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THE IRISH-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN THE NOVELS OF WILLIAM KENNEDY: ETHNICITY AND NARRATIVE METHOD

by

James B. Denigan, Jr.

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May

1990

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VITA

The author, James Bernard Denigan, Jr., is the son of James Bernard Denigan and Mary Margaret (Touhill) Denigan. He was born December 12, 1956, in Chicago, Illinois.

His elementary education was obtained in the Immacolata School in St. Louis, Missouri, and his secondary education was completed in June, 1975, at Christian Brothers College High School, also in St. Louis.

In January, 1976, Mr. Denigan entered St. Louis University where he received the Bachelor of Arts degree *cum laude* with a major in psychology in May, 1979.

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He has worked as an Admissions Counselor for St. Louis University, as the International Admissions Coordinator at Washington University, and as an English teacher at Washington University, St. Louis University, University of Missouri, Illinois Institute of Technology, Loyola University, and St. Louis Community College at Forest Park.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The interrelation of ethnic content and narrative method in the novels of William Kennedy depicts portions of the Irish-American experience. Kennedy, a significant contemporary Irish-American writer and the recipient of the 1984 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, uses character, theme, and style to recreate this ethnic experience in _The Ink Truck_ (1969), _Legs_ (1975), _Billy Phelan's Greatest Game_ (1978), _Ironweed_ (1983), and _Quinn's Book_ (1988). In these novels, which chronicle Irish-American ethnicity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Albany, New York, Kennedy uses characters who are original Irish-American portraits, themes[1] which have roots in Irish-American history and literature (especially the immigrant experience), and a style that fuses the language of journalism and lyricism into his own unique Irish-American voice. By examining Kennedy's novels from these three views, this study shows how Irish-Americans demonstrate "consent relations" (Sollors, 6), or earned assimilation, in a host culture. This process of assimilation and accul-

turation in America is discussed by Werner Sollors in Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture (Oxford, 1986).

This study attempts to demonstrate Sollors's theory of consent relations as it pertains to Irish-American ethnicity in Kennedy's novels. To show this rendering of consent relations, Chapter I discusses the theoretical basis of this dissertation, the ethnic historical and literary content of the Irish-American experience, and the application of the theoretical basis to ethnic content in Kennedy's writing. Chapter II demonstrates how Kennedy depicts Irish-American ethnicity and character, Chapter III discusses his employment of thematic issues prevalent in Irish-American ethnic fiction, and Chapter IV considers Kennedy's distinctive style and its portrayal of the Irish-American ethnic sense of language. The final chapter, Chapter V, considers William Kennedy's place in Irish-American literature and remarks on his contributions to American and international literature.

This dissertation shows how Irish-Americans have earned their American identity while retaining their ethnic traditions; in other words, how they demonstrate "consent relations" in the process of assimilation, how forms of narrative method interact with and support ethnic content in Kennedy's novels, and how Kennedy contributes to the proliferation of Irish-American writing in general. In es-

sence, this study contends that ethnic content interacts with narrative method in Kennedy's novels to lend a unique voice to the Irish-American experience.

Werner Sollors contends that readers of ethnic writing are more interested in content and, therefore, neglect matters of form:

> Readers are most curious about the _content_ of ethnic writing and often look for the survival of cultural baggage. Influenced by older approaches to ethnic survivals, they search for supposedly "authentic" literature and are less concerned with formal aspects, let alone syncretisms and stylistic innovations. (237)

This preference for content characterizes popular as well as critical interest in ethnic heritage; however, as critics often assert, such preference for subject matter at the expense of formal technique can sacrifice literary merit. For example, highly romantic and nostalgic prose such as that characterizing the famine generation of Irish-American writers (see Fanning's Introduction to his _Exiles_), suffers from didacticism, heavy-handed sentimentality, and a preoccupation with maintaining ties to ethnic heritage. This traditional conception of ethnic writing is not entirely unwarranted, and, as Sollors concedes, need not be a reason for denying the literature value. But, he argues, we should take a closer look at ethnic writing, including formal concerns, and its contribution to American literature as a whole:

> Less frequently studied are the innovative aspects of ethnic writing, the invention of ethnic traditions, the

> syncretism and modernism that characterize so many of the forms of ethnic culture in America. (240)

Pointing out that readers tend "to think of the development of American literature as 'growth'...from folk and popular forms to high forms..., from 'parochial' marginality to 'universal' significance" (240-241), Sollors maintains that such outmoded thinking is carried over from "the anti-quarian in us" (240), who seeks an elusive and sentimental concept of the past quite different from actual memory. Such thinking, according to Sollors, is un-American, for America was originally the place for those who rejected "hereditary old-world hierarchies (embodied by the European nobility)" (4). Such a descent-based attitude toward heritage, contends Sollors, is the antithesis of the American embrace of "consent relations" (6), relations which allow a newcomer to America to earn an identity rather than inherit it by blood or title.

Implicit in "consent," or earned relations, is a desire to experiment in an effort to assimilate oneself to the new host culture. This focus on trial-and-error is a significant part of the ethnic individual's--especially the ethnic writer's--task in America. Sollors writes:

> [The] vision of a new people of diverse nativities united in the fair pursuit of happiness marks the course that American ideology has steered between de-scent and consent. It is this conflict which is at the root of the ambiguity surrounding the very terminology of American ethnic interaction. (4-5)

The course of the conflict between consent and descent is

articulated by the ethnic writer genuinely interested in experimenting with formal method to express ethnic content. Sollors's theory calls on writers of ethnic literature to relinquish concerns with "ethnic...exclusivism" (13), where ethnic literature is looked upon as a "process of growth" (241), and, instead, to embrace "syncretism and modernism" (240). He notes that syncretism and modernism eschew interpreting literature as growth from parochial backgrounds to formal complexity and, rather, view ethnic literature as a "modern phenomenon" (245) of "invent[ing]...ethnic traditions" (240) for the sake of fictional representation. Such consent-based thinking offers a "broader and more inclusive definition of ethnic literature" (243) because it expresses the process of ethnic assimilation without resorting to exclusive, descent-based attitudes. In support of this syncretic and modernist approach, Sollors contends that the "forms of American ethnic literature surely deserve to be treated more seriously than if they were humble and involuntary by-products of 'genuine' ethnic themes or unmediated results of a minor author's parentage" (243).

Perhaps more completely than any other ethnic group, Irish-Americans have assimilated themselves to life in America. F. Scott Fitzgerald's ambition for upperclass mobility notwithstanding, Irish-Americans have often shunned pretensions to rights of inheritance. For the most

part, their experience in America, as shown in their history and literature, is one of consent--of assimilation to the prevailing societal norms. And despite nostalgic preferences for the "ould sod," reminiscent of stereotypical characterizations in Irish-American immigrant literature, the Irish-American experience has been dramatized through fiction as a consent-based process of assimilation.

One reason for the progressive development of consent relations is the Irish-American ethnic culture's native facility with the English language. Other reasons include its early interest in politics in a new-found democracy, the relative freedom of religious expression in America (although nativist opposition was not wanting in the United States), and the growth of the newspaper industry in America. Even oppression, an experience with which the Irish had become well-acquainted in Ireland under British rule, encouraged success in America. Bolstered by experience with adversity and persecution in Ireland, the Irish immigrant in America congregated in cohesive, urban neighborhoods, and eventually formed impenetrable blocks of familial, political, and religious loyalty. Such ethnic loyalty encouraged Irish-Americans to challenge the prevailing nativist attitudes and norms and to assimilate themselves (to consent) to the ways of the pluralistic host culture.

The Irish experience in America begins with the migration to American shores. Oppressive British control, poor economic opportunity, famine, and religious persecution for Catholics under Protestant domination forced millions of Irish to abandon their homeland. The largest numbers of Irish immigrants came to the United States, but not all came at once. Marjorie Fallows, in Irish-Americans: Identity and Assimilation, writes that migrations to the U.S., brought about by intolerable living conditions in Ireland, came in waves:

> With few prospects at home, and little hope for improved conditions, the flow of Irish immigration began even before the American Revolution, rose to a flood between 1835 and 1855, and became institutionalized as a way of Irish and American life in the years that followed. By the time immigration quotas were established in the 1920s, the Irish were already regarded as among the early settlers whose Americanization was no longer in serious doubt. (5)

McCaffrey notes that "the Great Famine (1845-1849) did much to institutionalize emigration as a permanent feature of Irish life" (Diaspora, 61).

Upon arrival in the United States, the Irish encountered both failure and success. Thomas Sowell, Lawrence McCaffrey, and William Shannon describe the general conditions of the newly arrived immigrants in America and their adjustment to an urban setting[2]. Originally a rural people, many Irish immigrants faced an immediate and radical change of environment in the cities of the United States. Sowell notes this early immigration experience of

the Irish:

> Much of their early history set the classic pattern of the newcomer to the urban economy and society. When the Irish began arriving in the 1820s, and especially after their massive immigration in the 1840s and 1850s, they began at the bottom of the urban occupational ladder--the men as manual labors, the women as maids. They crowded into the poorest quality housing--far worse than slum housing today--and lived under conditions that readily communicated disease, fire, and such social problems as violence, alcoholism, and crime. (17)

But the Irish rise to influence in America took root quickly. McCaffrey points out that many early immigrants were skilled artisans and tenant farmers (59). And Sowell explains that early Irish success showed itself in politics, "where some achieved influential positions by the middle of the nineteenth century and within a few decades became dominant in big city political 'machines' in Boston, New York, and other metropolitan areas" (18). The Irish facility with the English language contributed to this success in urban politics, and also led the Irish to careers in journalism (a springboard for many Irish-American writers). Also, Irish devotion to Catholicism provided cultural cohesion for their success in America's urban parish neighborhoods, although their Catholicism often marked them for discrimination.

In The American Irish, Shannon discusses the Irish settlement in the cities. He notes that as "America in the nineteenth century moved into the urban age" (29), so too during this time did the great waves of Irish immigrants

hit the shores of America. Shannon explains that limited finances often prevented the Irish from further travel in America once they arrived in large urban ports from their seagoing voyages (27). McCaffrey defines the heavy urban immigration experience as running from approximately 1822 to 1870, although the early twentieth century still experienced a steady flow of immigrants. Albany, the city of Kennedy's birth and residence, was one of the larger settlements of immigrant Irish.

McCaffrey describes the early Irish immigrants as "Pioneers of the American Ghetto" (Diaspora, 3), and his discussion of the Irish rise to prominence and respectability at once confirms the value of the urban experience to Irish-American identity while also cautioning the Irish against success and consequent abandonment of urban roots in America:

> Has their trip from Irish Catholic, urban neighborhoods to suburban melting pots been a journey to achievement and contentment or an excursion from someplace to no place? (10)

The Irish-American experience in an urban setting as a definition of an Irish identity and its assimilation to American culture is a familiar theme in Irish-American literature. Kennedy, who writes of the city's influence, sees Albany and its Irish-American community as a crucible for shaping the identity of his Irish-American characters[3].

Several Irish-American fiction writers, including James T. Farrell, Jimmy Breslin, Tom McHale, Mary Gordon,

and William Kennedy, depict Irish-American family life. Some of them, notably Farrell, who chronicles the dissipating history of Chicago's south side Lonigans, have focused their writing on the repressive domestic life of the Irish-American family. A disparaging view of the Irish-American home life does not tell the whole story, though. Gordon, for example, says the Irish-American home can be a source of refuge, despite the ridicule which keeps family members in check, and Kennedy's novels consider the contribution toward integrated character formation which begins in the Irish-American home. Shaun O'Connell, in "Boggy Ways: Notes on Irish-American Culture," discusses family cohesion as central to the Irish-American preoccupation with assimilation concerns of respectability and prosperity (385).

Politics is also important to Irish-Americans. It has been their road to acceptance and opportunity in America, and has provided for their assimilation to life in America. Shannon points out that the Irish began their development in politics early in America. They were "identified in American politics with the Jeffersonian tradition and, as it emerged, with the Democratic Party" (47). Since the 1790s, the Irish sided with the Jeffersonians in support of revolutionary France. The British as well as American Protestants, who shared many of the British prejudices against the "backward" Irish, opposed the Irish and the

Jeffersonian Democrats (47).

Following the Civil War, some seventy-five years later, the Irish developed their own style in politics, notes Shannon (60-67). The growth of political machines, for example, that of Tammany Hall in New York, characterized the Irish patronage style of politics. The political patronage system enabled the Irish to achieve economic, social, and cultural stability for families and friends. The system eventually spawned political machines headed by clanlike tribal chieftains known as party bosses. Richard Daley of Chicago, James Curley of Boston, John Kelly of New York, and Daniel O'Connell of Albany are some noteworthy leaders.

In addition to politics, religion has played an important role for the assimilation of the Irish in America. Lawrence McCaffrey notes a difference in prefamine and postfamine Irish Catholicism. Prior to the famine, Irish Catholicism had been "loosely structured,...more Irish than Roman in content and style" (Diaspora, 74), but after the famine, and in large part due to the influence of Paul Cullen, Cardinal Archbishop of Dublin, Catholicism was Romanized. From 1852 to 1876, Cullen insisted on "pietism as well as authoritarianism" (75) in the lives of Irish Catholics. In addition to Romanization, notes McCaffrey, Anglicization influenced Irish Catholics; it made them "more law-and-order-conscious and puritanical than Latin

Catholics" (76). McCaffrey concludes that bad memories of the famine, including starvation, a desire for improved living conditions, and "Roman pietism mixed with Anglo-Protestant Evangelicalism and Victorianism" (76) resulted in an Irish personal identity commonly associated with puritanical values. This puritanism, continues McCaffrey, changed the character of Irish immigrants who came to the United States after 1870. They were not the "happy-go-lucky rogues of earlier days" (76); however, the discipline instilled by the disciplinary changes in Irish Catholicism did much to reduce crime among Irish-Americans and to enhance the image of Irish-Americans in the United States (74-76).

Greeley comments on the role of the priest in Irish-American religious life, noting that it would remain quite similar to the one played in Ireland. While Irish migration to America as a result of the Great Famine of 1845-49 brought changes in the Irish-American attitude toward Catholicism[4], the priest retained his pragmatic political and religious influence. As a result, Irish-American Catholics reconstituted their cultural base in the parish neighborhood (132-133). Irish-American writers such as Farrell, Breslin, J. F. Powers, and William Kennedy, portray this parochial tradition as they mine the parish neighborhood for evidence of ethnic content.

Malcolm Cowley, in The Literary Situation, discusses

the origin of ethnic writers in America. The Irish writer began a literary career according to a distinct pattern. This pattern, one of two that Cowley outlines for the emergence of the ethnic writer in America, follows certain steps:

> First we read about members of the the new group as apparently stupid but really shrewd and lovable persons who made funny remarks in broken English.... Other members of the the group would then be presented in angry books, as tragic or pathetic spokesmen for their people. Still later their children would be presented simply as human beings to be valued for themselves. (153)

Citing group consciousness and an extensive history of oppression as a minority, Cowley remarks that Irish immigrant writers represent the clearest instance of this literary pattern. As "literary pioneers," the Irish immigrants harnessed their "racial sorrows" as an oppressed minority and expressed them in fiction (153-154).

Although Irish-American literature emerged in the early nineteenth century, it did not have a voice powerful enough to capture the popular imagination until the 1890s, when journalist Finley Peter Dunne began his Mr. Dooley essay series about Chicago's Irish immigrants. Dooley's homespun social and political philosophy, wrought with a "mixture of innocence and wisdom,...discussed the sorrows of Irish immigrants" (153). Charles Fanning, in his introduction to Dunne's _Mr. Dooley and the Chicago Irish: The Autobiography of a Nineteenth-Century Ethnic Group_ (1987), establishes Dunne's reputation: "The earliest Irish voice

of genius in American literature is that of Finley Peter Dunne" (xiii).

McCaffrey, in "Fictional Images of Irish-America," writes that "[cultural] and economic poverty, a lack of self-esteem, and concentrations on survival, then mobility, delayed an Irish-American literature" (228). However, the Irish-American immigrant writer soon had a chance to express himself in words, and, like Finley Peter Dunne, characteristically got started in journalism:

> Immigrants educated in nationality by Thomas Davis of the _Nation_ and Charles Kickham of _The Irish People_ formed the personality of Irish-America. Starting in the 1870s, John Boyle O'Reilly and his proteges at _The Boston Pilot_ authored a large quantity of prose and poetry....
>
> A truly Irish dimension of American literature began in the 1890s with Finley Peter Dunne's Mr. Dooley essays in _The Chicago Evening Post_.
>
> ("Fictional Images," 228)

This tradition of beginning a literary career with a background in journalism continues among contemporary Irish-American writers, including Breslin, Hamill, Flaherty, and Kennedy.

Charles Fanning's _The Exiles of Erin: Nineteenth-Century Irish-American Fiction_ chronicles the early development of Irish-American fiction as it expressed the Irish immigration experience from approximately 1820 to 1906. Organizing his edition of early Irish-American fiction according to the contributions of pre-Famine, Famine, and third generation Irish-Americans, Fanning notes that each generation's ethnic voice is characterized by its par-

ticular problems with assimilation and acculturation. Reassimilation after the Great Famine is the central event around which the immigrant's experience revolves.

Pre-Famine Irish-Americans were a relatively well-educated group, remarks Fanning in his introduction, "and its writers produced a significant amount of fiction in which satire and parody dominate" (14). But the onset of famine in the 1840s stifled this early voice, and introduced "the grimly serious and didactic fiction" (14) of the Famine generation Irish-Americans, who experienced hardship and persecution upon their arrival in America. This literature offered practical advice to newcomers for their survival in the New World. Fanning notes the change:

> So it was that in a matter of a few years the fictional norm was overturned: from satiric critique of propaganda to propaganda itself, from parody of fictional conventions that have been manipulated for extraliterary purposes to the humorless embrace of those same conventions--sentimental rhetoric, stereotyped characters, simplistic conflicts, and moralizing themes. (14)

The third generation attempted to redeem much of the damage done to Irish-American fiction by this Famine voice, and in so doing joined the developments "on the wider American literary scene after 1875" (15). Despite the persistent efforts of the "weaker" Famine generation writers, also called "the genteel romancers" (15), to churn out didactic works showing newcomers how to survive in America, the "third generation of Irish-American writers joined the enthusiastic debate between advocates of genteel romantic

fiction and those of the 'new realism'" (15). The third generation aimed its fiction at a wider audience, from inhabitants of urban America to those living in the countryside. World War I and Irish-American nationalist concern for the Easter Rising in 1916, as well as immigration quotas for all newcomers, prevented a fourth generation of Irish-American writers from surfacing. Not until 1932, with the publication of James T. Farrell's Young Lonigan: A Boyhood in Chicago Streets, would "the heritage of nineteenth-century Irish-American literary self-scrutiny come alive again" (15-16).

