literary and cultural production" and are instead too focused upon the admittedly incredible artistic innovations produced in 20th century Ireland from a predominantly aesthetic perspective.[5] In his critique, he challenges the trend of heralding modern and contemporary literature as innovative simply because of its newness—to do so would be to ignore the fact that each generation brings with it innovative newness in a variety of disciplines. Rather, the work of cultural critics is to examine new-fangled cultural production in how it inevitably—if only implicitly—interacts with contemporary structural shifts outside of cultural production.

For this period, he speaks specifically about the "capitalist modernization process," a set of processes initiated by the West which have resulted in the globalization of capital; the attempted secularization of non-Western, backwards, religious regions (including Ireland despite its geographical nearness to the epicenter of these projects); and the hierarchization of the West above the rest, so to speak, which was at once a Western-justified civilizing project as well as a project complicit with the global slave trade and colonial oppression. According to Cleary, while aesthetic production of 20th century Ireland likely deals directly with these aspects of society, cultural critics have not accounted for this in meaningful ways.

Cleary situates the global crises of late capitalism in a specifically Irish context to account for the vastly different experiences between the modern period in, say, Britain and that in Ireland: "while this massive discrepancy in national experience speaks for itself, the real challenge posed by these concurrent developments is to conceive of them not as two altogether alien and disjunctive histories but rather as two divergent vectors of the same capitalist modernization

process," voicing the relatively recent realization promoted by non-Western critics that the modernization of the West absolutely came at the expense of the Other.[6] Two contemporary plays—Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* and McPherson's *The Weir*—offer provocative entry points to this specific socioeconomic moment as a means of better understanding both the plays and the moment from which they hail.

Both of these works take place in rural localities, and therefore display manifestations of rural identity, addressing the collision of contemporary urban normativity and extant rural settings. *By the Bog of Cats* addresses the loss sense of locatedness, which was once associated with rural life. There is a clear sense in the play that the characters feel displaced, despite being in the same geographic location as always, evidence of the fact that the land around them has changed as well as the ways they interact with it through their stiff resistance to modernization. *The Weir* presents an interesting way of looking at one particular space—the Irish pub—and how it has become compromised as a location of (individual and collective) identity-formation. It also illustrates the inverse of the spatial identity problem in *By the Bog of Cats* through its introduction of urban folk into the rural landscape. Both fold into the Williamsian paradox of attaching one's identity to institutions that no

longer exist as theorized, witnessed by Williams in the English novelists of the 19th century—the characters of these plays are anachronistically related to the spaces they occupy, interacting with these spaces in ways that might have been possible one, two, or even three hundred years earlier, but have fundamentally changed in light of the mass migration centered upon cities as well as the identity-transforming (or identity-erasing) difficulties that have been part and parcel of the North Atlantic forces of globalized capital which sought to turn humans therianthropically into consumptive animals, and human centers of habitation into centers of consumption (to paraphrase theories of Ali Shari'ati and John Parkinson, respectively).

Carr's play, *By the Bog of Cats*, approaches the anti-/posthumanness of the late capitalist moment by challenging the characters' presumably long-held beliefs that their identities are inextricably tied to the land on which they live as means of self-building separate from any capitalist mission. Each of the characters at times presents their connection to the bog itself. Amongst the very first lines of the play, for instance, Hester tells us that she has spent much of her life by the bog. A stranger to the bog could hardly have cultivated a relationship to feel connected with a "corpse of a swan" who she's "known…the longest time."[7] In Scene III of the first act, Hester displays her devotion to the land: "Ah, how can I lave the Bog of Cats, everythin' I'm connected to is here. I'd rather die."[8] This moment, foreshadowing the violent end of the play, shows that Hester would rather die than to give in to the trending urbanization that is occurring around her; in her words, "I've never lived in a town. I won't know anywan there —."[9] In the town or the city, she would have no land to be beholden to in the same way that she identifies with her bog. To move away would be, to her, literally slicing part of her identity from her—she is fearful to find what might be left (if anything) if this crucial aspect of herself were to
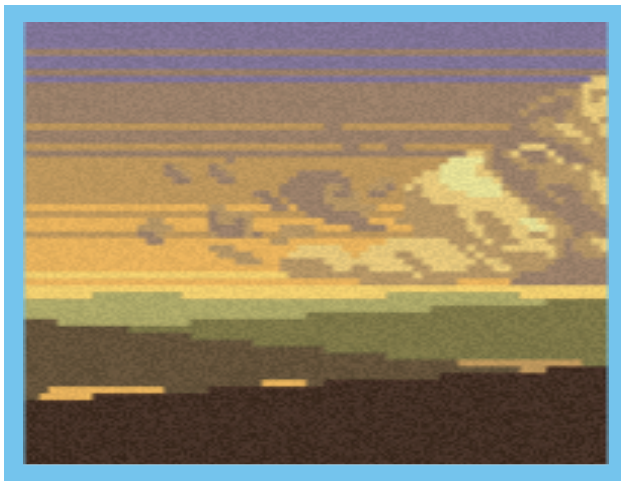
disappear.

