

Paying the Devil His Due: Alcoholism and the Faustian Bargain in Claire Kilroy's Novels

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Abstract: In Claire Kilroy's 2014 novel *The Devil I Know*, Tristram St. Lawrence has sold his soul to the devil, an investor who is also his Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor. Rehearsing Goethe's *Faust*, Satan approaches the alcoholic during a liquor-induced blackout to make the lurid deal. My essay re-routes the Faustian bargain towards a provocative suggestion by Kilroy: alcoholism acts as an allegory depicting the excesses of the Celtic Tiger and economic 'recovery' in Ireland. Blackout drinking thus operates as a metaphor for the reckless, overconfident decision-making of the 1990s and early 2000s by Irish leaders.

Kilroy's novel depicts the shame Irish people experienced following the economic crash through an alcoholic waking up from a binge session. In *The Devil I Know*, the trajectory of alcoholism, recovery, and relapse is plotted against the Irish development bubble and burst. I argue that Kilroy's re-purposing of the colonial stereotype of the wild Irish drunk acts as a feminist critique of the hypermasculine, aggressive actions of Irish leaders who sold the nation's sovereignty to structural adjustment programs. Kilroy undermines patriarchal myths within recession rhetoric by troubling the binary of masculinity, substituting chronology with 'drunk time', and offering an ethics of care towards more lasting recovery.

Keywords: alcoholism, Faust, Claire Kilroy, feminist, austerity