Irish-American fiction of the twentieth century has developed and diversified since the advent of Dunne's Mr. Dooley essays in 1898, a series that ran until World War I. Dunne's chronicle of early Irish ethnic development in Chicago characterized Irish-American identity at the turn of the century, but this identity would soon change and take new forms. For example, F. Scott Fitzgerald would add an aristocratic twist and a desire for respectability to his fiction, and Farrell would chronicle the hardship of the everyday lives of lower and middle-class Irish during the depression.

Robert Rhodes makes a strong case for including F. Scott Fitzgerald in the Irish-American literary canon despite his predilection for writing about the upper classes. Although William Shannon remarks that

Fitzgerald's "conquest of national fame was so swift and complete that he never became identified in the public mind as Irish at all" (233), Rhodes insists upon Fitzgerald's Irishness in "F. Scott Fitzgerald: 'All My Fathers'"; he argues that Fitzgerald's interest in the aristocracy is typical of the common Irish claim to descendancy from kings (in Casey and Rhodes, 33-34). Fitzgerald's problems with social class as well as his constantly recurring theme of relationships between fathers and sons (and those relationships which imitate them) are also part of Rhodes's defense of Fitzgerald's Irishness.

As Fanning, Shannon, and others have remarked, much of James T. Farrell's prolific output chronicles the lives of early twentieth-century Irish-Americans living on Chicago's south side. Farrell's most famous Irish-American character, Studs Lonigan, embodies the brutal, provincial, and insular nature of the parochial, ghetto life of the working class Irish in Chicago. In _Studs Lonigan_: _A Trilogy_ (1935), Farrell chronicles the dissipated life of Studs, including his boyhood, young manhood, and late twenties. Studs and his family and friends live the difficult lives of second and third generation Irish-Americans establishing themselves in depression-era America and pursuing respectability through familial, political, and religious avenues.

Edwin O'Connor's treatise on Boston Irish politics, _The Last Hurrah_ (1956), dramatizes the downfall of machine

politics in that city. Frank Skeffington, O'Connor's main character, and the last of the machine bosses, embodies old style party politics as it faces the advent of new image politics, represented by young Charles Kinsella. David Dillon, in "Priests and Politicians: The Fiction of Edwin O'Connor," summarizes the work of O'Connor in comparison with that of other major Irish-American writers of this century:

> His work lacks the bleakness and harshness of Farrell's or the cynicism of O'Hara's. The brutalities of the ghetto are left behind along with most of the sentimental cliches. He is neither a satirist nor an apologist but a compassionate observer of a process.
> (in Casey and Rhodes, 85)

Some issues in Irish-American literature typify Irish-American ethnicity, and contribute to the general stock of themes in American literature. For example, James Liddy, in "The Double Vision of Irish-American Fiction," cites Mary McCarthy's autobiographical _Memories of a Catholic Girlhood_ (1957) as a fine source for such themes as the "mendacity of the family members, the power of tale telling, romanticism that often hides personal weakness, religious scruples, confessional attitudes, and alcoholism" (7). And Betty Smith's perceptive and thorough views of the Irish-American family in _A Tree Grows in Brooklyn_ (1947) also develops themes depicting the richness and complexity of Irish-American home life.

J. F. Powers's satires of Irish Catholicism in America in _Prince of Darkness and Other Stories_ (1947) include

telling perceptions of worldly parish priests, and the ribald humor and absurdity of J. P. Donleavy's The Ginger Man (1965) result from the antics of "an Irish-American, one Sebastian Balfe Dangerfield, who--like Donleavy--has come to study at Trinity College, Dublin, after World War II, on the G.I. Bill of Rights" (Norstedt, 116). Dangerfield is "the Irish-American who has gone back to the 'ould sod' with the romantic notion of finding his roots and restoring his spiritual values" (120). Both Powers and Donleavy have enhanced the reputation of Irish-American literature with their work. And despite the irreverence and transparent frustration with their own Irish-American heritages, Jimmy Breslin, Pete Hamill, and Joe Flaherty have articulated many stereotypical, but perhaps accurate, themes of Irish-American fiction (Casey, 153-172), including issues of the family, politics, and religion.

Finally, in a call for continued work among writers of Irish-American fiction, Mary Gordon, in"'I Can't Stand Your Books': A Writer Goes Home," laments the paucity of Irish-American literature, especially when she considers its descendence from a great tradition:

> I have been for some time puzzled, unable to explain why the country of bards...of Yeats and Joyce,...of O'Casey and Synge, of O'Connor and O'Faolain produced so little in its American literary branch. (37)

Gordon does not end with a lament, though. She lists some major Irish-American writers who should be included in a contemporary course on Irish-American literature:

> You could begin...with O'Neill and Fitzgerald.... You could then go to James T. Farrell, whose Studs Lonigan recorded...the experience of the Chicago Irish in the 1920's and 30's. You would have to jump, then, to J. F. Powers's brilliant tales of 50's priests. Then you could go on to William Alfred's "Hogan's Goat," to Elizabeth Cullinan, to Maureen Howard and William Kennedy. After that, there would be nowhere to go. (37)

So far this chapter has outlined some important ideas and events in Irish-American history and literature. This sketch provides a context for the study of Irish-American ethnic content in the novels of William Kennedy. Ethnic content comprises only half of the approach to the Irish-American experience in Kennedy's novels, though. Narrative method completes the approach. The final section of this introductory chapter discusses the application of Sollors's theory of consent relations to Irish-American ethnic content in Kennedy's writing. Kennedy's use of character, theme, and style demonstrates that the Irish-Americans have assimilated themselves to the New World, and have, in many respects, recreated that world in their own image as an ethnic group. This re-creation supports Sollors's theory of consent relations, and Kennedy displays this theory by syncretizing narrative form with ethnic content. Kennedy's ability to syncretize authentic ethnic content with elements of narrative form distinguishes his writing from stereotypical Irish-American literature.

Seeking ways to syncretize ethnic content with literary form opens new vistas for the study of Irish-

American literature. Since this syncretism is not natural, it must be created; perhaps the first step in accomplishing this task is to reconsider ethnic content rather than to disparage it. Sollors gets it right:

> Literary forms are not organically connected with ethnic groups; ethnicity and modernism form a false set of opposites; and the very desire to transcend ethnicity may lead writers back into the most familiar territory of ethnogenesis and typology. (258)

Ethnic writers, then, must forge new links between ethnic content and literary form as they create literature. To this end, Kennedy simultaneously interweaves authentic ethnic content with traditional narrative forms, "syncretizing" (or re-inventing) the Irish-American ethnic experience in his novels through the development of character, theme, and style. His originality of interpretation and refusal to employ stereotypical conceptions of ethnicity without more purpose than appealing only to ethnic exclusivism breaks new ground in Irish-American fiction writing. Thus, Kennedy accurately expresses an ethnic group's realistic assimilation to a new environment while contributing his unique voice to ethnic literature.

Chapter II discusses Kennedy's characters and how they embody the Irish-American ethnic experience. In his characterization, Kennedy shows the process of adjustment for newly arrived and already established immigrants and the subsequent events and behavior which demonstrate consent to life in the New World. For example, <u>Legs</u>

dramatizes the pioneering spirit of its protagonist, Jack "Legs" Diamond. Many other Kennedy characters also have "pioneering" qualities which assist their assimilation in the New World. Bailey, of The Ink Truck, is tenacious; Francis Phelan, of Ironweed, is tough and persistent; Billy Phelan is nimble witted and street-smart; and Daniel Quinn, of Quinn's Book, is a self-made man intensely committed to his career as a Civil War correspondent. In general, all of Kennedy's characters endure with a will to survive at all costs.

While these and other qualities of ethnic character development may not be limited to Irish-American ethnicity, they are deployed by Kennedy with originality and a unique perspective on the assimilation of Irish-Americans. James Liddy's extensive comments on this unique vision, in Chapter II, notes that Irish-Americans have managed to keep their distinct ethnic identity without maintaining "visible ties" (6) to the old country. Many critics, including Johann Norstedt, Daniel St. Albin Greene, Loxley Nichols, Coilin Owens, Mary Gordon, and others comment on Irish-American character development in Chapter II; they shed light on Kennedy's ability to syncretize ethnic content with characterization in demonstration of Sollors's theory of consent relations.

Chapter III discusses the immigrant journey ethnic experience, the importance of place or homeland, as well as

the influence and interaction of family, politics, and religion. These themes reflect Kennedy's concern with the attitudes and patterns of Albany's North End Irish community. Kennedy's ethnic background, the historical reality in which his novels are set, is used as a touchstone for interpreting thematic patterns of Irish-American social and cultural experience. Thus, Kennedy remakes the Irish-American experience into the American experience--into the New World founded on immigration and developed by opportunity. A writer who thinks beyond mere static and insular trends of ethnic exclusivism in literature, Kennedy does more than rehash time-worn themes of Irish-American ethnicity; he makes them serve as original content for his narrative form.

Several critics, in addition to Sollors, discuss the integration of ethnic content and theme. William Shannon and Barry O'Connell, for example, write about early thematic influences on ethnic writing in America, including the concern with the "cost of leaving" (O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., 70). Coilin Owens, in "The Stage Irishman Transported," notes that certain themes, whether or not warranted by a fair assessment of Irish ethnicity, have been introduced to Irish-American literature. They are "the figure of the alienated artist, the tall tale, the frontier quest, [and] local colorism" (in Touhill, Varieties, 62). Many other ethnic themes have been ex-

amined by critics of Irish-American literature, including silence and self-protection (Gordon, 36-37) and the relations between fathers and sons (Browne, 73; Rhodes, 32). Kay Bonnetti, David Dillon, and Edward Reilly are just some of the other critics who support a discussion of thematic issues in Kennedy's writing.

Ethnicity and style, the topic of Chapter IV, discusses the way Kennedy uses language. It focuses on his ability to fashion words into what Werner Sollors calls "generational rhetoric" (211)--language that binds an ethnic group in "cohesive kinship" (210). This sense of kinship, and a related concept called "fresh contact" (Mannheim, 293) or coming of age, is conveyed in Kennedy's journalistic and lyrical styles. These two seemingly contradictory modes of literal expression fuse in Kennedy's writing to create his unique and distinctively Irish-American voice. An examination of each style, including the use of dialect writing, the notion of the "lyrical 'I'," (Freedman, 191), and the employment of other literary techniques--stream-of-consciousness prose is an example--convey some of the qualities of Kennedy's unique Irish-American voice. Sollors and other critics, including Charles Fanning, Ralph Freedman, Joseph Browne, Robert Towers, and Lawrence McCaffrey, substantiate the discussion in Chapter IV on ethnicity and style. By rendering ethnic content through linguistic style, Kennedy affords readers

of ethnic writing, whether or not of Irish-American heritage, to become vicarious consenters to the historical and literary experience which underlies an ethnic group's identity. McCaffrey makes the point:

> [The] history of Irish-Americans [is] an ethnic success story [and not]...a warning to other groups that they should be wary of surrendering ethnicity for the sake of assimilation. (Diaspora, 10)

Chapter I Notes

[1]For the most part, theme is used in a topical sense in this dissertation. In this manner, it concerns the "central or dominating idea in a literary work" (see C. Hugh Holman, in A Handbook to Literature, 4th ed., Indianapolis: ITT Bobbs-Merrill, 1985, p. 443). For example, such a topic- or subject-oriented interpretation of theme would include the influence and interaction of family, religion, and politics in the Irish-American experience. It may also include the immigrant journey and related concepts of alienation, protective silence, and concern for personal safety. The sense of place as well as father-son relations also fall within a more topical context of theme.

[2]See Lawrence McCaffrey's The Irish Diaspora in America (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976), Thomas Sowell's Ethnic America: A History (New York: Basic Books, 1981), and William V. Shannon's The American Irish (New York: Macmillan, 1966) for accounts of early Irish experience in America.

[3]Setting (or place) as theme is one of the topics developed in Chapter III ("Ethnicity and Theme") of this dissertation because Kennedy situates his novels in his native Albany and because Albany plays an integral role in his fiction in general.

[4]Emmet Larkin, in "The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75," American Historical Review (77, June, 1972), pp. 625-52, argues that, among several factors, the Great Famine had much influence in bringing about a resurgence in devotion to the Catholic faith among the Irish. In turn, their revised piety had residual effects among Irish-American Catholics.

CHAPTER II

ETHNICITY AND CHARACTERIZATION

William Kennedy portrays Irish-American characters whose ethnic traits identify them with their Irish heritage yet also demonstrate their consent to the American way of life. Through his characters' dialogue and actions as well as in his narration, Kennedy reconstructs the Irish-American experience in Albany during the 1930s depression era in _Legs_, _Billy Phelan's Greatest Game_, and _Ironweed_; during the late nineteenth century Civil War era in _Quinn's Book_; and during the 1960s in _The Ink Truck_ (this novel is probably set in Albany although the author does not actually mention the city). An examination of individual and social aspects of Irish-American ethnic behavior in Kennedy's characters shows how Irish-Americans consent to a broader spectrum of American life and literature.

Certain fictional representations of themes in the Irish-American life experience influence the development of Kennedy's ethnic characterizations. Immigration and assimilation to life in America comprise much of the experience which forms their characters, and nearly all of

Kennedy's characters endure prejudice, intimidation, and oppression. Whether the oppression originates with political, religious, or institutional prejudice in America, with the sordid conditions of urban life, or with individual ignorance, Kennedy's characters share a heritage of hardship and endurance. As a result of this oppression, many of Kennedy's characters are social outcasts, silent and self-protecting individuals, or sufferers of personal guilt. Although these qualities are not limited to Irish-American ethnicity, they do figure prominently in Kennedy's individual Irish-American characters, thus serving to identify them with these qualities commonly associated with immigrants to America. Kennedy's literary record of the Irish-American immigrant experience in the United States assists in his definition of Irish-American characters. Despite the difficulties they have endured, Kennedy's individual Irish-American characters somehow manage to triumph over adversity and to consent to life in the New World; they do so with integrity, loyalty, and intelligence.

As a group, Kennedy's Irish-American characters often demonstrate consent behavior frequently attributed to their ethnic culture, and they show the influence of this behavior upon their everyday lives. For example, families strive for social respectability in a critical environment dominated by nativist Americans, and they remain together in cohesive clans in order to protect each other and to help each other

survive. Often from rural backgrounds in Ireland, Kennedy's Irish-American families tend to congregate in ghettoes (in Albany, around the North End), to adhere to clan and tribal loyalties dominant in specific wards and parishes, and to revere matriarchs and patriarchs. These loyalties to family and community underlie their efforts to adjust to life in America, and serve to demonstrate the commitment fundamental to consent relations in a host culture.

Religion also plays a significant role in the social life of Kennedy's Irish-Americans, and has provided support for their adjustment and assimilation to the New World. Through the parish system as well as their own strict observance of Church doctrine, the Irish in America were able to commence and continue the process of consent. Although their reliance on religion may at times seem superstitious, perhaps stemming from remnants of Celtic worship, it is also instilled with strict adherence to discipline and respect for authority associated with Anglicization and Romanization. These qualities, upon which McCaffrey elaborates (Diaspora, 74-76), rely heavily upon the power of strong faith and occasionally on sentimental devotion. Guilt and repression also surface among the Catholics in Kennedy's novels. As a result, their religious faith is further intensified; indeed, devout religious faith is part of their cultural tradition, nationality, and even psychology. As discussed in Chapter I, the Irish-American sense of

religious devotion to the Catholic faith has historical roots in the Romanization of the Irish Catholicism, and has become what McCaffrey calls the "essential feature of Irish-America" ("Fictional Images," 235); it influences consent relations in their lives by establishing a viable means for assimilation in America.

As discussed later in this chapter, politics has much in common with religion in the lives of Irish-Americans, and the mixture of the two issues influences the social behavior of Kennedy's Irish-American characters. The son of an Irishman employed by the Albany Democratic political machine of Dan O'Connell, Kennedy invests an intimate knowledge of Albany politics in his Irish-American characters. His political characters arise from the parish system, are faithful to a fault, swear allegiance to the Democratic party, remain avowed adherents of the patronage system, and are convinced that politics, like religion, underlies the structure of their lives, including the economic aspect of it.

Occupation plays a large part in Kennedy's portrayal of the Irish-American social experience in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Kennedy's Irish-American characters are strikers, labor organizers, railroad and canal builders, factory workers, baseball players and boxers, boatmen, policemen, soldiers, horsemen, domestics, and housewives. Some of his characters begin the long, slow

climb to social respectability and consent as politicians, journalists, writers, lawyers, and priests. A few are successful in business, too. Whether in the performance of their jobs or just as traits of personality which surface despite occupation, many of Kennedy's characters can demonstrate behavior which is provincial, parochial, conformist, and mediocre; however, they can also behave adventurously, intelligently, and compassionately.

Action affects the development of character, and a character subjected to the familial, religious, and political influences of a pervasive ethnic environment may behave in ways which demonstrate a traditional as well as a contemporary process of assimilation to the host environment. For example, an Irish-American, whose immediate ancestors may have emerged from the social isolation or economic deprivation of an homogeneous and ancient island culture, might perform in a novel in a predictable manner. For example, Francis Phelan is portrayed as a reborn character attempting to assimilate to the consent-oriented fabric of American life in early twentieth-century America. This blending of the immigrant and veteran dilemma of adjustment with the narrative form of character development accomplishes what Sollors calls a syncretic form of literary expression characteristic of consent-based relations in America (237). An examination of individual and social aspects of characterization and ethnicity in each of Kennedy's five novels

demonstrates the consent of veteran Irish-Americans as well as recently arrived Irish immigrants to a new life in America.

With the possible exception of Daniel Quinn, Kennedy's protagonists are social misfits; they are more anti-heroic than heroic. Although they are the central characters of Kennedy's novels, through whom particular actions are shown and in whom certain moral qualities are developed, they are anti-heroic. Their anti-heroic qualities do not disparage the integrity of Kennedy's characters, though. If anything, the qualities ennoble the characters by focusing on their own unique visions and personalities in an alien environment; they affirm a personal sense of morality and commitment to adjustment in a world which seems to grow progressively immoral. As a result, Kennedy's protagonists can be picaresque; as such they are rich, complex, and fully human, qualities which assist in their adjustment and assimilation.