This is due to the fact that she feels the bog gives her life in some way, in the same way that she attributes agency to the bog. She describes it, after all, as a close friend or lover —"I know every barrow and rivulet and bog hole of its nine square mile. I know where the best bog rosemary grows and the sweetest wild bog rue. I could lead yees around the Bog of Cats in my sleep."[10] Hester thus sees the bog as central to her psychological makeup, as if the literal geography of the bog were programmed into her from birth. To leave the bog would be to sacrifice that intimate knowledge that has become central to her identity, in favor of the designedness of town, easily navigable by anyone with the crudest map, even those just arrived—to leave would be to "eradicate [her], make out [she] never existed" and drop her into the city where she is no one.[11] For someone who sees their personal history and identity paired with the bog's, knowing its intricacies is hereditary in the sense that one just arriving there, especially without the help of a song sung to them by their mother as a child, would be lost—in the literal sense of not knowing their location, and in the capitalist sense of having nowhere to consume, neither of which appears to be a problem for Hester.
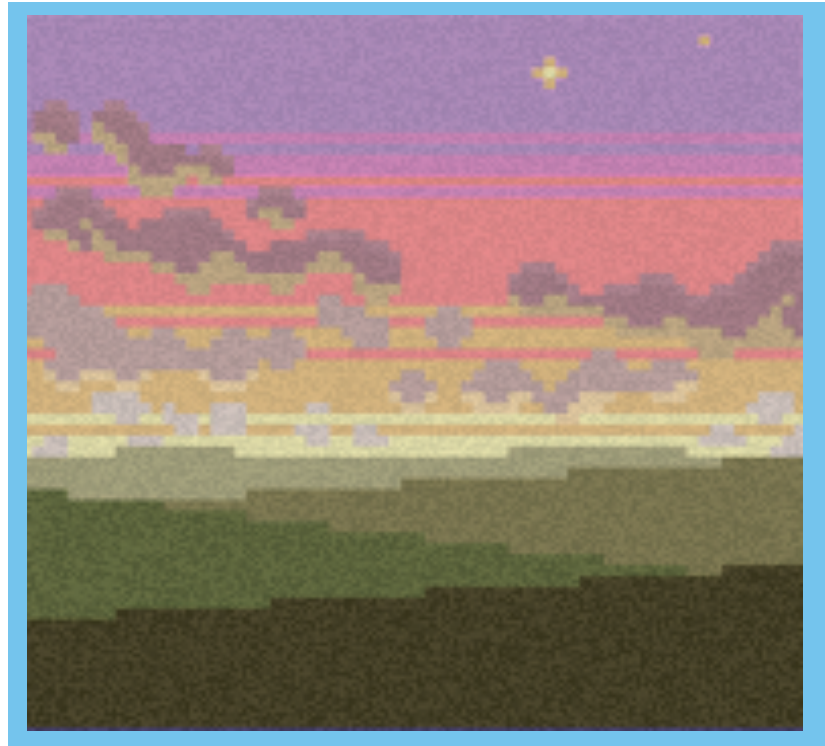
But more worrisome for Hester is the notion that a newcomer to the bog would finally bring the change from the outside world to which the bog and its inhabitants have been so resistant. Hester is cognizant of this in the fact that even allowing someone who is from the area to occupy her space near the bog would be to irreversibly harm it, inasmuch as her living there is as central to the nature of the bog as the bog is imbricated to her own nature—even her own house on the bog is troublesome to her. Her decision to burn the house down between the final two acts illustrates her view of the house as temporary—she seems to prefer living in the caravan which both connects her to her mother (Without "this auld caravan, I'd swear I only dreamt her.") as well as projects her view of the bog as a sentient organism on whose space she's encroaching ("… only an auld house, it should never have been built in the first place").[12] This brings up an interesting, though perhaps obvious, point about this proposed two-way street of identity: there is no identity inherent to a particular space, only that identity which is projected upon it by those who occupy it.

Hester does not seem to realize that this is the case though, and refers throughout to the

bog as a person existent with or without her. As she wreaks havoc upon the property in the final scene, she exclaims of the house: "Let the bog have it back. In a year or so it'll be covered in gorse and furze…"[13] The bog is surely comprised of living things and will inevitably reconsume the imposed house and regain its lost land. But its status as an agent which is going to actively take back the house as if defending it from a non-Hester stranger is interesting in two major respects.

First, it reaffirms Hester's view of what might be called the primacy of the land. Hester's deep connection to the land and the agency that they give to each other would indicate that Hester views the land as central to defining human beings—humans can live around the edge of the bog, and enter into it at their risk, but at the end of the day it is the bog's ability to take back that which has been stolen by settlers on or near it that grants the bog the first and final say in the state of the land. This elevates the land not only as an identifiable Self, but also as one that is indivisible from the identities cultivated around it, like Hester's. Hester looks at leaving the land as a ridiculous action—as evidenced by the play's dramatic closing—as a lover looks upon separation from their beloved. One might even go so far as to argue that

Hester is only interested in winning Carthage back not because of her love for him, and not even for Josie's sake, but because Carthage is of the land, and reuniting with him is but a guarantee that she too will be able to stay at the bog.