Some individual personality traits discussed by Andrew Greeley, Mary Gordon and others, and which are also examined in this chapter, offer insight into Kennedy's Irish-American characters. They include a tendency toward nostalgic reflection, a duality of personality which includes a mixture of introspection and boisterous conviviality, strong feelings of personal guilt for sins which may or may not be acknowledged to be such by society, a self-prescribed mes-

sianic sense of mission in life, a belief in superstition, and a need to ridicule self and others. Kennedy's Irish-American characters also have a gift for succinct idiomatic expression and lively conversation, a love of company, a child-like and perhaps adolescent enthusiasm, and a keen understanding of emotional complexity. While these qualities of character are by no means limited to the Irish-American personality, they are used as qualities of character development by Kennedy to develop his portrayal of Irish-American ethnicity in general.

As a young boy, Bailey, the protagonist of Kennedy's first novel, The Ink Truck (1969), "wanted to be Jesus" (8); however, he forsakes this deluded desire in favor of more realistic goals. He reasons that if he "couldn't save people, redeem their spirit" (8), then he could at least "make music for them, trying to be a minstrel of [his] time" (8). Bailey becomes, then, the self-appointed spokesman, a "prophet in America" (269), whose voice in support of the newspaper guild harangues the oppressive management of the newspaper for which he writes. An anti-hero destined to voice the injustice of the paper's operations, Bailey vows to continue his strike until the treatment of employees is acceptable. He feels the conciliatory blow to the paper will come when he can spill the ink from a truck scheduled to make a delivery to the newspaper during the strike.

Bailey is a newspaper columnist and a loyal guild mem-

ber. Although a man of significant intellectual skill, he maintains his proletarian sympathies, especially respect for the laborer. His own physical stature is sturdy and square; his personality is forthright, bawdy, and occasionally outrageous. In fact, Bailey's character recalls that of J.P. Donleavy's Irish-American protagonist, Sebastian Balfe Dangerfield, in The Ginger Man (Sheppard, 79). Both Bailey and Sebastian are dissolute Irish-American heroes, trying to find a utopian setting for their romantic conceptions of life. Both are adolescent, and their flights of philosophical fancy are the result of a desultory search for a perfect world. Both characters are formed by a naive but well-meaning effort to reconcile a perfect and ideal world with a real and unfair one. The result is ill-fated, but the attempt to achieve such a reconciliation is entertaining. Johann Norstedt, in "Irishmen and Irish-Americans in the Fiction of J.P. Donleavy," describes Donleavy's one-sided view of Irish-Americans in a manner which parallels Kennedy's depiction of them, especially Bailey, in The Ink Truck:

> The one-sidedness is necessary for Donleavy to achieve his comic effects--the slapstick people and situations which are the novel's greatest strengths, with Sebastian, the magnificent Irish-American rogue, being the crowning touch. Donleavy has found the perfect type of...human being for an entertaining comic confrontation. (in Casey and Rhodes, 121)

However, Kennedy's creation of a comic Irish-American personality in Bailey, the rebellious and seemingly dissolute

protagonist, differs in significant ways from Donleavy's characterization of Sebastian. Kennedy's Bailey has a singleminded, almost religious devotion to a cause--the strike. In this sense, he is committed to the process of consent relations, for he desires to make something better of his environment from the injustice which exists in it. Unlike Sebastian, who desires to escape responsibility, Bailey engages it. Bailey is a principled, if obsessive, man trying to affect constructive changes in his world. His responsible attitude toward earning those changes demonstrates how he adjusts to life. Sebastian, on the other hand, is unwilling to accept responsibility and its inherent process of consent; his unbridled drinking sprees and sexual escapades as well as his lack of commitment toward his academic studies undermine his sense of purpose in life as well as the effort needed to earn the right to consent.

Daniel St. Albin Greene, in "There's Nobility in a Born Loser in Mr. Kennedy's Comic 'Ink Truck'," attests to the endurance, tenacity, and bravado of Kennedy's principled Irish-American anti-hero:

> Bailey is a loser of heroic dimensions. He is the irrational idealism of the Man of La Mancha, the life style of Jimmy Breslin, the indomitable bellicosity of a guerilla fighter. An eloquent wild man of large intellect and larger spleen, he is the most intransigent of a tiny knot of diehard strikers, hapless remnants of a once-cocky Newspaper Guild local that walked out on a paper a year ago. (21)

Bailey, the quixotic Irish-American anti-hero, remains

steadfastly devoted to the strike. One of his partners in the cause, Rosenthal, upon contemplating the inevitable demise of the protest, says of Bailey's admirable devotion to it:

> Yet Bailey did not plan to die. He behaved as if revolution were possible and he talked like a madman. Bailey believed in possibility. Not dead yet, Bailey said. And he could smell death, an Irish trick. It came from eating so many rotten potatoes for hundreds of years. The stink of decay was in their nostrils at birth.... Mystic Irish. (The Ink Truck, 13-14)

Even Bailey's home reveals his devoted Irish-American character. Kennedy writes of Rosenthal's visit to the Bailey apartment:

> On [a] wall Rosenthal recognized bits of Bailey's taste: a magazine cartoon sketch by Ronald Searle of a decapitated James Joyce climbing down the rocks beside the Martello Tower with his eyepatched head under his left arm, clutching his ashplant with his right hand; and above him a screaming hawk flying off with a copy of Ulysses in its claws. Beside the sketch was a framed Playbill from the Abbey Theatre....
>
> "So he's a professional Irisher at home, is he?" Rosenthal said to Grace [Bailey's wife]. "He probably kissed the Blarney Stone." (17-18)

Throughout The Ink Truck both overt and subtle references to Bailey's ethnic character surface. During one of his surrealistic dream voyages into the past, Bailey stumbles into a shanty town where early Irish immigrants to America had settled and then commenced building the canals which flowed west from Albany. Bailey's dream is full of superstition and mythical elements, including "pooka" (mythical Celtic spirits). References to cholera, which plagued Irish immigrants, to the famine, to Joyce, and to

the poetry of Yeats are sprinkled throughout this novel about an enigmatic yet tenacious Irish-American warrior. Loxley Nichols notes in "William Kennedy Comes of Age" that The Ink Truck introduces the reader to many "trademark" elements of Kennedy's writing, including a city scene similar to Albany's, Irish-American characters and their superstitions, and a preoccupation with "man as a social being, inclined to congregate in coffeehouses and taverns" (46).

The individual personalities of Kennedy's characters become increasingly complex with the advent of each novel to succeed The Ink Truck. As Kennedy sharpens his skills as a literary artist, he begins to refine his sense of ethnic characterization and the capacity it demonstrates for adjustment to a host culture replete with challenges and adversity. This refinement improves by situating characters in a specific locale--in particular, Albany. As discussed in Chapter III, specifying a place in which to develop his Irish-American characters allows Kennedy the artistic freedom to demonstrate the assimilation, or consent relations, of ethnic characters to the host environment. Legs Diamond's story is an example.

Jack "Legs" Diamond (born John T. Nolan) is the Irish-American protagonist of Kennedy's second novel, Legs. To the narrator of Legs, Irish-American lawyer Marcus Gorman, Diamond is the quintessential Irishman in the New

World. Diamond embodies Sollors's idea of consent relations in ethnic writing in America: the notorious Irish-American gangster is both a myth and a real life individual who fulfills his right of consent by earning his way--"shaping [his] dream that [he] could shoot [his] way" (13)--in a land of opportunity. Although Diamond's illegal activity may suggest that he is an outsider, it does not negate the determination to succeed by earning one's way, which is part of consent relations. Narrator Gorman says of Diamond:

> I had come to see Jack as not merely the dude of all gangsters, the most active brain in the New York underworld, but as one of the truly new American Irishmen of his day; Horatio Alger out of Finn McCool and Jesse James, shaping the dream that you could grow up in America and shoot your way to glory and riches. (13)

Diamond embodies the American dream of personal success, of moving from "rags-to-riches" and making up the rules along the way. He exudes the pioneering spirit of the newly arrived immigrant determined to improve his lot in the world.

Other Irish-American ethnic traits of Jack's individual personality surface in _Legs_. He is a devout and disciplined, even sentimental, Catholic who makes excessive charitable contributions to the Church (in one instance, he donates an organ), and is married to "an Irish Catholic girl brought up to respect grace and transubstantiation" (179). His fondness for singing and dancing is legendary, and he can electrify an audience with sparkling conversa-

tion. His adolescent charm endears him to both men and women (especially nuns). These qualities, along with the strong undercurrent of his religious faith, demonstrate his excitement for life and living, and contribute to his desire to engage in and assimilate to life in the New World completely.

Similar to the obsessive and bawdy Bailey, "the mystical Legs" (243) has a sense of mission in life, and he sets about to accomplish it despite legal or public disapproval. "[A]nother Albany Irishman...riding into eternity" (256), Legs derives much of his motivation from his religious devotion. Despite his uncivil and unchristian behavior as a gangster, Legs maintains characteristic devotion to the Church. Perhaps some of this devotion is motivated by guilt, particularly for realizing that he actually disobeys the Church's assumptions about behaving in an acceptable manner. Marcus Gorman, in a reflection on his own father and his own religious heritage, remarks about Jack's complex sense of motivation:

> Remembering him [Gorman's father],...when I was questioning my own irrational reading of Aquinas long after I'd lost my faith, I knew all three of us were hounded by religious confusion: Jack out of St. Anne's, both my father and I out of Sacred Heart, products all of the ecclesiastical Irish sweat glands, obeisant before the void, trying to discover something. (257)

Kennedy captures the ambivalence of Legs's personality. Mixing the two sides of the gangster's life, the good-natured, fun-loving Irishman and the sinister, cruel

gangster, he renders a dual nature (see James Liddy's "The Double Vision of Irish-American Fiction") which both fascinates and disgusts. For Legs, the result is a life filled with personality traits that yield legend and myth.

James Liddy, in "The Double Vision of Irish-American Fiction," comments on the dual nature of character in twentieth-century Irish-American fiction and on other ethnic traits which contribute to the Irish-American personality. For example, Liddy notes that Irish-American fiction, which can be relatively dramatic and accessible, tends to concentrate on divisions of loyalty among the Irish in America. Liddy says that a "separate background can emerge which is distinct in its ethnicity, yet without visible ties to the Irish of Ireland" (6)--a concept central to Sollors's claims about the operation of consent relations among immigrants to America. The accessible drama relies on time-honored adherence to basic loyalties, including that of family, while simultaneously playing upon the complexities of ethnic identity in an unfamiliar environment. This separate nature, both from the Irish experience in Ireland and from their immigrant experience in America, characterizes much of the duality in the Irish-American personality, especially as it is expressed in its ethnic literature.

Character traits of Irish-Americans which contribute to Liddy's concept of a double vision, and some of which

characterize Legs, are "mendacity in the family members, the power of tale telling, romanticism that often hides personal weakness, religious scruples, confessional attitudes, and alcoholism" (7). Numerous examples of these Irish-American character traits which Liddy mentions are weaved throughout Legs as Kennedy draws the portrait of his protagonist.

One of the important "models from Irish and American culture that [merges] in the self of the consciously Irish American" (Liddy, 7) characterizes Kennedy's assessment of Legs: "Horatio Alger out of Finn McCool and Jesse James" (Legs, 13). The Horatio Alger myth underscores Sollors's consent-based theory of ethnic assimilation by emphasizing that immigrants can earn their way in a land of opportunity if only they persist and work hard. For example, Irish immigrants may be seen moving from a state of poverty to a position of prominence within the community as well as the nation. For Legs, his means of persisting, albeit illegal, moved him upward on the scale of success and national prominence. In his novel, Kennedy uses Legs's ethnic character traits in conjunction with narrative method to create fiction which demonstrates consent relations in ethnic writing. To illustrate this point, Mark Busby notes that narrator Gorman "sees Diamond as an American icon" (390)--both hero and villain. This duality of positive and negative characterization shows how Diamond's ethnic

character development is consistent with the American idea of earning success--Americans often overlook conflicting, even vile, behavior if it is sufficiently heroic or financially lucrative. In addition, this duality of Irish-American ethnic characterization establishes Kennedy's narrative form for the ethnic content of Irish-American literature. Gerald Howard, Kennedy's editor at Viking, says that Kennedy's "Irishness is a real key to ...what he is thinking" (Moritz, ed., 224). The article notes that Kennedy wrote the story of Legs Diamond

> because [Legs] was a fascinating personification of the moral ambiguity of the American ideal of "success," glamorized by a press that superficially reviled him, raised to "a mythic dimension" in the popular romantic imagination, and viewed by Kennedy himself as a "venal man of integrity." (225)

The popular romantic characterization of Legs Diamond is consistent with the literary stereotype of the Irish-American character. The stereotype, note Joseph Browne, Coilin Owens, and Shaun O'Connell, depicts the Irishman as a storyteller, showman, romantic, and dreamer. But this stereotype is also consistent with the American dream of earning one's way in a consent-based culture: to an extent one convey the image or type of his ethnic heritage in order to be identified with it and to be an example of its success. (Indeed, two highly popular, late twentieth-century United States presidents have embodied this romantic stereotype of the Irish-American.) William Kennedy's _Legs_ preserves much of the stereotypical and romantic

literary image, and in so doing conveys an Irish-American heritage consistent with the public's concept of Diamond's Irish-American image.

Two Irish-American characters are central to the plot of _Billy Phelan's Greatest Game_: Billy Phelan, the novel's protagonist, and Martin Daugherty, the narrator of Billy's tale. Both men exhibit individual Irish-American ethnic traits as how they adjust to the American way of life. Billy Phelan is a small-time gambler, bowler, pool hustler, and card player. He hails from Albany's Irish-American working-class enclave, the North End. Although a street-smart, wise-cracking punk with a gift for the one-liner, he maintains social scruples and a personal sense of moral integrity as the true distinctions of his Irish-American heritage. He plays life according to its own realistic rules, yet operates from innate feelings of fairness toward others. His philosophy: I pay if you win; you pay if I win. He is provincial and nervous, and is given to a nearly self-damaging obligation to the code of silence. He makes an effort to stay out of other people's business.

Upon Billy's personal commitment to loyalty rests his character development as well as the novel's plot: he refuses to intercede on behalf of a kidnapping victim's powerful Irish-American family because that would betray someone's confidence in him. Consequently, he is silenced and ostracized by Albany's citizens, themselves controlled

by an all-pervasive Democratic political machine overseen by boss Patsy McCall, whose son, Charlie, is the kidnapping victim (and a friend of Billy). Martin Daugherty, columnist for the Albany newspaper and a failed novelist, functions in the novel as a "go-between" for the McCall family. He reluctantly mediates the demands of the McCalls with Billy's own personal requirements for integrity, including a refusal to rat on someone else for any reason.

Billy's Irish-American character is partially established by frequent reference to and portrayal of his family life in North Albany. A fully mature adult, Billy still lives at home, and is the eldest son of a single mother, Annie Phelan. His father, Francis Phelan (the hero of the next novel in the Albany series, Ironweed), long ago abandoned the family for a life on the road.

Like many heroes in Irish-American fiction, Billy can be a type: he is a rowdy, nighttime gambler with a taste for drink and a gift for gab. He is unemployed, and prefers to make quick, though unreliable, money as a gambler. The absence of his father leaves him without a clear sense of direction in life and retards his proper social development. In many respects, Billy's behavior is adolescent, and his reluctance to accept social responsibility manifests itself in an almost neurotic preoccupation with illegal play, with being a gamester.

Billy is not completely lacking in socially redeeming

qualities, though. He adheres to his own high standards of social and personal responsibility: he suffers the ridicule, silence, and ostracization of others in order to maintain his (and their) freedom at the hands of the pernicious McCall machine. An alienated individualist, he eventually draws the attention of the multitude through the media: Albany's quasi-philosophical newspaper columnist, Martin Daugherty, sensing Billy's devotion to the more principled cause of personal integrity, writes a vindicating appraisal of Billy's character near the end of the novel.

Duplicity and a respect for the code of silence, traits which Mary Gordon, in "'I Can't Stand Your Books': A Writer Goes Home," maintains are rooted in the persecution experience of the Irish by the British, become operating principles for the development of character in Billy Phelan (37). These complex principles, which can affect the process of assimilation negatively or positively, depending upon the situation in which they are used, do affect both Billy Phelan and Martin Daugherty. In the following passage, Daugherty emphasizes their negative results:

> Martin hadn't told Billy that his father was back in town. Duplicity and the code of silence. Who was honored by this? What higher morality was Martin preserving by keeping Billy ignorant of a fact so potentially significant to him? We are all in a conspiracy against the next man.... Duplicity at every turn.... Oh yes, Martin Daugherty you are one duplicitous son of a bitch. (Billy Phelan, 106-107)

Martin Daugherty is another type of Irish-American character. Unlike the unskilled, working-class, shanty Irishman Billy Phelan, Martin is a complex character from a lace-curtain Irish-American background. Similar to Billy, however, he is preoccupied with the father-son relationship. He allows the emotional problems he has with his father, playwright Edward Daugherty, to hinder his own personal and artistic development. Although Martin finds temporary relief in creative writing, his unresolved conflicts with his famous father block his creative efforts and stifle the personal relationships he tries to maintain with his wife and children.

As a husband, father, and journalist, Martin exhibits character traits often associated with Irish-American paternal figures. His relationship with his wife is strained and repressive as is his relationship with his son, who wants to become a priest. Martin is skeptical of priests and the priesthood, so he attempts on several occasions to thwart his son's desire. As a journalist and aspiring novelist, Martin follows in the Irish-American tradition of prefacing a literary career with training in journalism. Near the end of the novel, in a gesture of defiance against the pervasive Irish Democratic machine, Daugherty contemplates the difficulty being an Irishman of principle in Albany:

> The condition of being a powerless Albany Irishman ate holes in his forbearance. Piss-ant martyr to the rapine culture, to the hypocritical handshakers, the

> priest suckups, the nigger-hating cops, the lace-curtain Grundys and the cut-glass banker-thieves who marked his lousy city. Are you from Albany? Yes. How can you stand it? I was there once and it's the ass-hole of the northeast. One of the ten bottom places of the earth.
>
> Was it possible to escape the stereotypes and be proud of being an Albany Irishman? (272-273)

Martin Daugherty, like Billy Phelan, is an Irish-American character surviving in an intensely localized culture which suffers from its own parochial nature. Both characters consent to the dictates of political and social corruption that dominate Albany, an immigrant city controlled by the ethnic prerogatives and political agenda of its Irish-American population. The process of consent to the all-pervasive prevailing norms of Albany's Irish society ensure their survival in it.

Perhaps more than any other character in Kennedy's novels, Francis Phelan, the protagonist of Ironweed, portrays Irish-American ethnic traits and their application to consent relations originally and realistically. One reason for this original and authentic expression of Irish-American ethnicity is Kennedy's examination of the related concepts of sin and guilt. These forces unite to motivate Francis's character throughout his life, and serve as powerful sources for consent and assimilation.

Francis Phelan has much to feel guilty about. Objectively examined and technically speaking, he is a murderer, an adulterer, an alcoholic, and a man who abandons his wife and children for a life on the road; however, Francis's

problems started years ago. As a young man and new husband and father, Francis participated in a labor strike. During the ruckus, he hurled a stone which struck and killed another man. This death resulted in the subsequent deaths of two other men when armed guards opened fire on the crowd. In the process of escaping the authorities, Francis was unable to assist another man struggling to climb onto a moving railroad car; the man plunged to his death after Francis lost his grip on the man's outstretched hand. Another death for which Francis feels responsible occurred in self-defense. A drunken bum, who tried to steal Francis's shoes by hacking off his feet with a meat clever, is tossed head first by Francis into a concrete bridge abutment. But the death which most affects Francis, causing him to flee his family and job in Albany in the first place, is that of his infant son, Gerald. While changing the thirteen-day-old infant's diaper, Francis accidentally dropped the child on its head and broke its neck. For this mistake, Francis cannot forgive himself.

Ironweed examines the integrity of this Irish-American vagrant whose life is filled with guilt for his mistakes, but whose toughness (like the stem of the ironweed plant) counteracts the destructive effects of guilt, allowing him to re-enter and adjust to life as he once knew it. Flower, in The Hudson Review, writes that "Kennedy wants us to value his protagonist as a survivor, an archetype, a peren-

nial: 'The name refers to the toughness of the stem', runs the epigraph from the Audubon Field Guide" (376). This archetypal characterization of strength and determination is echoed by novelist Saul Bellow: "[Francis Phelan is] a traditional champion, the fated man, a type out of Icelandic or Irish epic" (Jones, 22). Francis's will to survive and not to succumb to the damaging effects of guilt distinguishes his noble and dignified character.

Other qualities define the archetypal character of this Irish-American hero. For example, Loxley Nichols and William Pritchard discuss the Joycean qualities of Kennedy's protagonist in Ironweed, comparing him with the archetypal hero in Ulysses. Nichols sees relationships between Kennedy's Ironweed and its wandering protagonist-in-exile and Joyce's Ulysses and its hero:

> Mythical allusions are readily discernible in Ironweed. There are the names Helen and the Ulysses-sounding Aloysius (Francis's middle name). And it happens that after a twenty(-two)-year absence, Francis returns home to find a grown son, a faithful wife, and a friendly dog. Such details, plus Kennedy's exploration of the father-son relationship, immediately identify him with Joyce. (47)

Nichols also points to other qualities which align Kennedy with Joyce: a focus on the "imagination...firmly planted in native soil,...'family' novels, on-going histories of characters,...stream-of-consciousness, interior monologue, and development by association" (47-48). Many of these qualities are examined in Chapters IV and V.

Pritchard, in a discussion of Francis's feelings of

guilt for sins that haunt his past, works through some reasons behind this Irish-American hero's feelings. In his analysis, Pritchard indicates that Francis, although battered by sin and guilt, still strives courageously to preserve his dignity, if at least because he is human and, therefore, fallible. His quest for forgiveness still incomplete, the aging hero, overlooking his future burial site in a cemetery outside Albany, rails against the "spooks" (Ironweed, 196) which haunt his guilty conscience. Pritchard writes,

> Against such yearnings to be "situated" in a more permanent position, as it were, is Francis's ironweed-like persistence. At one moment later in the novel, he turns on the "spooks"...who have haunted him and tells them that "You ain't real and I ain't gonna be at your beck and call no more": "Your all dead, and if you ain't, you oughta be. I'm the one is livin'. I'm the one that puts you on the map." We may be reminded of Joyce's Bloom in the cemetery with his sudden recognition that he is not dead yet, not yet.... (38)

Kennedy writes of Francis's dignified pose despite the temptation to condemn himself. In an act of heroic defiance, Francis is established by Kennedy as his own predestinator:

> For Francis knew now that he was at war with himself, his private factions mutually bellicose, and if he was ever to survive, it would be with the help not of any socialistic god but with a clear head and a steady eye for the truth; for the guilt he felt was not worth the dying. It served nothing except nature's insatiable craving for blood. The trick was to live, to beat the bastards, survive the mob and the fateful chaos, and show them all what a man can do to set things right, once he sets his mind to it. (207)

Francis's desire to be his own predestinator fulfills the

claim of consent relations to earning one's way in the New World; he is determined to fight his way back to the responsibilities of everyday reality. The society in which he was born and raised notwithstanding, he resolves to emerge from his self-imposed isolation and confusion and to rediscover himself in a new world.

Finally, Kennedy writes that guilt actually becomes the motivation Francis needs to keep him alive. Kennedy's writing is a perceptive comment on the Irish-American ethnic response to guilt and how it can characterize Francis's sense of self-discovery and personal identity. He says of Francis:

> In the deepest part of himself that could draw an unutterable conclusion, he told himself: My guilt is all that I have left. If I lose it, I have stood for nothing, done nothing, been nothing. (216)

An ancestor of Francis Phelan, and the namesake of Francis's youngest son, Daniel Quinn Phelan, is Daniel Quinn, the Irish-American protagonist and hero of <u>Quinn's Book</u>. He is a self-made journalist, storyteller, and historian whose romantic curiosity leads him on a personal and moral quest for a higher life, "a life fulfilled by language" (280). Although the protagonists of Kennedy's previous novels harbor few ethnic personality traits which truly demean them, none has the purely noble qualities of artist-hero Daniel Quinn. Commenting on his experience as a war correspondent during the Civil War, Daniel vows "to live [his] life according to the word" (280), a commitment

which eventually leads to a fruitful examination of his past in fulfillment of a personal and moral quest for the truth:

> It was in this elated frame of mind that I picked up a pen and set down a handful of words that I hoped would begin the recovery not only of what had been lost but also of what I did not know had been lost, yet surely must have been. I was persuading myself that if I used the words well, the harmony that lurked beneath all contraries and cacophonies must be revealed. This was an act of faith, not reason. (280)

Here, Quinn realizes that his desire to recover what had been lost is the need to recover the past. The only true means of recovering the past for him is by using words--by being a writer. Quinn's Irishness is central to understanding his impulse to discover the past and deal with history, so, in characteristic expression of his ethnic heritage, he draws upon this impulse to initiate a quest for truth. This quest is Quinn's approach establishing consent relations in the New World.

Quinn's examination of the past begins with his family history, which goes back to "the values of the people of Clonmel, Cashel, and the towns in Mayo and Tyrone where the family had flourished" (71) in Ireland. His grandfather abandoned the family when his son, Daniel's father, was only two years old, and emigrated to America. Daniel's father came over when he was old enough to care for himself. He became a "great friend" (63) of Emmett Daugherty, an Irish labor organizer and grandfather to the narrator of _Billy Phelan_, Martin Daugherty. Daniel, himself a second

generation Irish-American, learned firsthand the troubled history of his Irish ancestry. He relates the demise of his nuclear family, explaining to Maud, his beloved, that his parents and sister died from cholera. Emmett Daugherty helped the young orphan find work, and soon he was hired by John "the Brawn" McGhee, an Irish canal boat operator and ex-boxer.

Quinn, "that formidable folklorist" (228), later teams up with Will Canaday, founder and editor of the Albany Chronicle. Canaday offers to teach the boy about journalism, thus starting him on a writing career[1]. Fate and a series of events perhaps ascribable to the luck of the Irish make him an eyewitness to the Civil War. He remains a war correspondent for two years, earning a reputation as one of the best historians of the War's events. But the War's savagery and senselessness disgust him, and lead him to abandon journalism for a career writing literature--"to move beyond the barricade of facts into some grander sphere" (280).

Quinn's foundation for success as a writer and observer of the human condition is his Irish heritage as well as an intense preoccupation with violence in history, especially that of Ireland. His family's history makes him a living link between the history of the Irish in Ireland and the Irish in America:

> I cheered for...the rebellious farmers of Ireland who, under the leadership of one William Smith O'Brien[2], were defying the English (my father's father had lost

> his land to the English).... I did begin to see that violence was the norm of this bellicose world.
> (Quinn's Book, 49)

Quinn's preoccupation with the past began when he was orphaned. In an effort to reclaim the past, he returned to the abandoned house in North Albany where he grew up prior to his parents' deaths. While wandering about the house, he recalls that his mother once asked him to bury a valuable family heirloom in the backyard. The heirloom, a birdcage, was buried to prevent its theft by looters. Quinn unearthed it upon his return. It was a

> circular metal disk bearing an odd trompe l'oeil design. Now it was a screaming mouth with vicious eyes, now a comic puppy with bulbous nose and tiny mouth. Depending on where the light hit the eyes they were glassy, or sad, or hypnotic.... [Quinn] believed the disk was valuable in some way yet to be understood. (73)

Taking the "Celtic potato platter" (178), which he later equates with Maud, because both are "agents of change and illusion, both of uncertain origin and significance" (178), he resolves to become a writer. He carries the "Celtic disk" (198) as a talisman of his family's Irish heritage. The platter, Kennedy writes, had waited

> underground for another generation to unearth it quantifying its own value and mystery in the shallow grave; and Maud propounding mysteries of the cosmos with every Maudbreath. Buried, they eluded. Resurrected, they grew lustrous. (178)

Equating the disk with Maud symbolizes for Quinn the regeneration and assimilation (the consent) of the Irish in America. Quinn has a stake in this regeneration, for he

will join in the union of love with Maud near the end of the book in perpetuation of the Irish experience in America. In this union, Maud offers opportunity for Quinn, herself, and their potential offspring, because she, like Quinn, is one of the "agents of change" (178)--one with whom Quinn can carry on the Irish tradition in America. As an agent of regeneration and consent, Maud, as symbolized by the disk, assures movement into the future. Ironically, this future she assures is equated with a talisman (the disk) of the past (heritage).

The Celtic disk also symbolizes for Quinn the vast migration of Irish to the New World during the 1840s and 1850s. (Quinn's Book "is set in Albany beginning in 1849 and going until maybe the Civil War era somewhere, the 1860s, 1880..." [Bonnetti, 75]). Starting with the famine, and continuing throughout the remaining half of the 1800s, the Irish migrated by the thousands to America. During the course of the novel, Quinn reflects on his family's history in Ireland. His grandfather was expelled from his own property by the British, forcing him to emigrate to America. Quinn also thinks of his mother carrying the disk from Ireland as a talisman of her own family's ancient heritage. By carrying on in his mother's task of bearing the Celtic disk, and by committing himself to a writer's life in America, Quinn accepts the responsibility to preserve his ethnic history--to be an observer, recorder,

and interpreter of the Irish experience in America. In this manner he fulfills Sollors's idea of consent: that ethnic traditions need not be lost as the process of assimilation takes place. By consulting the traditions of ethnic heritage and culture, the ethnic newcomer establishes an identity completely within the context of American pluralism based on the immigrant experience. Quinn's view toward the past portrays him as an Irish-American imbued with a turbulent and inescapable history carried into the New World--the new order:

> There were no explanations that satisfied Quinn, only a growing awareness of dark omissions in his life and a resolute will to struggle with the power the past seemed to have over him: power to imprison him in dead agonies and divine riddles. He would wake dreaming of his disk and its faces, a savage dream of a new order: forces as old as the dead Celts, faces in the shape of a severed hand and a severed tongue that would bring Quinn great power over life. (Quinn's Book, 288)

The new order of which Quinn dreams is the new race of Irish in America; they will create a new history, to which he and Maud shall contribute.

Quinn, the progenitor, is Kennedy's Irish-American hero establishing consent relations in the New World. Through Quinn's characterization as a New World ethnic, Kennedy demonstrates Sollors's thesis in Beyond Ethnicity that immigration in America, and its record in ethnic writing, is a matter of consent and not of ethnic exclusivism. Through Quinn, Kennedy throws off old-world ties, and embraces a syncretic form of ethnic writing completely in

the American grain; Quinn's unique and dignified character breaks ties with stereotypical characterizations often associated with "genetic memory" (O'Connell, 395)--or ethnic exclusivism. Kennedy accomplishes this separation by writing full circle in his Albany cycle of novels; he returns to an Irish past in Quinn's Book and, paradoxically, arrives at a meaningful understanding of an Irish future in America. As the old Mexican says to Quinn near the end of the novel, "You will live a long life, raise sons, and have a happy death" (288). In typically quizzical Irish fashion, Kennedy's narrative responds on Quinn's behalf: "Quinn believed none of it, believed it all" (288). By accepting the responsibility of being a writer, Quinn accepts the responsibility of knowing and voicing the past. Only in this complete measure of commitment to the word, to his ethnic culture, and to himself can this Irish-American writer consent to a new life in the New World.

Kennedy's development of ethnic character and consent relations in his novels extends beyond writing about individual Irish-American personalities; it also includes development of a social or group identity of the Irish-American character. This identity development depends largely upon Kennedy's depiction of three interrelated influences in Irish-American social identity: familial, religious, and political. Although these three aspects of Irish-American life are examined extensively as themes in

Chapter III, they serve at this point to reinforce the concept of the group identity as a matter of consent and Irish-American character development in Kennedy's novels.

Kennedy focuses much of his attention on the Irish-American family and community. He is a product of Albany's Irish-American neighborhood, a section in the north end of the city nicknamed "Limerick" (O Albany!, 29) for its heavy concentration of Irish-American citizens. Mary Croyden notes that Kennedy's novels are "inextricably linked to his native city,...when Albany was a wide-open city run by Irish bosses and their corrupt political machine" (52). She continues to say that Kennedy, a fifth generation Albany Irishman whose working-class parents lived in the city's Irish North End, refined his sense of visual and aural detail while growing up in Albany. This focus on detail allows him to capture the "tone and temper" (52) of Irish-Americans whose families are in the process of assimilation, and his years spent in Albany exposed him to the hometown belief that "life was lived in a specific way" (53). This specific way was the Irish-American way, and it stipulated that familial loyalty was paramount.

In the form of a clan operated by a quasi-tribal mentality, the family provided protection, refuge, and identity for the group in the New World. Any deviation from the psychological pact underlying domestic loyalty, notes Mary Gordon, was grounds for relentless ridicule and

criticism. Although Gordon concedes that this ridicule can hurt, she points to its purpose:

> Irish ridicule is intended to hurt but it is also a balked expression of love. It is also a desire to protect, or at least to urge self-protection upon the victim. It is the stick to beat in front of the stray member of the herd, to urge him or her back to his or her proper place, the place of hiding. (36)

This proper place is within the family clan, where one is assured protection from the outside world. Kennedy's novels abound with the sense of familial cohesion based upon ridicule. In _The Ink Truck_, Bailey is a social outcast and the subject of public and private ridicule as he carries out his strike plans. In _Billy Phelan_, Billy Phelan is ridiculed, silenced, and ostracized by the Irish-American community for refusing to betray the kidnappers of Patsy McCall's son, Charlie. Even Francis Phelan stays away from home and family for fear of exposure and ridicule; in addition to social ridicule, he becomes his own source of ridicule, punishing himself for what he deems are personal inadequacies and sins. Although family loyalty is not exacted upon Daniel Quinn by ridicule, it is, nevertheless, something which he feels. Since he has lost his father, mother, and sister during the process of emigration, Quinn feels humiliated by the process of leaving his homeland. However, his determination to recover his lost way of life emerges in his own obligation to retrieve his family in the form of historical memory. This powerful sense of devotion demonstrates itself in his

choice of a writing career and in his desire to start a family with Maud.

The Irish-Americans in Kennedy's novels are devout Catholics. They subscribe to a brand of Catholicism rich in mystery, tradition, and pietism. Their Catholicism, when fused with "two kinds of cultural imperialism: Anglicization and Romanization" (McCaffrey, Diaspora, 75), produces a powerful sense of devotion bolstered by Anglican order and puritanism as well as by Latin pietism and authoritarianism (McCaffrey, 76). Kennedy accurately portrays this peculiar devotion in his novels.

For example, Bailey travels in his dreams in search of the spiritual devotion to carry on the long strike against the newspaper. These searches take him back to medieval Christian underworlds inhabited by "pooka"--hobgoblins or sprites associated with Celtic lore. Returning from his dream-voyages, his spirit is purified and renewed. He is then able to continue his guild strike with a near-obsessive sense of devotion to the cause of justice for his mistreated guild members.

Legs Diamond is a devout and somewhat superstitious Catholic. He is committed to regular attendance at mass, and he favors a particular blue suit and a signet ring because they bring good luck. This tendency to invest objects with talismanic power is perhaps indicative of the Latin devotion to religious icons, and is obliquely ren-

dered in Diamond's purchase of a church organ, as though he were buying indulgences. In the case of Diamond, such dubious generosity is sentimental, though, and serves as counterpoint to the actions of a man whose life was otherwise a disgrace to Christian behavior.