The second interesting implication from the bog's ascribed agency is that it creates a false binary between nature (congruent to premodernity) and culture (congruent to modernity) in such a way as to indicate that the Bog of Cats has been wholly unchanged by the nature of capitalistic modernization.

Hester's thinking would suggest that—although the capitalist project has not insisted upon turning the bog into golf links or cranberry farm just yet —there have been no changes in the bog because of its relentlessness in maintaining itself as a force for humans to reckon

with—of course, there are houses around the bog, but its character remains virtually unchanged.

Furthermore, the Catwoman's discussion about medicine puts into direct opposition the bog and capitalist shifts—"Gave auld Xavier Cassidy herbs to cure his wife. What did he do? Pegged them down the toilet and took Olive Cassidy to see some swanky medicine man in a private hospital" where she went on to die.[14] The people of the bog have a clear distrust of modern institutions, making them appear as stereotypically rural, backwards, and utterly resistant to modernity.
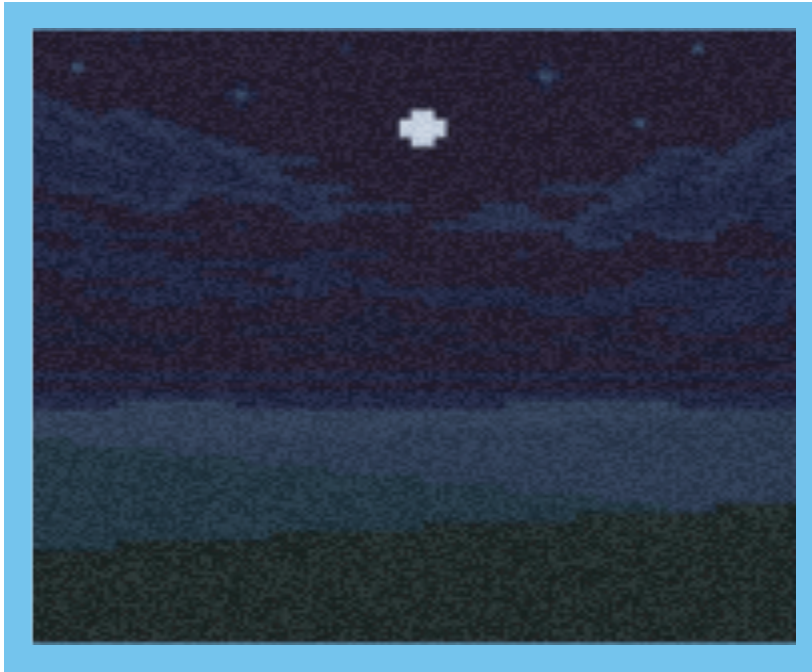
But a line from the Catwoman from early on puts this in an interesting light—"I know everythin' that happens on this bog," she says. "I'm Keeper of the Bog of Cats in case ya forgotten? I own this bog." Ownership of the bog is certainly at odds with Hester's view of it, as she does not seem to think of it as something tenable but rather as something elevated to human status, able to think for itself. It is too at odds with Hester's feelings about her close relationship with the bog. Although it is unlikely that the Catwoman owns it in the sense of holding its deed, she nonetheless brings in a toxic implication with this line —if she too believes as Hester does that the bog is some kind of anthropomorphic being,

the notion that it can be owned, bought, and sold runs into the issue of late modernity's complicity with the consumerization of subjectivities and commodification of spaces. After all, paired with Hester's view of the bog as an equal, a friend, or a lover, the Catwoman's view of herself as a veritable empress of the bog would imply too her status as an unofficial landlord over not only the bog, but Hester as well. This hierarchy imposed by the Catwoman presents a curious metaphor for land's role in modern capitalism that is perhaps best reflected at the end of the play.

At the last bit of Act III, Hester is prepared to live up to her word, and take her own life as an alternative to leaving the bog.[15] Though the play ends with this very outcome, the delay in her suicide illustrates the timelessness, as well as the anachronicity, of their surroundings. When Josie unknowingly wanders onto the stage, and Hester informs her that she's going "Somewhere ya can never return from," Josie mandates that she will not let her mother leave. "Mam," she cries, "I'd be watchin' for ya all the time 'long the Bog of the Cats. I'd be hopin' and waitin' and prayin' for ya to return." This, of course, mimics Hester's own experience as a child—"…I watched her walk away from me across the Bog of Cats. And across the Bog of Cats I'll watch her return."[16] This, in addition to the utterances of "Mam—Mam—" of each as they die indicates the cycle they exist in on the bog. It implies that one can hardly escape the bog except through death, in much the same impossibility of escaping the capitalist yoke. But moreover, the youngster's name, Josie, might also imply that Hester's own mother, Josie, too was trapped by the bog, perhaps left by her own mother as a child in turn, in a way that makes identifying with the bog a necessity for Hester and previous women Swane to remember their forebears. But such speculation is unimportant; what is important is the fact that to keep one's identity with the bog, at least in the Swane family, requires a payment of blood, comparable to the steep price of identity in the capitalized world. The structures of globalized Western capital are inescapably oppressive—one is forced to find their identity in what they consume. The same can ultimately be said of the bog, or any notion of literally grounding one's identity, which requires a static, unexamined existence as opposed to a malleable one.