Diamond's wife, Annie, is likewise a devout Irish Catholic whose excessive expressions of faith often motivate her behavior beyond the dictates of reason. Instead of obtaining a divorce over her husband's infidelities and murderous ways, she does just the opposite:

> In William Kennedy's Legs, John Thomas Diamond is a bootlegger, hijacker, drug dealer, and sadistic murderer. He publicly flaunts his chorus girl paramour, Kiki. Still, his wife Alice stays with him because as a good Irish catholic [sic] woman how could she expiate "that black terribleness of marrying and loving evil, except by staying married to it?"
> (McCaffrey, "Fictional Images," 232)

Billy Phelan considers the influence of religion and its effect on the social definition of Irish-American character development. This novel treats the topic of the priesthood as well as the Irish-American ambivalence toward priests. Lawrence McCaffrey comments on this uneasiness in Kennedy's novel:

> Many Irish-American fiction priests are fools or knaves.... In William Kennedy's Billy Phelan's Greatest Game Martin Daugherty worries that his seminary-entering son [Peter] might become like some clerics he has known: "There was a suburban priest who kept a pet duck on a leash. One in Troy chased a nubile child around the parish house. Priests in their cups. Priests in their beggar's robes. Priests in their eunuch suits. (233)

Throughout Billy Phelan, references to the Old Testament

story of Abraham and Isaac are made in support of the father-son relationship influencing the development of Kennedy's characters. The relationships which Kennedy considers in this novel are those between Francis and Billy Phelan, Edward and Martin Daugherty, Martin and his own son, Peter, and Patsy and Charlie McCall. In the final pages, narrator Daugherty reflects on his own relationship with his father:

> Martin's view of his meeting with his father was this: that all sons are Isaac, all fathers are Abraham, and that all Isaacs become Abrahams if they work at it long enough. (278)

Ironweed and Quinn's Book are relatively free of overt religious reference, but they deal considerably with the operations of guilt. Francis Phelan struggles against being the guilty victim of self-imposed humiliation over a failed life; however, by the end of the novel, when he learns to accept "a world where events decided themselves" (224), Francis realizes that guilt, that very thing which he tries diligently to escape, is actually a source of social identity.

Daniel Quinn, perhaps the least religious of Kennedy's characters, also feels an internal need to establish his social sense of responsibility and identity, so he sets out on a moral quest of self-discovery. As a character of solid ethical standards, he feels compelled to write in order to understand the moral importance as well as the cultural and historical value of his ethnic traditions. Quinn

expresses this responsibility in a quasi-religious pursuit of the truth, in which he commits himself to a monastic preoccupation with reading and with training himself to write. He prepares himself to seek the truth as a writer and interpreter of history.

Similar to religion, "politics [is] a form of personal salvation and private exaltation" (Kennedy, O Albany!, 340) for Irish-Americans. McCaffrey reinforces the close relationship between politics and religion in Irish-American literature, acknowledging the "fluid borders between the two" ("Fictional Images," 231). He says that Anglo-American prejudice caused religious leaders to form their own schools, hospitals, and other institutions of public welfare. Politicians and even priests participated in leadership roles for the Irish-American community (232).

Kennedy's novels follow in this tradition of examining Irish-American politics and religion in conjunction with each other. Loyalty of near-religious devotion is exacted by Patsy McCall, the "Irish-American chieftain" (29), in Billy Phelan. Kennedy also refers to this political figure as "Patsy, the savior, the sine qua non,...the party leader and patron" (29) of the Irish Democratic faction in Albany. McCall's character is modeled on famed Albany political boss, Dan O'Connell, a powerful civic influence in the lives of the Albany Irish, and a man who controlled the city from 1919 to 1977. According to Kennedy, O'Connell

was the leader for whom "the charisma, the power, the belief that [he] was a man of golden qualities, generated a loyalty in his followers that often reached absurd heights" (*O Albany!*, 301).

In addition to strict loyalty, and key to their success in politics, is the Irish-Americans' ability to organize and obtain political support. Their organizational skills, based on the grassroots approach of patronage-style politics, were particularly strong in Albany during the 1930s, the era in which Kennedy sets *Legs*, *Billy Phelan*, and *Ironweed*. This power to organize still exists in a "patronage system that makes Chicago's Democrats look like the League of Women Voters" (Hunt and Quinn, 190). Kennedy examines the system of patronage most thoroughly in *Billy Phelan* and in his nonfiction work, *O Albany!*.

Historians comment on the background of the Irish-American organizational ability in politics. For example, Lawrence McCaffrey writes:

> [The] Irish arrived in the United States relatively competent in politics. Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Emancipation and Repeal of the Union organizations and Charles Stewart Parnell's Home Rule movement educated them in public opinion mobilizing and political tactics. By the close of the nineteenth century they controlled most American industrial cities....
> ("Fictional Images," 235-236)

Historians also cite the oppressive conditions for the Irish struggling under British colonial rule as training ground for success in politics. Crushing Penal Laws in Ireland, which left the Irish with virtually no room for

political organization or expression, forced communication underground. There, silence, subtlety, and secrecy fostered intense bonds of political loyalty. This experience with developing various skills in politics transferred with the Irish in the process of immigration, and served to assist them in the process of establishing consent relations in America. Eventually, through a combination of patronage style politics, oratorical expertise, the system of parishes, and other factors, the Irish came to dominate the American political scene.

This private underworld of political secrecy and intrigue established in Ireland parallels the setting for Kennedy's most political novel, Billy Phelan. In this novel, nightlife characters haunt the political life of Albany. They roam a latenight underworld populated by gamblers, carousers, and street toughs. They have a unique lingo, and they exchange promises, words of faith, and I.O.Us on a "do unto others..." basis. Their underworld consists of an established and cohesive ethnic subculture in complete control--exercised from within--of the politics of Albany. Herbert Mitgang, in "Inexhaustible Albany," writes:

> The author invites us to wander along the characters' streets, drop into their saloons and gambling dens, watch them vote as the powerful Democratic machine boss tells them to (or else). (35)

Of all Kennedy's novels, Billy Phelan is Kennedy's finest and most complete expression of the way Irish-American

politics worked in the depression era of the 1930s.

Quinn's Book also takes a thorough look at Irish political loyalty, but its focus is on a fairly distant past. Kennedy writes of Maud's father's arrest and imprisonment for participation in a rebellion of tenant farmers in Ireland (167). The conditions of oppression under British rule are then paralleled in America "between the Irish and the Know-Nothings (who numbered in their political ranks the enraged nativists and assorted hybrid-haters bent on shaping a balance in this republic of equals by expelling the unequals)" (127). This attitude of separatism and expulsion only engendered determination in Irish-American political activities, for the Irish were a people well-skilled in conducting successful political activity despite opposition.

Kennedy's sense of the Irish-American culture as a group contributes significantly to his overall development of ethnic character and consent relations in America. Kennedy's portrayal of the influence and interrelations of the family, religion, and politics in the lives of Irish-Americans (topics considered in more detail as themes in Chapter III) is conducted to varying extents in all of his novels, and provides a social backdrop for the individual character development of his protagonists and assorted major characters as they adjust to life in the New World. The development of individual and social aspects of Irish-

American characters in Kennedy's novels is firmly rooted in the setting of each work, and defines Albany as an influential enclave of the Irish in America.

Chapter II Notes

[1]See McCaffrey, "Fictional Images of Irish-America" (228), for an account of the Irish-American involvement in journalism and its foundation for Irish-American literature.

[2]See Blanche M. Touhill's _William Smith O'Brien and His Irish Revolutionary Companions in Penal Exile_ (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1981) for an account of O'Brien's experience dealing with the British colonial effort in Ireland.

CHAPTER III

ETHNICITY AND THEME

The concept of ethnic writing is changing. According to Werner Sollors, readers and writers of ethnic literature can no longer think profitably in terms of regaining some elusive cultural history as a definition of identity distinct from the prevailing culture in which they live. Such self-indulgence is no longer an expedient means for assimilation in a densely populated, pluralistic society, especially as recorded in a particular ethnic culture's literature. Swift, reliable, and inexpensive transportation as well as significant advances in electronic communication bridge boundaries between cultures to the extent that reliance on old world notions of hierarchical descent and biological exclusivism fails to account for ethnic identity in society at large as well as in its literature. Sollors describes the residual emotional propensity to seek ethnic exclusivism based on elusive and artificial claims to descent:

> The heart of the matter is that in the present climate consent-conscious Americans are willing to perceive ethnic distinctions--differentiations which they

> seemingly base exclusively on descent, no matter how far removed and how artificially selected and constructed--as powerful and as crucial; and that writers and critics pander to that expectation. "You will never understand me. Don't you understand?"--is the gesture with which cultural interaction seems to function; and even the smallest symbols of ethnic differentiation ("she called herself Kay Adams") are exaggerated out of proportion to represent major cultural differences, differences that are believed to defy comparison or scrutiny. (13)

He concludes, however, that "critics should not give in to such demands for such biological insiderism" (13). Instead, Sollors calls for critics to study ways in which ethnic writing demonstrates assimilation to everyday life in America.

Sollors points out that sociological theories of the 1960s portrayed the development of ethnic literature as an "increasing formal complexity from travelogues and letters..., sermons, essays, and biographies to the increasingly successful mastery of poetry, prose fiction, and drama" (240-41)--a "historical unfolding of ethnic writing as a process of growth" (241). This model of development "from lower to higher degrees of complexity" (241), though persuasive and "plausible" (241), is antiquated and parochial, and fails to account for modernist, syncretic views of ethnic literary development. Its deterministic reliance on the competitive concept of descent is the material of provincialism, and leads to the destruction of those qualities of ethnic literature which otherwise characterize the history of a culture. Such antiquated

theories of literary growth conclude that "modernization [complex writing] simply [means] emancipation from ethnicity" (241). Citing Sandburg and Farrell as examples of ethnic authors whose authenticity extends beyond narrow definitions of ethnic writing, Sollors eschews linear and simplistic theories of ethnic writing in as diverse a culture as melting-pot America:

> The forms of American ethnic literature surely deserve to be treated more seriously than if they were humble and involuntary by-products of "genuine" ethnic themes or unmediated results of a minor author's parentage. (243)

Indeed, they deserve to be treated as an integral part of a contemporary dynamic development in American literature, one which accounts for the rich strains of ethnic writing in America: "Instead of looking at various ethnic traditions as merely growing from very parochial beginnings to modernist assimilation, we may also see ethnic identification itself as a modern phenomenon" (245).

William Kennedy engages this "modern phenomenon." For example, he ties various Irish-American thematic preoccupations together with his overarching concern for ethnic unification (not exclusivism) with the host society and with narrative syncretism. This approach to ethnicity and literary form embraces Sollors's concept of consent relations: assimilation without loss of cultural identity as demonstrated in an ethnic culture's literature. Kennedy writes about Irish-Americans surviving and enduring in

America. To this end, he develops various ethnic themes in his novels which show how "[e]thnicization and modernization often go hand in hand" (Sollors, 246), that is, how assimilation need not sacrifice the ethnic identity and cultural traditions of a homogeneous people in order to assure its survival in a pluralistic, host culture. Examining Kennedy's deployment of thematic issues relevant to the lives of consent-conscious Irish-Americans reveals not a "loss of traditional culture [but a]...persistent concern with the new and the modern" (246) and with how ethnic representation contributes to modernization. Kennedy adopts a unified and syncretic approach to ethnic writing in developing his modernist concern with various themes traditionally associated with the Irish-American ethnic experience. The journey of Irish immigrants to America, the sense of place (Dinnsheanchas [see p. 84]), and the influence and interrelation of family, politics, and religion reflect his concern with the attitudes and patterns of Albany's North End Irish-Americans.

The Irish immigrant journey experience is weaved throughout Kennedy's novels, and is expressed in related concepts of unification. As an immigrant experience, the journey may follow the pattern of separation, self-protection, and return. Such common ethnic themes are treated in the works of James T. Farrell, for example, "our first great ethnic writer" (Shannon, "Preface," xi). Barry

O'Connell, in "The Lost World of James T. Farrell's Short Stories," comments:

> The world left behind is irretrievable and yet inescapable. The cost of leaving, the death of remaining, the anger and defensiveness about one's group--themes common to most ethnic writing--are unforgettably captured in Farrell's best work.
> (in Casey and Rhodes, 70)

Kennedy also is concerned with these and other thematic issues. In Quinn's Book, for example, Daniel Quinn refers to the cost of leaving and to the death of remaining in Ireland because of famine, disease, and persecution: "I was thinking of my parents' stories about bad times in Ireland, and of the presence on their table of very small potatoes, when there were any potatoes at all..." (75). Cholera, a disease which afflicted the Irish in both Ireland and America, took the lives of Quinn's parents and sister, and forced thousands of Irish to emigrate to America. In addition to famine and disease, Kennedy considers the persecution and oppressive conditions of the Irish under British rule. He comments on the rebellion of tenant farmers in Ireland under the leadership of William Smith O'Brien (49), and delves into the turbulent family histories of characters whose lives were changed by separation and emigration from Ireland. These hardships and others initiated the Irish immigrant in the long, slow process of establishing consent relations in America: relocation, adjustment, and assimilation to a new life based on earned (not inherited) opportunity.

Quinn also undergoes a personal, moral quest in search of himself in the New World which parallels the immigrant journey and the subsequent challenges of assimilating to a new life in America. His story begins when he is a young boy who is orphaned by the deaths of his parents and sister. After being apprenticed to a canal boatman, a typical occupation held by Irish immigrants, Quinn takes a job with a newspaper. The Albany Chronicle, under the editorship of Will Canaday, exposes him to reading and writing. Eventually, Canaday hires him as a correspondent to cover the Civil War. The war experience has lasting effects on Quinn, and along with his love for a young Irish woman named Maud Fallon, also an immigrant, leads him to write creative literature. Quinn's writing allows him to indulge his desire to return to his family's history in Ireland while simultaneously exploring his new life in America.

Several other Kennedy novels deal with the immigrant journey; they too involve the cost of leaving, the death of remaining, and the irretrievable yet inescapable return to the past. As such, they incorporate the initial stages of assimilation and consent for Irish-Americans. In The Ink Truck, Bailey sets about to maintain the pre-strike standards he knew while working as a columnist for a big city newspaper, and he persists in his effort to make an entrenched and indifferent bureaucracy of management

respond to the needs of the workers. Since he can neither escape his principles nor accept the present management style, he sets about on a personal quest in search of the past, a search which he hopes will reveal the means to change the system. His journey leads him into several surrealistic dream fantasies populated by Celtic spirits of the imagination. In one of his dreams, Bailey encounters what purports to be turn-of-the-century Albany. It is full of plague-ridden Irish immigrants living in shanty-towns along the Erie canal. One immigrant, whom Bailey encounters in his dream, has just made the voyage from Ireland to America. The harsh journey has caused him to lose his wife and two children to the cholera plague shortly after their arrival in America; another of his children died during the migratory voyage from Ireland. These dreams are Bailey's attempt to return to his immigrant forebear's past, where he searches for a means to resolve conflicts within himself about the exacerbating conditions of the strike and about "the way American society crushes idealism" (Reynolds, 185). In a sense, Bailey's disillusionment over his dispute with an indifferent newspaper management parallels the struggles of the early Irish immigrants to gain acceptance amidst nativist American persecution. He must form his own intolerant special interest group, and then establish an identity among that group which nourishes his spiritual commitment to

gaining concessions from the established management. The grassroots approach of Bailey's underground movement meets the needs of his group.

Jack "Legs" Diamond is also on a personal quest. His quest, "shaping the dream that you could grow in America and shoot your way to glory and riches" (Legs, 13), dramatizes the immigrant dream of fulfilling the Horatio Alger myth. As mentioned in Chapter II, the myth has roots in the immigrant experience in the New World, and underscores Sollors's theory that consent relations characterize ethnic life in America. No longer is success conferred by birthright; now it is conferred by the earning one's way through the work ethic (or consent). Within the framework of this theory, the old world is transformed into the new; what one must do is assimilate to the new way through hard work and application. What appalled, yet also fascinated, a puritanical, nativist American populace was not that Legs was a gangster, nor that he did not work hard to achieve and fulfill the myth (for he certainly applied himself, surviving several murder attempts and legal assaults in the effort), but that he achieved it so quickly. The plodding nativist masses resented being left behind by this adaptive and independent New World ethnic whose ambitious drive for attaining success disregarded their interests altogether. Until it could stop him, the public could only respond to Diamond's activities by reliving vicariously the notorious

gangster's life as it was portrayed by the tabloids. The public read and believed his story in the only way it could understand it--as a myth. To the popular imagination, Legs was a mystical, magical being who eluded its attempt to understand him and thus get a hold of him. ("Who the hell was this Legs anyway? Who...really knows Legs?" [Legs, 243]) Thus, society re-created Diamond; it re-invented him to fulfill its own delusory quest for passion, excitement, and success.

Billy Phelan's personal quest marks a change in the course of the immigrant journey in Kennedy's novels. Whereas the quests of Bailey, Legs, and Daniel Quinn are conducted in the external world of public affairs, the personal quest of Billy Phelan is internal; his quest is a voyage of the mind. And the metaphor of Albany nightlife gives Billy the psychological cover he needs to conduct his voyage.

Billy's personal quest is for an anonymity symbolized by his own absent father; it is entwined with the universal search for the elusive archetypal paternal figure. Anonymity for Billy is situated between the positive and active step of searching for his father, and thus learning about his own identity, and the negative and inactive step of denying his feelings for his father. By maintaining his disguise of anonymity under the psychological cover of Albany's nightlife, Billy provides for his own self-

protection; he neither has to deal with painful negative feelings of resentment toward his irresponsible father nor to acknowledge his love for his father (to search for him) and, thus, risk the pain of further rejection.

Throughout the novel, Billy, the small-time hustler, denies his feelings for his wayfaring father in order to protect himself from the man who abandoned the family and to prevent himself from realizing what may be true about his own dubious social identity--that being a two-bit gambler is no better than being an absent father. To reinforce the psychological tension involved in Billy's emotional conflict between search and denial, Kennedy replays the father-and-son relationship in the life of narrator Martin Daugherty. Daugherty's relationship with his father, Edward, also serves to enlighten Billy's situation because it highlights by way of contrast those aspects of Billy's father-son relationship which offer hope for reconciliation with and understanding of his father, Francis. For example, Martin's father, a famous playwright, remains physically present in Martin's life, but lacks the psychological presence (he later becomes senile) necessary for a healthy relationship with his son. However, Billy's father, although physically absent, thinks constantly of his son, and the guilt arising from the father's fond memories of his son serves as a source of strong motivation for him to return from his self-imposed life on the run to

his family in Albany's North End. Initially, this guilt motivates Francis to appear periodically (almost like a ghost) in local pubs or at election polls, but eventually, with the help of Martin Daugherty, Billy meets his father. Father and son talk, giving Billy the chance to assert his love for his father. Having taken the step toward loving his father, Billy then urges him to return to the family. He also insists upon giving the wandering vagrant money and paying for his meal. Finally, he offers to buy his father new clothes.