What this does, finally, is peel back a layer of the capitalist project to suggest that the goal of moving beyond the increasingly oppressive capitalist order ought not to be to return to precedent ways of life via a rejection of modernization. Williams implicitly identified the danger in one living anachronistically in that they inadequately address the reality of their own time. But the nuance neglected by this is that, in light of late modernity, there is no turning back—the bog will never return to its former glory, Hester will not be able to identify herself with it forever, and everyone who now lives there will ultimately reach a fate similar to hers. The question is one of reconciliation: how, if at all, can one embrace the admittedly positive aspects of capitalistic modernity (arguably: modern healthcare, wider access to knowledge, a more liberal ability to define oneself as a particular type of consumer) with those aspects labeled traditional, and how can one excise the negative aspects of each of those respective modes of living? The bog for Hester is something fetishized, in the same way that a city dweller might fetishize the latest material object, and so her traditional idea of identity can be said to be equally harmful. The goal of a postcapitalist, post-Western, postsecular, and postmodern theory is to break down these oppressive structures and replace them with an ideal mode of living as oneself and with a plurality of other selves as one desires, without the exploitation inherent in a capitalist society that is arguably peaking at this very moment, though the proposed possibility of this is perhaps already too idealistic.

she feels so utterly connected to the land she lives on and averse to moving to town, in addition to many other personal problems. The tragic ending of the play speaks to her fierce resistance of the forces of globalized capital, which posits that culture is simply better situated in an urban environment —the closer people are to each other, ports, government spaces, and businesses, the more efficiently they can consume.

By giving urbanites so many amenities, and making rural life so difficult in modern times, the forces of global capital are perhaps felt strongest in places where its presence is the weakest, such as rural Ireland.

Though Hester might feel that her land has been relatively unchanged in the modern period,

By the Bog of Cats can be read in line with the changing landscape of global capital in its relationship to the land on which it takes place, and in light of the strong relationship between the characters and the land and their attempted resistance of modernization. The mass migration to the cities has left these characters in the Irish Midlands developmentally behind, denoted implicitly by Carr in her specificity as to the characters' brogue and their general lack of financial prosperity. A friend from Cavan once recited an old joke, indicating the lack of financial opportunities as well as a sort of backwards, premodern bar-barity associated with her native county: "Do you know how copper wire was invented? Two Cavanmen fighting over a penny." The only option to continue cultural development, in the eyes of the modernizing project, is to allow their lives to be taken over by urbanity, either in moving to the city, or becoming directly reliant upon it—conversely, to leave literally or figuratively the country and the land they identify with. Hester is the most clearly resistant of this pull to the city, as well as resistant to the a forceful push from the country, where financial stability is hard-won for Hester due largely to the fact that

the fact remains that the land has changed—people from near where she lives may even be commuting to Dublin to work on a daily basis according to the statistics from the Spatial Planning Unit's report, thereby abandoning the local economy and leaving those who are resistant to the forces of capital in the lurch. Hester is essentially a caricature of the stubborn ruralite resistant of change, even as change persists around her. One clear case of the changing nature of Irish rural areas is in the pubs, which have seen their relevance in local culture recently wane for a number of reasons directly correlated to the rise of urban centers.

Rural pub license renewals and applications are on the decline, according to Scarborough, who convincingly argues that pubs were at one point central to notions of identity in Ireland, particularly rural pubs, as a "third space", a place separate from work and home, per Scarborough. The role of such spaces is
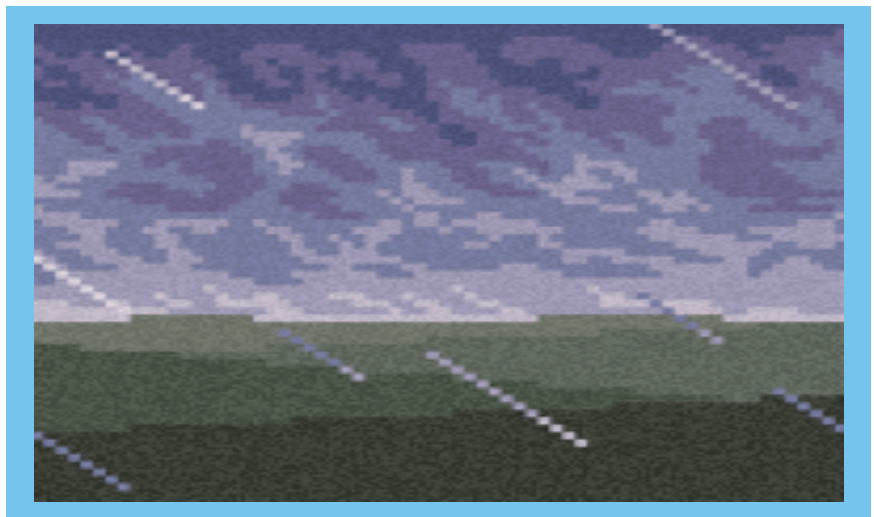
to provide continuity, regularity and a sense of place, all of which contribute to the construction of the self, the projection of the self within the public sphere and the generation of collective identity.[17]

Scarborough views the Irish pub as the ideal third space as a site "where individual and group identities form with a community framework." But with the rise of global capital, and the consumerization of individuals, so too has come the commodification of culture, perhaps evident no more than in the decline of pub culture: "public venues for the production of social capital and identity construction [have] transformed or [disappeared]." This change has been marked, according to Scarborough, by the shift of pubs in Ireland from third places to fourth places. Fourth places are essentially identical to third places, but "The primary purpose of the fourth place is, not to provide a location for social groups to engage in the community, but commodification of place for consumption."[18] In other words, third places and fourth places are the same except for their role in the public spheres—the former is essential to identity formation, and the other pretends to be.

This is witnessed by interviewees in Scarborough's paper in Irish "themed" pubs in Ireland —and seen internationally as in many of the dozens of Irish pubs in Midtown Manhattan —via use "of various 'props' to present an atmosphere of antiquity and heritage," feigning a connection to the identity-forming spaces which display a geographical history, only to bolster their attractiveness to consumers.[19] Fourth places, Scarborough maintains, "while appearing to provide a temporary solution to the loss of place in the emerging post-modern geography, are ultimately inadequate due to their dislocation from community."[20] This is echoed by a number of her interviewees, who note the "great craic" in the past of rural pubs in Sligo in particular which are now emp-

ty most of the time, even on the weekends, due to the rising popularity of themed spaces in town which promote connections to false identities (biker bars for non-bikers, frontier bars for non-frontierspeople, etc.) and lower prices (due to their more convenient location and ownership by larger companies as opposed to local proprietors).

This is directly echoed by Finbar Mack in *The Weir*, who explains to the new ruralite Valerie upon entering the kind of rural pub that is exactly the focus of Scarborough's study, "half the townland used to nearly live in here" while walking into a nearly empty pub that is filled only by those intimately close with the owner, none of whom are particularly young.[21] In fact, it is made clear that the only reason Finbar even appears to bring Valerie to this particular pub is because, according to Jack, "This is the nearest place to old Maura's" and that there is even a certain novelty in visiting this pub to "introduce her to the natives" implying that even pubs which have resisted the commodifying turn are subjected to the process of becoming fourth places.[22] The fact-driven decline in Irish pubs as noted by Scarborough has had a remarkable effect on culture, is inextricably tied to the rise of cities, and is necessarily linked to *The Weir*.

This context is brought up even before the first lines of the play by McPherson, who specifically situates this play in the modernizing and urbanizing processes by noting the picture hanging in the bar of "*People posing near a newly erected ESB weir.*"[23] While the weir itself is hardly central to actual action of the play, this early mention, its later invocation as a temporal marker, and the name of the play itself all hint at the importance of the modernizing projects to the rural locals, interestingly referred to as "natives", as perhaps a turning point for rural Ireland which presupposed that reality which has been greatly highlighted during the Celtic Tiger period. As in Carr's Irish Midlands, *The Weir's* setting in "*Northwest Leitrim or Sligo*" indicates a geographical class of people who have been relatively untouched by modernization, and therefore those most harmed by it, as economic transformations have likely driven their neighbors to living and consuming in the towns and cities of Ireland and thus left the rural pub empty, and those still around—like Jack and Jim in the play—without consistent work. Even in their employment status, with the exception of Finbar who owns a successful business, one can cull that they have not received any sum in the vast influx of capital to Ireland.

One can sense, then, that without support—and, instead, a notable theft of support—from the encroaching modernizing projects, the rural men in this pub are seeking a way to hold on to what they view as a noble past. One way in which they do this is through their retelling of old tall tales, which both preserve the land as unchanged as well as resist the incoming importance of logic and rationality that is venerated by modernity.