Cunning, silence, and social exile, the covers provided by Albany's nighttime gambling scene, are evidence of Billy's need for self-protection. Mary Gordon discusses this need among the Irish:

> Cunning...is the coin of exchange of any oppressed group.... Silence, too, is another form of protective coloration not unknown by the oppressed. But exile, the ultimate, most deeply willed concealment of identity, is...to be permanently in disguise; it is an extreme form of self-protection. And self-protection is an Irish obsession. (36)

Cunning underlies the gambling and hustling life of the gamester, and silence, such as that maintained by Billy about the kidnappers of Charlie Boy McCall, are prevalent issues of the immigrant journey in the novel. Billy's own silence is matched by the silence imposed on him by the entire city of Albany when the McCall machine orders everyone to ostracize him for refusing to betray the kidnappers. Only when Martin Daugherty mediates (as he did between

Billy and his father) the negotiations of the kidnapping among Billy, the McCalls, and the kidnappers is the silence broken.

Martin's involvement in everyone's life sets up some tense relationships among the various Irish-American characters, though. Because he is a writer, he has the power to expose and confront. For this reason, other fellow Irish-Americans in Billy Phelan do not completely trust him. Gordon remarks on this distrust of writers among the Irish and Irish-Americans:

> I am convinced that this desire to hide for self-protection is at the core of a great deal of Irish behavior--behavior that was shipped successfully from Ireland to America. This is, of course, another reason why the Irish, a people so imbued with the power of the Word [sic], do not value writers in their midst. A writer speaks out loud; a writer reveals. And to reveal, for the Irish, is to put oneself and the people one loves in danger. (36)

The point of Billy maintaining an anonymous position between denial and actively seeking is to protect himself. On a personal level, this desire for self-protection justifies his anonymity, allowing him to conduct his personal life with regard for the delicate and volatile emotions underlying his psyche. On a social level, it allows him to conduct his business affairs, themselves quite delicate and volatile because of their illegal nature.

Ironweed is Kennedy's finest expression of the immigrant journey and personal quest. It too complements Kennedy's overarching concern with ethnic unification and

narrative syncretism in his novels. Francis Phelan's own self-imposed exile, his personal moral quest, and his eventual return to his family and hometown express this preoccupation with reunification and syncretism.

Francis's twenty-two-year odyssey is an attempt to escape the oppression he feels within himself from living a life filled with sin and guilt. In some respects, Francis's personal journey also parallels the Irish immigrants' movement to and assimilation in America. As a wandering hero, he embodies the exodus of oppressed immigrants to a new land of promise. George Stade, Loxley Nichols, and William Pritchard note the influence of the odyssey on Kennedy's writing. They point to the similarities between Joyce's _Ulysses_ and Kennedy's _Ironweed_ as an indication of this influence. The wandering heroes of _Ulysses_ and _Ironweed_ both embark on their self-imposed voyages of personal discovery; they attempt to find the sense of purpose and identity which comes through prolonged self-examination and endurance of social isolation.

Stade sees _Ulysses_ as "that stumbling block in the way of every Irish novelist since Joyce" (15), and while remarking on Kennedy's effective use of the odyssey (he titles his article "Life on the Lam" [1]), feels that Kennedy has not escaped Joyce's influence--perhaps to the detriment of original artistic expression. Nichols, on the other hand, finds _Ulysses_'s influence on _Ironweed_ to be

positive. He points out similarities between Joyce and Kennedy based on the continuity of cultural tradition and on the fact that each writer uses imagination, place, family histories, stream of consciousness, interior monologues, and associative development in his writing (47-48). For example, Kennedy's graveyard scene in _Ironweed_, in which Francis defiantly asserts in associative thought development that he will defeat the "'spooks'...who have haunted him" (Pritchard, 38) about his turbulent family history, is a reminder of "Joyce's Bloom in the cemetery with his sudden recognition that he is not dead, not yet" (38). Kennedy makes such a scene highly personal for Francis, and it becomes pivotal for understanding many of the reasons behind his psychological torment and his attempt to escape it by living a life on the run. His personal history involves many of the people buried in the graveyard, and his involvement with them over the years has affected his psychological well-being.

Francis's "life on the lam" eventually ends, though, and he returns full-circle from his personal journey to his family in Albany's Irish North End. He is greeted by his loving wife, Annie, who finds him a set of clean clothes and prepares a room and a hot bath for him as well. Edward Reilly, in "Dante's _Purgatorio_ and Kennedy's _Ironweed_," notes that Francis is redeemed for his sins upon his return in a "symbolic re-baptism,...submerging himself in the

family bathtub..." (7):

> Sitting in the bathtub, Phelan feels "blessed," and the bathroom sink, with its "sacred" faucets, its "holy" drainpipe, and its "aura of sanctity," leads him to conclude that "everything was blessed at some point in its existence" [Ironweed, pp. 171-172].... After bathing, he finally and symbolically casts off the "stink of bumdom" when he dons his 1916 suit and shoes that restore his "resurrectible good looks" [Ironweed, p. 172]. (7)

Here, return home and the redemption for life's sins signal an end to Francis's journey of self-scrutiny and self-discovery, and complete the process of reintegrating his soul with his family. This reintegration confirms on a personal level the larger assimilation of immigrants within the community. Just as Francis has earned his way back to his family and himself (his mental stability) so too have newcomers to America consented to a new life.

Kennedy's concern with ethnic content and narrative method also encompasses an important issue in Irish-American literature: the sense of place. Place, and its concern with a specified region or land, functions as an integral theme in Kennedy's writing and is central to a study of the Albany series of novels[1]; it situates Kennedy's work in the tradition of regionalist writing in Ireland and America. Douglas Bauer comments on the importance of Albany as setting:

> [He] has now filled four published novels, all of which have as their setting the city of Albany, where Kennedy was born, raised, lived most of his life, from which he fashions vivid, sepia-shaded myth. And like all regionalists, his root-place, his Albany, is specific and universal, temporal and timeless, a seamless fusion of precise genealogy and fictive population. It is

> seen with a creative perspective.... (6)

For Kennedy, this perspective has its roots in Ireland, and supports his contribution to American literature as an Irish-American writer. Hunt and Quinn point to Kennedy's perpetuation of an ancient Irish tradition which emphasizes setting or place as theme in literature:

> The Irish Irish, in the days before the English, had a name for this sort of thing, Dinnsheanchas, the poetry of place, an amalgam of history, mythology and folklore through which a person came to know the past of every piece of the landscape, to understand its associations and thereby gain control of the unseen forces that could cure or curse him. (190-191)

Kennedy captures the essence of Albany as a dynamic, yet corrupt, immigrant city during the depression-era 1930s in at least three of his novels: Legs, Billy Phelan, and Ironweed. Quinn's Book, also set in Albany, concentrates on the latter half of the nineteenth-century urban scene--the years leading up to, including, and immediately following the Civil War. In Quinn's Book, Kennedy chronicles the lives of the ancestors of depression-era characters, Billy Phelan, Francis Phelan, and Martin Daugherty. The setting for The Ink Truck, less discernible since Kennedy does not actually state in the novel that Albany is where the action occurs, is nonetheless important for its urban locale as well.

Important to Kennedy's sense of place in Irish-American writing is the urban environment, for this is where the process of consent is historically most evident

for Irish-Americans. Kennedy's focus on the city life of Irish-Americans arises from the shift of the Irish people during mid-nineteenth century immigration from a rural, agricultural environment in Ireland to an urban, industrial setting in America. McCaffrey says in The Irish Diaspora in America that although some Irish immigrants tried to settle in rural America, many found life amidst the vast spaces in the American countryside to be lonely and desolate. The distances between small plots of land in Ireland did not compare with the vast distances between farms and communities in rural America. Essentially a gregarious and communal people, the early Irish immigrants who originally settled in the American countryside eventually drifted to urban ghettoes where they integrated themselves among city dwellers, especially among their kin and friends (65).

For Kennedy, Albany is a place of legend, myth, and lore. This "imaginative source" (Barbato, 52) provides him with a plethora of opportunities for creating literature which concentrates on the place theme of ethnic consent. In a discussion of Billy Phelan, Prescott notes that

> Albany, that improbable city, is the real hero of this novel; like some antique bard, Kennedy celebrates its past, its nocturnal legends. The year is 1938, the time is almost always after dark, and the characters--journalists and politicians, grifters [sic] and bums--are constantly reminded of times further past, of the floods and strikes, the scandals and murders of a quarter century before. Kennedy's story...concerns Albany's night people, who live on the edge of the underworld. ("Nightcrawlers," 100)

This magical place is used repeatedly in Kennedy's Albany

series of novels, and is a powerful factor for ethnic unification in his writing. Setting (or place) as a theme affords Kennedy the opportunity to syncretize ethnicity with narrative method.

Albany is only obliquely rendered in The Ink Truck, but a city quite similar to it is used to dramatize many of Kennedy's concerns with ethnic consent. Bailey's dreams about the past, troublesome drama of a city similar to Albany as it might have existed at the turn of the century are often situated in the Irish immigration experience to America, and the contemporary 1960s urban scene of Albany is central to the novel's thematic development because it provides both a home for the controlled newspaper--against whom the strike is directed--and a plausible setting for the tensions and idealistic struggles for justice which engender and nurture the laborers' strike.

Albany is the actual setting for much of Legs, including the death of Diamond in a Dove Street hotel, but it takes on less of a mythical identity in the novel than does its protagonist. Instead, Albany accommodates the "romantic image" (Croyden, 57) of the urban gangster until it can no longer tolerate him. It also embodies an important development in urban politics in America--large scale corruption--and the effect it would have on the city as thematic setting in Kennedy's Billy Phelan. In Legs, Kennedy uses narrator-lawyer Marcus Gorman to voice the endur-

ing effects of this development in the American city during the twentieth century. As noted in more detail (see pp. 100-101), Gorman says that urban gangsters such as Diamond were initially used by politicians to break up strikes and to manipulate stockbrokers; however, the gangsters later "reversed the process..., [becoming] manipulators of the pols" (215).

Kennedy, whose actual life and career have made him privy to the political corruption of the city, captures the inbred nature of this problem quite well in Billy Phelan. The nighttime atmosphere surrounding the setting provides cover for the vice which operates the city of Albany from within. Gambling dens, pool halls, and pubs thrive in the cramped quarters of Albany's city limits, and are fertile ground for substantial political corruption. The Irish Democratic machine controls the activities and establishments of Albany's nightlife as well as the politicians and the police force that operate the city, so it sets the rules for the city's conduct. Despite the emphasis on corruption, though, the existence of illicit activity is what gives this novel life. It provides Billy with a reason for being, and actually serves to show that even illegal activity has its own set of standards. A warm sense of intrigue pervades this novel, lending an effect to it which conveys a feeling of belonging to the dynamism of urban existence.

Albany as "place" takes on a psychological role in Ironweed. Croyden notes that Kennedy sees Albany as "various as the American psyche itself, of which it was truly a crucible" (52). Francis Phelan moves in and out of this microcosmic world of Irish-Americans, taking time to vote in its machine-controlled elections or drink in its Irish pubs. For Francis, Albany is a repository of failed attempts at living, but it is also where he belongs. It is his home--the source of his ethnic roots and a place from which he draws personal strength. Albany may be parochial and provincial, politically corrupt and frequently dangerous, but it is also familiar, and Francis has earned the right by consent to be there. He has endured the city's strikes, its disreputable politicians, and its ethnic ghettoes. As a crucible of the American psyche, Albany functions as a cleanser for Francis's soul. It distills the essential elements for his survival. What comes out of this distillation is a quizzical, complex belief in the meaning of his own guilt, a blunt unwillingness to be victimized by himself and others, the determination to endure, and the undeniable fact that he has a place of origin and, therefore, a place to come to.

Quinn's Book relies on the early stages of Albany's growth and its experience with immigrants, especially the Irish, to set the scene for the parallel developments of Quinn's early years as a young man and the consequent

growth of his life and career as an immigrant in America. As Quinn discusses his history in Ireland, so too does Kennedy discuss the history of Albany in America. He emphasizes the Irish immigrant experience in the city as perhaps its most influential social element and considers the early years of the newspaper industry, the city's voice. In addition to these early influences in Albany's growth, Kennedy dramatizes the industrial development of the city and chronicles the lives of the working-class people and those of the wealthy citizens, in particular Hillegond Staats, who benefited most from industrial expansion. Kennedy even presents some of the city's entertainment history in the lives of the actress Magdelena Colon and her niece, Maud. In all, Albany is described as a thriving late nineteenth-century city teeming with opportunity for immigrants in the New World.

Akin to place, and tied to the unification of ethnic identity and its syncretism with narrative method, is the influence of the Irish-American family--the clan--in Kennedy's novels. The family clan, including its respective influences of father-son relationships and of its women in general, contribute to Kennedy's narrative development of theme and its syncretism with Irish-American ethnicity. It is one of the primary means for the development of consent relations among Irish-Americans in Kennedy's novels.

Billy Phelan's father, Francis, abandoned the family for a life on the road long ago. Even though his family forgives him, Francis cannot bring himself to return. As a result, his choice to leave has negative affects on his children, especially his son Billy. A lack of paternal authority and the consequent inability to exercise inhibition allows Billy to participate in an adolescent underworld of gambling, drinking, and easy women. He has a sarcastic tongue and is fascinated by trendy clothing. His relationship with his girlfriend is essentially loveless--just a matter of fulfilling his sexual appetite.

The difficulty arising from Billy and Francis's father-son relationship, notes Kennedy, is due in part to "the notion that we are all in conspiracy against the next man, against the next generation,...the conspiracy against the children" (Bonnetti, 76). For example, Francis's children, including a married daughter, hold their father in contempt for abandoning the family. They feel his departure was a conspiracy to defraud their mother and them of the support and reassurance they expected from a father. In their minds, Francis had conspired to deprive them, for his absence is taken by them as an act of aggression by reason of omission: he is unwilling to return and explain why he left them, consciously choosing to remain silent for two decades. This unwillingness to communicate nearly ruins Francis's life and the lives of his family. With no

alternative but to assume they were the cause of their father's absence, the children inherit the guilt of their self-indulgent father, and Billy in particular commits himself to a life of illicit activity, especially vice. Consequently, the children see guilt as punishment for their father's sins (infanticide, homicide, adultery, and abandonment). In a sense, Francis has handed down guilt in his own image; the children become the inheritors of the father's guilt. As noted in Chapter II, the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac substantiates Kennedy's dramatization of this process of inheritance in Billy Phelan. Again, narrator Martin Daugherty reflects: "[All] sons are Isaac, all fathers are Abraham, and...all Isaacs become Abrahams if they work at it long enough" (278).

The father-son relationship runs throughout Quinn's Book and Legs, too. In the first novel, Quinn's father dies when the boy is young. As a young man, Quinn apprentices to a bawdy canal boatman, John McGee, who cares for him but whose lifestyle is too unstable to sustain him long. Later, Quinn apprentices to newspaper editor Will Canaday. Canaday, a father-figure and mentor, introduces the boy to books and writing, and encourages him in the newspaper trade. Their imitation father-and-son relationship is healthier than that between John and Quinn (not to mention the one between Billy and Francis Phelan), and introduces Quinn to the responsible world of social interac-

tion, love relationships, and a creative career. Canaday is always present for Quinn, and is willing to talk to him about personal as well as social matters.

The main father-son relationship developed in Legs manifests itself in a friendship between Marcus Gorman and Jack Diamond. Gorman's friendship with Legs is also an imitation of the father-son relationship. As a father-substitute for Legs, Gorman is a figure of authority (a lawyer), and acts as a liason between Legs and the respectable society of Albany. He bridges Legs's criminal life with the legal and political world of Albany. In addition, Gorman counsels Legs. He dispenses words of authoritative wisdom (legal advice), and protects Legs from problems he may incur with the law. But Gorman fails as a moral force in the novel and, hence, as a beneficent father figure. He is fascinated by the disreputable gangster, and desires the wild women who move throughout Diamond's world. In a sense, Gorman renders himself the impotent father figure because he cannot remain morally upright in his or society's eyes. This impotence originates in the ill-fated relationship he has with his own father, whose fame as a writer destroyed Marcus's mother's life and hindered the development of meaningful relationships Marcus had opportunity to establish.

Joseph Browne writes about the father substitute in Irish and Irish-American history:

> Generations of Irish and Irish-American sons have seen their fathers downtrodden and debased until the father figure that each son needs to identify with is, at worst, a total stranger, or, at best,..."some fatherly friend." (73)

In an assessment of the significance of the father-son relationship in Irish-American literature, Browne comments on its development by Irish-American writers. His remarks are important for Kennedy's contribution of this form of relationship to Irish-American literature:

> Surely, Irish-American writers don't hold the patent on the theme of alienated fathers and sons, but the manner and frequency with which they develop it are uniquely Irish-American. (73)

Kennedy follows in this manner and frequency of developing the father-son relationship in Irish-American writing by treating it within the larger frame of the influence and interaction of familial relations and by repeatedly layering several father-son relationships upon each other in his novels. This layering effect can be seen, for example, in the relationships of Billy and Francis Phelan, Martin and Edward Daugherty, Legs Diamond and Marcus Gorman, Marcus Gorman and his father, Daniel Quinn and John McGee, and Daniel Quinn and Will Canaday among others.

Also part of family relations in Kennedy's writing is the general influence of Irish-American women in his novels. Influence of the matriarch in Irish-American families is strong, and perhaps one of the greatest sources of the mother's strength is her intense, at times stifling, devotion to the family. "Matriarchal possessiveness," Ken-

nedy acknowledges, is "obviously at work...in Billy Phelan and Ironweed" (Bonnetti, 77). In the latter novel, Billy's mother and sister, also a mother, form a center around which the family gathers in its North End residence. They hold tight reins on their families, and while they may not completely control the behavior of the men outside the home, they often do so within it.

Lawrence McCaffrey writes that the treatment of Irish-American women in Irish-American fiction is not particularly favorable. He says that

> [it] describes Irish-American women as emotionally and morally stronger, more stable, practical, industrious, conservative, and dependable but less imaginative, sensitive, poetic, adventurous, in general less interesting or exciting than Irish-American men.
> ("Fictional Images," 239)[2]

He then goes on to cite Kennedy's writing as an example of this unfavorable treatment. He says that Kennedy's women tend to be "docile and long suffering" (239) wives, typical of the limited dimensions given to women in Irish-American fiction. McCaffrey cites Alice Diamond, in Legs, and Annie Phelan, in both Billy Phelan and Ironweed, as examples of this image. Alice Diamond, for example, stays with the murderous, adulterous gangster "because as a good Irish Catholic woman how could she expiate 'that black terribleness of marrying and loving evil, except by staying married to it?'" ("Fictional Images," 232).