This dynamic is first introduced by Jack's story of the house which Valerie recently began to occupy. This fairy tale is particularly interesting be-
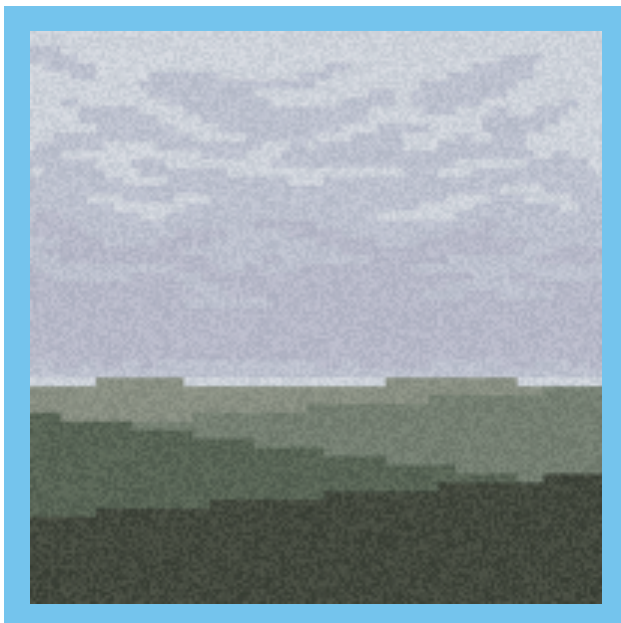
cause it illustrates a direct rejection of modern reason, and yet is not wholly discredited by the men in the pub except to comfort Valerie, to dismiss this story and the ones to follow as "only old cod" seen "up and down the country."[24] In this story, as in each of ones that follow through the play, the men seem to be convinced of their veracity because of the transformative experiences they view of these stories. Jack, for instance, tells the story of an old woman whose "house was built on what you'd call [the fairy road]" and recounts one moment in particular when a "soft knocking at the door" was attributed by old Maura Nealon to one of those fairies.[25] Interestingly, Jack brings up the construction of the weir as paired with the only other instance of the knocking heard by Maura other than the story he'd just shared, perhaps an implicit affirmation that modernity had driven the fairies away, or that the accompanying age of logic and reason assured he and Maura Nealon ceased believing such events were possible. After his own story, Finbar attributes his experience as the reason he'd quit smoking.[26] Jim's story appears paired with a lesson that he'd learned the regional nature of these stories, and how one's specific micro-area identity impacted directly one's life.[27] What all of these stories have in common though, even the last one shared—hardly a ghost story like the others—is that they are attempts to hold onto something that has disappeared as people have grown less superstitious. Much like Hester in *By the Bog of Cats* attempting to keep the land beneath her feet intimately connected to her identity as opposed to moving to the town, and like the 19th century novelists discussed by Williams, the characters in *The Weir* are, as particularly noted in their retelling of these stories, attempting to hold on to the past in such a way as to resist the rise of modernity paired with urbanization. It is not unreasonable for these men to attempt resisting modernity though; they have been largely excluded of its benefits, yet all too keenly felt its negative aspects.

Interestingly, perhaps the strongest resistance to modernity comes from the character who one would assume has benefited most from it—Valerie. Her move from the city to the country is directly contrary to the statistics spelled out by Shipman Martin, and is somewhat paradoxical otherwise as well. As she explains, she moved out to the country as the result of a painful experience of the death of her daughter, and discomfort after a phone call where she claimed to have heard her deceased daughter speaking to her.[28] She even indicates that her move to the country was directly a rejection of modern reason: referring to the phone call and the men's attempts to rationalize it: "it's something that happened. And it's nice just to be here and…hear what you were saying. I know I'm not crazy." She identifies more with the men and their unreasonable ghost stories than those in the city who would likely encourage her to either forget the phone call, or seek psychiatric help to figure out what the true meaning of the (presumably imagined) phone call was, marked by the implicit "now" in the last clause of that quote. She derived a sense of affirmation in hearing their unlikely stories that matched her own. But, in an interesting way, her time in the pub is comparable to time spent with a psychiatrist in its form, as she and the men talk through personal issues and from where they come until they reach more settling conclusions, or breakthroughs. This is for Valerie even more valuable than time with a shrink, as her audience does not simply listen to her and prescribe medicine and, in fact, is complicit with letting her feelings be once she tells them to.

But this presents a troubling paradox. In one sense, Valerie's retreat from the city to the country supports the fact that there is merit in the declining ways of life found there, and that their conservation is virtuous. Contrary to the overwhelming logic of their contemporary moment, there is solace to be found in a lack of reason and lack of modern mores. Instead of the country-

side losing value as a place, then, its value is simply transformed. But at the same time, there is an unsettling novelty in her retreat. Replaced are the actual identities of the men and the places she is encountering with identities as simple objectified Others compared to the urban areas and their subjectified populations. They are mere actors within an urban narrative. This keeps them trapped beneath the capitalist yoke they are implicitly rejecting by continuing to live in the country, and capitalizes the country in a way one might view the commercialized simplicity of the vacation destinations, exemplified by the incoming German vacationers referred to throughout the play as a financial God-send for the barkeeping Brendan, or the country living tours of Lancaster County, PA's Amish Country.[29] In this respect, they are urbanized outcasts, and subjects to be taken advantage by those who have faced hardship in cities and wish to find retreat—solidifying their roles within the modernizing processes as a viable alternative to modernity precisely because of the inviability of their lifestyles, an overcorrection for the problems included in the modern moment. This overcorrection, though, solves neither the attendant problems of pre-modern, country life nor those associated with urbanity and moder-


nity, but only perpetuates them. In other words, an overcorrection indicative of a social order which fails to critique its ills and remains complicit with the decidedly negative parts of itself.