However, in an an interview with Kay Bonnetti in the Missouri Review, Kennedy defends the seemingly unflattering

portraits given to women in his novels. He says that his novels deal primarily with a world where women are not welcome or prevalent--a world of pool halls, gambling, and vagrancy: "[It is] a sexist society and these are sexist men. It's institutional. It's cultural" (77). In addition to the defense of historical purpose and accuracy, Kennedy would also be justified in pointing to those Irish-American women in his novels who are given positive images.

Certain important women in Quinn's Book and Ironweed are depicted as intelligent, honest, sensitive, adventurous, and imaginative. In Quinn's Book, for example, Maud Fallon is independent, forthright, and creative. She becomes a singer and a stage star; she is a poetic, beautiful young woman destined to love Quinn. Also, she is possessed of her own direction in life, and holds off the advances of Quinn until she is prepared to spend her life with him. And Helen Archer, Francis's road companion in Ironweed, is intelligent, honest, and talented. In one scene, she assumes the stage in a bar and sings a beautiful song for the bar's dissipated audience. This scene serves to reveal her inner beauty and dignity, despite her offensive outward appearance as a drunk and a bum. As she commands the respect and attention of an otherwise unruly and derisive group, Helen demonstrates Kennedy's belief that she is an individual whose hard luck and unfortunate cir-

cumstances in life do not negate her self-worth. Kennedy points out that Helen was once raised among refined people. Among them she absorbed a respect for dignified behavior in the face of adversity. Despite physical evidence to the contrary, her inner potrait is one of a beautifully drawn female; it functions as an example of the noble qualities of women in Irish-American literature that Irish-American writers can generate. As a victim of the depression, and desperate to survive in whatever way she can, Helen is forced to live a dissipated life. Her choices result mainly from society rather than from internal character flaws.

Other portrayals of women in Kennedy's novels are not necessarily disparaging, and are certainly within character for the times, settings, and artistic purpose of Kennedy's novels. The images of the women in The Ink Truck are centered somewhere between the relatively unflattering portraits painted in Legs and Billy Phelan and the positive images created in Ironweed and Quinn's Book. Irma, the surrogate mother figure with whom Bailey has an affair in The Ink Truck, is a devoted member of the striking guild. Although she has difficulty managing her feelings toward Bailey, she is independent and intelligent, and she lends personal, moral, and political support to the guild strike. However, Bailey's wife, Grace, cuts an unflattering portrait. She is overweight and lazy, and her spirit has

been crushed by the erratic lifestyle and neglect thrust upon her by Bailey's obsession with the strike. She can barely concentrate on even the most menial task, and often nags or insults Bailey and his guests because she is unhappy. Her faults are not entirely her own, for she is seen as the 1960s wife of a relatively unstable and volatile idealist whose obsessions make him ignorant of her needs and dreams in life.

Other aspects of Irish-American family life which signal adjustment and consent are treated in Kennedy's novels. The McCall family in Billy Phelan rules and dominates with a tribal mentality. The loyalty and possessiveness of this Irish-American clan excludes outsiders, and is obsessed with protecting its members and territory. One of its main functions is to ensure the successful assimilation of its members into society. The constant oral communication--the verbal interaction--in this Irish-American family also characterizes its cohesiveness. The McCall family constantly worries and discusses the fate of Charlie Boy, its kidnapped son, and continues throughout the novel to make deals with the characters who move in and out of its home in the North End.

The Phelan family in both Billy Phelan and Ironweed is also quite verbal although its conversations can be reserved and cautious. Members of the family argue about the behavior of its men, especially that of Billy and Fran-

cis, and the women persist in their concern for proper social behavior. Billy's sister has children who demand constant advice and attention, and she is forever discussing with her husband the activities of Billy and her memories of her father.

Legs's household in the Catskills is also filled with the commotion and conversation associated with Irish-American families. He and his wife, Alice, talk or argue frequently, and members of his gang hang around his farm and ridicule each other. They exchange derogatory quips and cast aspersions on each other as they waste countless idle hours in attendance upon Diamond. Perhaps most of the conversing in _Legs_ takes place between Diamond and Gorman. The two men spend quite a bit of time discussing their family histories, especially their respective relationships to mothers and fathers, and much time is spent planning how Diamond can be extricated from his many legal and political predicaments. Gorman has been hired by Jack particularly for his advice.

Kennedy's concern with unification and syncretism includes the development of politics in his novels. Political issues as a matter of consent pervade Irish-American literature, and are particularly well-developed in Kennedy's writing. As a journalist and ethnic insider on the Albany political scene, Kennedy developed a keen awareness of the city's obsession with politics. Each of his

novels contains political material to varying extents. For example, The Ink Truck, while somewhat devoid of overt references to Irish-American politics, contains political references to anti-establishment values, including distrust of institutions and bureaucracy as well as disdain for capitalism. Legs too is not primarily concerned with politics, but it does discuss some of its aspects, especially in connection with gangsterism and the consequent development of major corruption. Billy Phelan deals substantially with the political scene in depression-era Albany, and Ironweed develops it to some extent because of its close narrative ties to Billy Phelan. Finally, Quinn's Book contains a significant amount of politically thematic material, primarily discussing the historical background of politics in Ireland but also considering John McGee's political activity in New York City.

In The Ink Truck, Bailey assumes the radical, irreverent posture of American youth during the politically volatile 1960s. He challenges the entrenched bureaucratic establishment of the newspaper, championing the ideals of the underdog guild strikers. His communal band of workers stages a prolonged sit-in at the newspaper, and it plots an act of radical civil disobedience in a challenge to the newspaper's management: it seeks to vandalize an ink truck scheduled to arrive at the paper's offices. In addition to seeking radical reform by perpetrating the act of van-

dalism, Bailey openly defies the recalcitrant establishment of conservative managers at the paper by sabotaging one of its parties. He attends the party and proceeds to ridicule its host. In addition to participating in radical activities, Bailey decorates his home with avant-garde, antiestablishment art as well as idealistic slogans espousing working-class reform. As an intellectual and radical, Bailey is an Irish-American completely committed to the cause of seeking justice for the oppressed and disenfranchised working class.

In Legs, narrator Marcus Gorman predicts how the negative image portrayed by Jack Diamond, the notorious gangster, would affect politics in America in the years to come. This negative image, as discussed by Valentine Cunningham, would project Legs as a figure who actually bolstered "the health of the social system..., [making him] the prophet of the intimate interlocking of American city politics and crookery in later decades" (1037). Gorman's prediction:

> It has long been my contention that Jack was not only a political pawn..., but a pawn of the entire decade. Politicians used him...to carry off any vileness that served their ends, beginning with the manipulation of strikebreakers as the decade began and ending with the manipulation of stockbrokers at the end of the crash, a lovely, full, capitalistic circle. Thereafter the pols rejected Jack as unworthy, and tried to destroy him.
>
> But it was Jack and a handful of others...who reversed the process, who became manipulators of the pols, who left a legacy of money and guns that would dominate the American city on through the 1970's.... [He] was unquestionably an ancestral paradigm for modern urban political gangsters, upon whom his

> pioneering and his example were obviously not lost. (215)

According to Kennedy, in _O Albany!_, evidence indicates that Dan O'Connell, actual party boss of the Irish political machine in Albany, probably ordered the police department of Albany, which he controlled, to assassinate Legs early on the morning of December 18, 1931. For years, the Democratic political machine tolerated Legs, perhaps out of respect for one of its own, but eventually it tired of his behavior. Although Irish-American politicians may have stopped Legs, they did not succeed in rooting out the legacy of corruption within their own ranks.

In _O Albany!_, Kennedy describes the core of political life in Albany, a description central to _Billy Phelan_:

> I believe it was a common Albany syndrome for children to grow up obsessed with being a Democrat. Your identity was fixed by both religion and politics, but from the political hierarchy came the way of life: the job, the perpetuation of the job, the dole when there was no job, the loan when there was no dole, the security of the neighborhood, the new streetlight, the new sidewalk, the right to run your bar after hours or to open a card game on the sneak. These things came to you not by right of citizenship. Republicans had no such rights. They came to you because you gave allegiance to Dan O'Connell and his party. The power he held was so pervasive that you often didn't even know it existed until you contravened it. Then God help you, poor soul. Cast into outer darkness. (43-44)

"Cast into outer darkness" is exactly what happens to Billy Phelan when the small-time hustler refuses to divulge the identity or location of Patsy McCall's son's kidnappers. For refusing to be loyal to the party boss, Billy is silenced and ostracized by the entire city, especially by its

Irish enclave. Since nearly all of Albany is controlled by the McCall machine, many of the Irish-Americans obliged to the Democratic patronage system dare not "contravene" Patsy McCall's order, especially since he ensures their jobs and other matters of livelihood which are part of the consent process.

Billy's personal code of ethics prevents him from "ratting" on the kidnappers, and although he does not condone the kidnapping, he cannot bring himself to expose someone on behalf of another's interest. He accepts ostracization instead, and waits out the silencing until Martin Daugherty, in anxious defiance of the McCall family who controls the newspaper for which he works, writes a column praising Billy for his virtuous character and commitment to keeping his word. Daugherty takes pains to explain Billy's disapproval of the kidnapping, focusing his article on Billy's personal integrity.

Most of <u>Billy Phelan</u> revolves around the control exercised by the authoritarian political machine and the close affiliation that politics has with religion in establishing consent relations in the Irish-American community. Kennedy describes in religious terms the political control that activates this novel:

> Democratic aspirants made indispensable quadrennial pilgrimages to genuflect in the McCall cathedral and plead for support. The machine brushed the lives of every Albany citizen from diapers to dotage. (30)

Kennedy, in his reference to the McCall "cathedral," notes

the confluence of politics and religion in the Irish-American community. The political patriarch, Patsy McCall, much like a Catholic priest overseeing his parish, controls the secular flock of Albany's Irish-American community. The Church, in turn, provides a ready source of political support for the machine. The parish, and its position within an interlocking network of other Catholic parishes, can turn out the vote from the pulpit.

McCaffrey and Dillon comment on the confluence of politics and religion in Irish-American cultural life. These critics note that both political patriarch and priest expect loyalty or faith from their institutional members; both of their respective institutions provide solace, protection, and assistance to the unfortunate; both organizations operate from a strong power base:

> Literature has concentrated on the two most important aspects of Irish-America, religion and politics, with fluid borders between the two. Politics defended against nativism, provided social services, and gave access to power and through power to economic opportunities.... Anglo-American protestant prejudice forced Irish leaders of American catholicism [sic] to construct alternative institutions featuring schools, hospitals, orphanages, and asylums. Politicians and priests shared Irish-American leadership. Similar instincts and talents guided men who managed wards and parishes, cities and dioceses. Political machines and the Catholic institutional alternative incorporated catholic [sic] into Irish-America, strengthening both.
> ("Fictional Images," 231-232)

Dillon, who comments on the relationship between religion and politics in "Priests and Politicians: The Fiction of Edwin O'Connor," also makes the point:

> In the past the Church exercised the same type of control over an Irish-American's spiritual life as the Democratic party did over his political life. Both were hierarchical, authoritarian organizations that strengthened his commitment to the community and his sense of identity, his distinctiveness among other immigrants. In most parishes the pastor functioned as a tribal leader, as another boss-politician. He helped to keep cultural traditions alive and defended them against disruptive innovations. He found jobs, settled disputes, gave advice on important social and political questions, rewarded friends and punished dissidents. His word was law because he spoke for both God and city hall. In return for his services he customarily received the devotion and unquestioning support of his flock. (in Casey and Rhodes, 79)

A tradition of confluence between religion and politics is evident in Kennedy's novels with his rendering of scenes in which the corrupt side of the secular world emerges in the lives of Irish-Americans. For example, Francis still votes annually (and illegally) for the Irish Democratic machine. He needs the money, and the corrupt machine pays five dollars a ballot to vagrants who vote repeatedly in a single election. During one election, Francis voted twenty-one times. In this instance, the civil power of politics works hand-in-hand with the moral power of religion; the world according to Albany's Irish Democratic machine operates on the principle that the end justifies the means. If the machine stays in power then it will see to the welfare of its constituency. Even the social and moral infraction of homicide, which resulted when Francis threw a stone at a striker during an industrial dispute, is politically justifiable to the McCalls; eventually it absolves Francis of a death it sees as just one of those unfortunate events

which surfaces amidst the greater cause of a machine-organized labor strike.

Ironweed develops politics to a respectable extent, especially in relation to Billy Phelan. In Ironweed, Francis Phelan comments on the political activity of Albany's more prominent citizens, and the control they had (and still have) over the lives of Irish-Americans living in the city. In a daydream sequence, discussed in detail for its stylistic implications in Chapter IV, Francis observes a parade of Albany's notable and notorious politicians as they file into an imaginary sandlot baseball game in his wife's backyard. These politicians, along with their control of elections and strikes, have lead him into trouble throughout his life. The trouble they make for him, though, is of little concern, for even the very system which causes Francis difficulty also provides for the resolution to his problems. It controls lawyer and friend Marcus Gorman, who takes care of Francis's problems for a nominal fee. The machine system described in Ironweed is one vast interlocking network of favors done and favors returned. By the end of the novel, Francis reflects on Albany's maze of politics and politicians. He realizes that despite the provincialism and parochialism which results from its political intrigue and dealing, Albany is a city richer for its political life and urban dynamism. It takes care of its own, and he has come to respect it and

to rely on it to keep him alive.

Quinn's Book deals with the roots of Irish-American politics. At various points in the novel, protagonist Daniel Quinn refers to the tenant farmer rebellion in Ireland under British occupation and to the inhumane treatment of the Irish struggling under the British Penal Laws. Centuries of oppression shaped the Irish capacity for organization and secrecy as well as their belief in grassroots cohesion. These skills,

> [a]long with advantages other immigrants did not have: a knowledge of the English language and an acquaintance with the dominant Anglo-American culture,...organization and eloquence, a sense of cohesion,...and the beginnings of a political tradition in the nationalist agitation in Ireland,
> (Shannon, The American Irish, 60),

prepared Irish-Americans to achieve a rather ambitious political agenda in the New World.

Irish-Americans in Quinn's Book dominate the urban political scene. For example, John "the Brawn" McGee joins Irish Democrats in New York City's Tammany Hall:

> [In] New York...he felt kin to all that he saw: the antlike mob of Irish, the Irish political radicals, the city politicians, the gamblers, the brawlers, the drinkers.
>
> The power that [John] manifested in galvanizing the attention and loyalty of other men...generated wisdom of the moment in Manhattan's Democratic politicians. And so they hired John to round up a few lads and fend off the gangs hired by politicians of the Native American stripe.... (245-246)

Kennedy's experience as journalist in Albany as well as his own family's political background--"[his] father William was a frequent gambler and political factotum from

the capital's North End," (Sheppard, 80)--influences the development of political themes in his novels. Under the concepts of unity and syncretism, politics (like religion, family, place, and the immigrant journey) brings the Irish-American community together and creates an identity for an ethnic culture whose heritage has been rent by violence, colonialism, famine, disease, and emigration. Kennedy's thematic concerns in their various forms dramatize patterns of the Irish-American experience in his novels. They demonstrate how ethnicity and narrative method function syncretically to demonstrate the process of assimilation and consent for Irish-Americans in the United States, and they serve as an example of how forms of narrative method in literature can effectively express ethnic content. In the following chapter, style will be considered as another example of how narrative method expresses ethnicity.

Chapter III Notes

[1]Kennedy situates his novels in his native Albany, so a sense of place is important to this study. His novels, commonly but perhaps inaccurately called the "Albany trilogy" or "Albany cycle," actually comprise a "legacy" (see Robert Gibb's unpublished dissertation, "The Life of the Soul: William Kennedy, Magical Realist," Lehigh University, 1986, pp. 3-4). Margaret E. Connors, in "The Irish and Irish-American Family in Albany, New York, 1850-1915," in Varieties of Ireland, Varieties of Irish-America, ed. Blanche M. Touhill (St. Louis: College of Arts and Sciences Continuing Education-Extension, U of Missouri-St. Louis, 1976), presents a detailed historical and sociological discussion of the development of the Irish-American community in Albany.

[2]However, Hasia Diner's Erin's Daughters in America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983) makes a strong case for the progressive historical development of Irish-American women in the United States.

CHAPTER IV

ETHNICITY AND STYLE

Kennedy's style reflects his ethnic heritage; its unique linguistic qualities express the ethnic development of his Irish-American characters and themes. Language as a matter of style is central to a study of ethnicity in Kennedy's novels for several reasons: 1) language, especially as Kennedy uses it, is a recurrent topic of critical inquiry in Irish-American literature (the Irish facility with language, in both its oral and literal expression, is well-established); 2) numerous critics have remarked on the expressive lyricism in Kennedy's novels and on the consistency with which he has developed his style since his first novel, _The Ink Truck_; and 3) Kennedy follows in the tradition of Irish-American fiction writers who have made the transition from journalism to literature[1]. Although he follows in this tradition, Kennedy has, unlike many other journalism-trained writers, successfully structured his style in a lyrical mode which places him in the forefront of contemporary American writers.

This chapter on ethnicity and style examines Kennedy's

use of language as an ethnic characteristic, his verbal energy and consistency of stylistic development, and the journalistic and lyrical influences in his novels. These aspects of Kennedy's unique style are examined for Irish-American ethnic content and its demonstration of consent relations. To the extent that language plays a significant role in demonstrating consent relations, Sollors invokes the concept of "generational rhetoric in America" (211), including ways Irish-American writers such as Kennedy discuss "coming of age," separation from the home country and parents, immigration, urbanization, and metaphors--or cultural constructs ("codes, beliefs, rites, and rituals," 9)--of the ethnic experience. Generational rhetoric, Sollors maintains, shows how language native to certain cultures binds the members of an ethnic group into a "cohesive kinship":

> Generational metaphors have served to support (and have sometimes even shaped) interpretations of the conflicts which have emerged from the clash between descent and consent in American culture. Seen this way, the construct of "generations" has been useful both as an instrument of cultural criticism and as a rhetorical device that is used to create a sense of cohesive kinship among the diverse inhabitants of this country. (210)

To the extent that narrative style is a consent-based expression of ethnic content in his novels, Kennedy's use of language relates the process of Irish-Americans earning, instead of inheriting, a place in American culture. As an Irish-American writer examining the cultural experience of

Irish-Americans, he uses ethnic aspects of language to make a place for his prose in an American literature rich in the melting-pot tradition.