This overarching theme is specifically denoted by Scarborough's discussion of the pub's transformation in the same chronological period, as well as by McPherson's use of the rural pub as the center of Irish rural life for those whose lives can still be called predominantly rural. It would be particularly difficult to miss the changes in pubs over the past few decades. As Scarborough's research would indicate, they have transformed from old-fashioned, seemingly timeless centers for community and individual identity building to spaces complicit with the larger trends associated with the various modernizing projects, and contrarily related to the individuals who still wish to occupy them as third places as opposed to fourth. The weir is, of course, the symbolic manifestation of this transformation from rural people with identities overlapping with the land they occupy to rural people who are simply outcasts of modernity. While I hesitate to call them outcasts, the fact is that despite their efforts to resist modernity and continue an Irish way of life has only resulted in their being repurposed, and their resistance to modernity becoming the very aspect of their lives which has allowed them to become thoroughly assimilated into the modernizing project. Whereas Scarborough denotes third places becoming fourth places as something that seems to happen to one place at a time— she quotes one interviewee who notes the marked differences between "themed" pubs and the real thing—it is not the specific places themselves that are transformed but people's ideas about them. Thus, as pubs as intended fourth places become more ubiquitous, all pubs, regardless of their intended status as third or fourth places, are going to be assumed fourth places.

Likewise, as space in general is consistently commodified as fourth places are (Parkinson),

all space is already fourth-placed; the only difference is in the degree and manner of its commercialization. As the radial concentric circles used to describe the population shifts in greater Dublin by Shipman Martin, urban centers can be viewed as centers of Western capitalization, with the outward-extending rings simply being diagnostic of the varying stages of Westernization. As Dublin and other Irish cities can be called the Westernized hubs of Ireland, places like the settings of these two plays simply become spaces on a continuum between spaces waiting to be urbanized and spaces which already have a specific role in relation to urbanized spaces. This is related not only to Shipman Martin's findings, but too to the very nature of Irish identity of the country, of the city, and of the state in general as seen in the collision of city and country in both *By the Bog of Cats* and *The Weir*.

This all relates to identity in the ways in which people view themselves. But, of course, identity is not always limited to the solipsist's formulation; there are spaces in which we exist and interact with others which impact the ways in which we view ourselves and the various communities to which we belong. To ignore the spaces we interact with as central aspects of identity-formation would be to ignore those aspects altogether; while I do
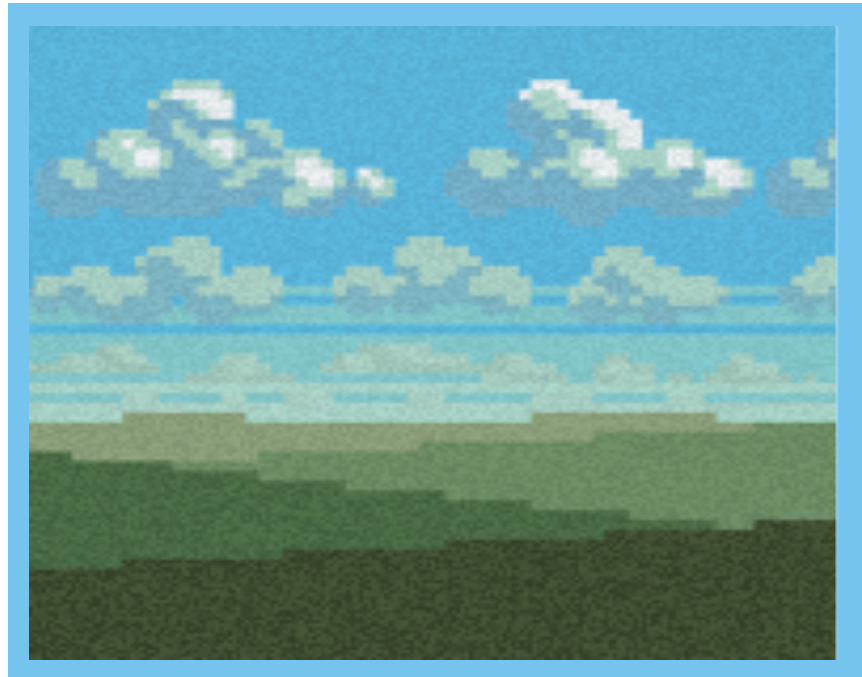
not plan here to posit a philosophical argument as to the nature of the self, it is clear that the spaces in which we spend our time have an impact on how we see ourselves. This is evidenced by the two plays discussed in this paper, which both hold centrally the importance of spaces to individual and collective identity-building.

But to simply acknowledge of a spatial impact upon identity formation is not enough; following from Cleary, it is important also to view the impact of various social and cultural structures which are essential in these processes of identity-building. This appears to only become more necessary as we move ever closer to a wholly globalized world in which the Western forms of oppressive capitalism play an ever-increasing role in the ways that we think about and view ourselves, each other, and our communities.

Going through this paper, a reader might be tempted to think that the best means of challenging the growing normativity of global Westernization and capitalism is to simply resist by maintaining, as these characters appear to, so-called traditional ways of life that allow for identity-formation separate from oppressive Western structures. But such a view is naïve. While these characters can certainly be seen to reject the developed ways of life, what is more important is their various reconciliations with modernity—an antithetical relationship between the way things used to be and the way

whatever is to replace the untenable, oppressive order that has come as the side effectual cost of the amassed wealth of the West over the past 500-odd years.

At the center of an anthropological study by Duroy and Caulkins is a place in the northwest of the Republic of Ireland surreptitiously referred to as Ballylough. Much like the rural locales featured in each of the plays this paper has focused upon, there is a clear crises of identities occurring there, as there have been for the past century, and the past three decades in particular. There is hardly a general agreement as to what it means to be Irish, what it means to be good, and whether or not being Irish and being good are equivalent. The residents of this town are variously troubled, as "Ballylough exemplifies some of the tensions of a rapidly changing, economically expanding region."[30] These crises are intimately paired with the processes of modernization that have strangled Ireland since the rise of urbanism began in Ireland in the 1970s. Such strangulation has thrown into doubt the grounds on which people in Ireland are to identify themselves—one center of their identity formation, the pub, has begun disappearing, and has already lost much of its cultural value; another center, the very ground on which they stand, has as well. This is a sequence of events which has occurred the world over—in former colonies, in so-called backwards regions, and even within the West itself—in which the capitalist machine, ever searching for centers of profit, has begun to take even those most complicit with its oppressive properties and turn them from human subjects into animals of consumption. Everything—from the ways that we educate our children to the ways that we design our cities—serves only to bolster this as everything is merely auctioned off to the highest bidder. The price we are paying for these processes is seen every day in the ways illustrated by Carr

things are now, which allows for the possibility of a synthetic order to come. Brendan, for instance, does not turn away tourists seeking a glimpse to the way things once were from his pub on principle; he reconciles the modern notion of consumptive vacationing with his rural life. This suggests not a simple, wholesale rejection of the Western modern order, but rather radical reimaginings of that order through the eyes of those typically referred to as the Other. Hester Swane, on the one hand, illustrates distinct resistance to modernity; she went to the extreme of suicide as a means of refusal of the Western order which sought to separate her from her land. The Weir, on the other hand, presents a synthetic order necessary for the reversal of the globally-repressive machine that resides in the capitalist order in its confluent ideas of the city and of the country which challenge both the characters' and the audience's notions about both. In exposing these manifestations of rural and urban identities to veritable representatives of each, both the Self and the Other can gain a sense of how the other half lives. It is this relationship, which I referred to as psychiatric above, which will promote a breakthrough in the global order and allow for a radical reimagining and subsequent institution of

and McPherson—people are losing the land they've identified with their entire lives, if not for generations before; rural pubs as crucial incubators for all levels of identity formation are being turned into pastiched centers of consumption and forced, false identities. There is something radical at the core of someone like Valerie moving from the city to the country. It illustrates the possibility of reimagining modernity as something other than the quasi-dystopia I have just drawn out. It offers a glimpse into how one might subvert the most subversive of all civilizational orders the earth has ever witnessed. Though it too has its shortcomings as a means of escape, it radically imagines a world in which the capitalist yoke is reversible. And it offers the possibility for a better future, when identities are in crisis because we are troubled by their philosophical nature—not because the globalized nature of Western capital has pre-arranged the world for us to think in its terms.

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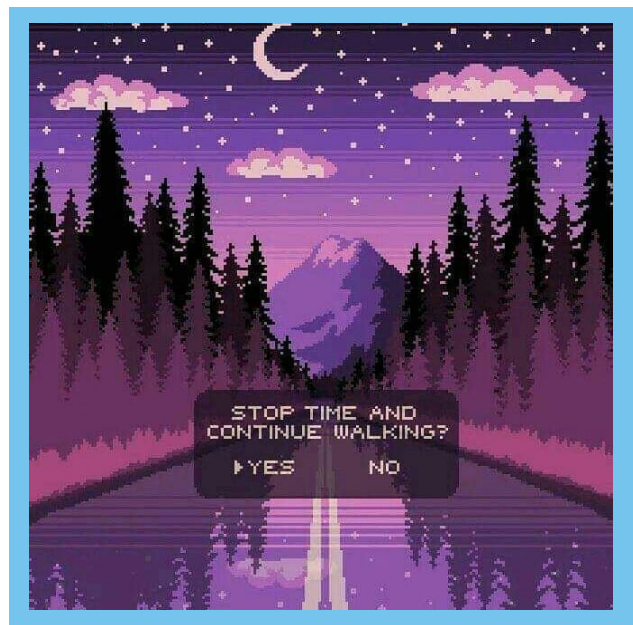
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