Joseph Browne discusses the "linguistic finesse and imaginative vitality" (75) of the Irish-American writer. He notes that "the Irish-American writer has the special advantage of an imagination and a love of words and storytelling that has been carefully and deliberately cultivated for centuries" (74). This tradition of experimentation with the oral and literal nature of words has its roots in Ireland, and, according to Browne, is expressed in the ability of the Irish-American writer to fuse imagination, romance, realism, cynicism, and charm. The fusion of these somewhat contradictory emotions creates the ironic perspective and quizzical charm of the Irish-American storyteller's personality (75).

From his masterful deployment of dialogue, which Penner calls "terse, idiosyncratic, and natural" (7) to the realistic "narrative earth of the novel's events" (Bauer, 6), Kennedy crafts words to achieve certain stylistic effects for his realistic, yet lyrical, novels. A distinction of his unique linguistic style, in both its ethnic content and narrative form, is its lively dialogue and vivid narrative description. Kennedy's realistic style, including its local idioms and diction as well as its sentence variety and tone, couples with a residual lyricism

steeped in Irish words ("pooka," "keenin'"), urban witticisms ("wouldn't give a sick whore a hairpin"), and unusual twists of phrases ("It was near to bury him, is what it was") to create a "distinctive vision and control of language, [an] elegiac tone undercut by irony" (Prescott, "Time of His Life," 78). When his realistic style is fused with this poetic, lyrical style, Kennedy contributes a unique Irish-American voice which at once juxtaposes the seemingly contradictory modes of journalism and lyricism while blending them both into one distinct voice capable of covering a broad range of human emotions. This range is characterized by realism at one extreme and idealism at the other; the unique quality of his Irish-American voice is that it bridges the gap which separates them.

The realism of Kennedy's style, as discussed later in this chapter, is conveyed in the vernacular or colloquial speech of lower and middle-class Irish-Americans living in Albany as well as in the detailed narrative description of the novels. Kennedy uses the speech of the common man, especially when discussing politics (what Shaun O'Connell calls "the common language among Irish-Americans," [395]), to convey the everyday concerns of first, second, and third generation Irish-Americans assimilating to life in a pluralistic society, and he uses detailed description to further complement the realistic portrayal of the Irish-American experience. This realism demonstrates how

Kennedy's experience as a journalist honed his skills for researching factual detail and for listening closely to the subtle interplay of language specific to local Irish-Americans.

For Kennedy, jargon, figures of speech, and idioms convey colloquial realism. His ear, trained in the highly oral environment of his Irish-American family and neighborhood, and later, in the pubs, pool halls, and meeting rooms of Albany, hears the words which signal "cohesive kinship" (Sollors, 210)--familiar language that binds an ethnic group within the larger context of society, shaping its identity. This mastery of portraying authentic ethnicity through language is demonstrated in dialogue which alludes to heritage, political affiliation, religious preference, and other ethnic identity markers. For example, a conversation between Billy Phelan and Charlie McCall about Billy's gaming expertise exposes details which subtly identify ethnic background:

> "Some performance, Billy," said Charlie Boy McCall, standing to stretch his babyfat. "I should learn not to bet against you. You remember the last time?"
>
> "Pool match at the K. of C."
>
> "I bet twenty bucks on some other guy."
>
> "Live and learn, Charlie, live and learn."
>
> "You always were good at everything," Charlie said. "How do you explain that?"
>
> "I say my prayers and vote the right ticket."
>
> "That ain't enough in this town," Charlie said.
>
> "I come from Colonie Street."

> "That says it," said Charlie, who still lived on Colonie Street.
> (Billy Phelan, 10)

This ability to "get in background information, a technique that seems artificial in most other writers" (Penner, 7), distinguishes Kennedy's terse yet detailed and realistic style. In this passage, the reader extracts important information for the development of the plot as well as the influence of the Irish-American experience on the story: not only must one vote for the Irish Democratic machine and keep his religious faith, he must also come from the heart of the Irish enclave--Colonie Street.

In addition to the ethnic signals in Kennedy's dialogue, including those of religion and politics, his narration characterizes the diction of 1930s, depression-era Albany, whose feisty and tenacious working-class Irish dominated urban life. Here, hustler Billy Phelan is completely synchronized with the urban scene of his Irish hometown:

> Billy's native arrogance might well have been a gift of miffed genes, then come to splendid definition through the tests to which a street like Broadway puts a young man on the make: tests designed to refine a breed, enforce a code, exclude all simps and gumps, and deliver into the city's life a man worthy of functioning in this age of nocturnal supremacy. Men like Billy Phelan, forged in the brass of Broadway, send, in the time of their splendor, telegraphic statements of mission: I, you bums, am a winner. And that message, however devoid of Christ-like other-cheekery, dooms the faint-hearted Scotty's of the night, who must sludge along, never knowing how it feels to spill over with the small change of sassiness, how it feels to leave the spillover there on the floor, more where that came from, pal. Leave it for the sweeper. (8)

In this passage, Kennedy employs Sollors's concept of "generational rhetoric" (211) to convey Billy's "coming of age"--his separation from established society. Ironically, this generational rhetoric, which Billy feels distinguishes him from the norm, actually serves as a backdrop to frame Billy's central position within it; his idiomatic expressions, street jargon, and "tough-guy" demeanor convey the authentic atmosphere of Albany's Irish North End scene which predominated in the 1930s.

Charles Fanning, in his introduction to Mr. Dooley and the Chicago Irish: The Autobiography of a Nineteenth Century Ethnic Group, comments on Finley Peter Dunne's uncanny ability to render authentic atmosphere. Dunne's sense of dialect writing captures authentic Irish-American urban atmosphere by concentrating on speech:

> Dunne was...aware of the dangers of dialect writing.... [A]nd here he successfully walked a tightrope, managing to suggest the brogue without sacrificing clarity. Working simply, with a few sure strokes, he made of the Dooley voice a serviceable, flexible medium. The dialect is conveyed by occasional contraction (th' and gettin') and expansion (gr-rand and ta-arget), with a sprinkling of Irish pronunciations (quite [quiet], jood [dude], a cup of tay) and holdovers from the Gaelic (soggarth [priest], omadhon [lout], gossoon [little boy]). Dunne's ear for the rhythms and timing of this Irish American urban speech is everywhere remarkable. In even the slightest Dooley piece, we hear a living voice. (xx)

The living voice of authentic dialect writing is conveyed by Kennedy's writing as well. Through his expression of Irish-American dialect, including brogue, contraction, pronunciations, vocabulary, rhythms, and timing, Kennedy

imparts his unique style in language tailored to the requirements of generational rhetoric and cohesive kinship. The following passage demonstrates Kennedy's use of vocabulary, contraction, brogue, and inverted syntax to render authentic Irish dialect:

> "Then we went to me uncle's place on the road to Tipperary, and he took us in and paid for Pa to go to America. Pa himself is all of us that went over. The night before he left we had a wake for his leavin', with me ma keenin' for hours over his goin'. 'Ye won't come back for us,' she kept saying. It was near to bury him, is what it was. But he sent remittances and got us all over here, me and me sister and me mother. And didn't we all come to this town of Albany, because we couldn't fit in New York in the wee room Pa lived in. We was here just a few weeks and no money left when he got the foundry job, and then, a little after that, they broke his skull, the man did, the bastard man." (114)

Contraction, pronunciation, brogue, and well-timed witticism are at work in Legs, too:

> "So in comes big Barney Duffy with his flashlight and shines it on Bones sitting on poor Jack's chest. 'Sweet mother of mine,' says Barney and he grabbed Bones by the collar and elbow and lifted him off poor Jack like a dirty sock. 'Haven'tcha no manners atall?' Barney says to him. 'I meant no harm,' says Bones. 'It's a nasty thing you've done,' says Barney, 'sittin' on a dead man's chest.' 'On the grave of me mother I tripped and fell,' says Bones. 'Don't be swearing on your mother at a filthy time like this,' says Barney, 'you ought to be ashamed.' 'Oh I am,' says Bones, 'on the grave of me mother I am.' And then Barney threw us both out, and I said to Bones on the way down the stairs, 'I didn't know your mother was in the grave,' and he says to me, 'Well, she's not, the old fart-in-the-bottle, but she oughta be.'" (12)

Such colorful dialect writing, including its jargon and slang, subscribes to the binding power of kinship rhetoric in a melting-pot society. Sollors notes that this

"generational rhetoric" (211), group-specific language that acts as a verbal cohesive among the members of an ethnic culture, is prominent in America; it characterizes the efforts of consent-conscious ethnics to establish a unique national identity within a pluralistic society. While such early attempts at identity formation may relax or dissipate as each generation successively assimilates to the host society, it does not mandate the loss of ethnic identity. In fact, language is one way which cultural heritage may be maintained during the consent process.

Sollors maintains that generational rhetoric nurtures cohesive kinship themes. Citing Karl Mannheim's essay, "The Problem of Generations" (1928), Sollors says that motifs of generational rhetoric, including ones which indicate "fresh contact" (Mannheim, 293; Sollors, 211), stem from ethnic experience in America. The immigrant journey experience, for example, is an instance of "fresh contact." The newly arrived immigrant experiences an opportunity to encounter a host society for the first time. Themes of fresh contact apply to American literature quite well:

> Many motifs of American culture stem from the stresses of adolescence and ethnogenesis (the individual and the collective "coming of age" after separating from a parent/country), of urbanization, of immigration, and of social mobility. In the United States what Mannheim terms "fresh contact" is experienced in a persistent and cumulative fashion. Many stories told in this country are stories of several "fresh contact" themes combined. Generational rhetoric may be one appropriate expression and vehicle of this experience. (211)

Quinn's Book, an example of the Bildungsroman, deals with

the stresses of "'coming of age' after separating from a parent/country," including immigration, urbanization, and social mobility. Daniel Quinn's life makes "fresh contact" with America, and is chronicled from its early years, when he is orphaned, to his adulthood, when he contemplates marriage to Maud. Throughout the development of Daniel Quinn's life, Kennedy re-creates stages of growth through which his protagonist must pass. For example, Kennedy develops the apprentice-master relationship Quinn has with Will Canaday. He also portrays Quinn's growing awareness of sexuality and women and the protagonist's development of a mature love relationship. Kennedy even chronicles with meticulous care Quinn's deepening awareness of his natural family's ethnic history and the influence it has on Quinn's separation from and re-discovery of it.

Similar to Quinn's Book, Billy Phelan considers "coming of age," especially after separation from a parent (e.g., father-son relations). Kennedy delves into Billy's growing awareness of his father's dissipated life, and simultaneously considers the urbanization of the American Irish and their adjustment to social mobility, industrial occupations, and urban life. These adjustments are embodied in Billy's personal life as well as that of his father, Francis. Both characters act out in their interpersonal relationship with each other some of the struggles which many Irish-Americans experienced in the New World.

The hardships they encounter include the father-son relationship, lack of employment, struggling to survive in the city, and attempting to gain social respect.

Many of these struggles which begin in Billy Phelan are carried over into Ironweed. Francis Phelan suffers the devastating effects of being involved in a labor dispute at his factory; he endures difficulty as a vagrant struggling to stay afloat in a hostile urban environment; and he strives constantly to regain presence of mind and personal conviction in order to return to society and his family in Albany's North End.

Legs demonstrates the issues of readjustment and growth more subtly than, but just as effectively as, Quinn's Book, Billy Phelan, and Ironweed. Diamond is adolescent in his behavior, and, like Billy Phelan, he suffers from separation anxiety and an insatiable desire to get ahead quickly in the world. However, unlike small-time gambler Billy, he frequently takes his rebelliousness too far. Diamond is driven to achieve his ideas of success so strongly that he commits murder, adultery, and felonies. His escapades are legendary, and they serve as a source of extraordinary excitement for a romantic public enthralled with his achievements. In his desire to succeed, Diamond maintains his strong ethnic ties through a blind, almost superstitious, sense of devotion to his tasks, and he performs for the world on the urban stage.

The Ink Truck is an urban novel, and the adolescent-minded Bailey persists beyond all reason, and with boundless energy, in efforts to perpetuate the newspaper strike--to break ties with the establishment. Even ostracization by the newspaper management and society at large does not deter him. Like Billy and Francis, Bailey is unwilling to submit to the demands of what he perceives to be an unprincipled bureaucracy and indifferent society; his refusal to conform affects not only him but his wife and friends as well. Separation and return operate in this novel about a protagonist who, in many ways, symbolizes an ethnic culture trying to consent to the ways of the New World. The ideas of separation and return are especially critical in the dream sequences of Bailey involving reflection on the Irish immigrant experience and in the scenes of the labor strike which require vigilant effort.

Because generational rhetoric imparts familiarity, security, and belonging to an ethnic group, it makes the group's homogenous members feel a part of the expansive fabric of a heterogeneous, melting-pot society. In other words, generational rhetoric simultaneously lends a sense of identity and belonging to the ethnic group, at least in its early stages of arrival, as it serves as a linguistic bridge to the multi-ethnic host society. Having an accent *is* American; belonging to a group *is* American, too. By adhering to a group and its norms, especially to an ethnic

group's nationality, one consents to the norms of the pluralistic, host society--itself a conglomeration of different national identities. Kennedy's use of generational rhetoric, including characteristic rhetorical devices, demonstrates how Irish-Americans establish consent relations in their assimilation to life in America.

Several critics and historians, notably Lawrence McCaffrey, Charles Fanning, Werner Sollors, and Shaun O'Connell, comment on the journalistic backgrounds of many Irish-American writers and how journalism functioned as an inroad to literary success for them. McCaffrey, in "Fictional Images of Irish-America," writes that Irish-American literature "emerged from journalism" (228) and that Irish journalists such as "Thomas Davis of the _Nation_ and Charles Kickham of _The Irish People_ formed the personality of Irish-America" (228). Later, in the 1870s, John Boyle O'Reilly and others wrote poetry and prose for the Irish-American newspaper, _The Boston Pilot_. In the 1890s, Finley Peter Dunne's Mr. Dooley essays appeared in the _The Chicago Evening Post_. In _The Irish Diaspora in America_, McCaffrey writes that Dunne "was one of the first Irishmen to bridge the gap between journalism and literature":

> In the twentieth century, Irish-American literature was inspired by the works of Yeats, Joyce, Synge, Sean O'Casey, Frank O'Connor, and O'Faolain, but in the United States, Irish literature had a journalistic base. Irish-Americans contributed writing ability, imagination, and adventurous personalities to American newspapers. (84)

Fanning, in the introduction to his edited collection of Dunne's essays, Mr. Dooley and the Chicago Irish, says that the atmosphere of American journalism during the late nineteenth century was exciting, an excitement preceeded by the mid-nineteenth century (1840s to 50s) development of the "brand-new telegraph line known then as 'O'Rielly's Lightning Line'" (Sollors, 246). According to Sollors, Henry O'Rielly (originally O'Reilly) was an "Irish-born...urban journalist in the boom years of Rochester" (246) who convinced investors to finance this new means of communication.

Another significant step toward literary success made by Irish-Americans working in journalism was taken by an Irish-born American, Samuel Sidney McClure. He invented the newspaper syndicate, which allowed for widespread publication of a writer's output. In addition, the syndicate provided national recognition for writers whose literary works might receive some attention by virtue of an audience's familiarity with their names as well as writing. Sollors says that McClure sold stories to newspapers for five to twenty dollars a piece (246).

Irish-American journalism was fully operational in 1876, when John Boyle O'Reilly became editor of The Pilot, a Boston newspaper which began "publication in 1838 as an 'Irish and Catholic journal'" (O'Connell, 385). This journal provided Irish immigrants, as well as established

Irish-Americans, with "everything from the tales of saints and martyrs to news from Ireland" (385). O'Connell goes on to say that the "Pilot remains today a central resource of the Irish-American experience and a primary example of Irish-American detachment from the mainstream of Boston culture" (386). Interestingly enough, the Pilot, under the editorship of O'Reilly, actually "played down Irish cultural separation and praised America, dramatizing the tradition of the Irish-American's steady, unquestioning patriotism" (386). This willing devotion to America supports Sollors's idea that Irish-American ethnicity, including its literary output, has roots in consent-based relations.

Kennedy follows in the tradition of Irish-American writers breaking into literature through the journalism trade. This avenue to a literary career was opened to the Irish by their facility with the English language, their experience with politics, and their cultural inclination toward oral and literal expression. As noted, Kennedy is from the ranks of journalistically-trained Irish-American writers. He often writes in a vigorous, terse style which employs concrete detail and seeks clarity in common diction, succinct and pithy sentences, and brief paragraphs. He prefers writers who, like himself, create from specific experiences:

> Writers I have valued...always drew upon the specifics of their experiences, not free-floating value judgments but the specific of Algeria in Camus, for instance, or

> the war in Hemingway, or Babylon in Fitzgerald, or the Southern aristocracy in Faulkner. (Croyden, 53)

His own realistic, direct style derives from actual experience with the forgotten and oppressed, those who are "haunted by annihilation, by life making [them] inconsequential" (Croyden, 70). The hardships of the unfortunate serve as sources for "the dark, brooding style of his novels" (70).

The overall effect of Kennedy's journalistic style is to render the authentic voice of experience. Kennedy's concern with details, facts, and research substantiates his journalism training. In addition, he has a sparse, unsentimental style marked by the harsh and crusty growl of the urban existentialist. In the following passage of realistic dialogue, Kennedy captures the immediacy and hard, dry crack of the satirical, urban voice well-versed in expressing the heart of an issue:

> "He came to see you, didn't he? Why the hell does he want to talk about Snyder's Lake, for chrissake? He's writing a book and he wants a layoff and he wants protection. You didn't give him a goddamn thing to make him think you even know what the hell a number is."
>
> "He knows."
>
> "He does like hell. How could he? You didn't talk about having the okay or that you got cash to guarantee his pay-offs. You didn't say how late he could call in a play or tell him he wouldn't have to worry getting stuck with a number because you'll give him the last call and get rid of it for him. You didn't tell him doodley bejesus. George, what the hell are you doing in the rackets? You ought to be selling golf clubs." (Billy Phelan, 158)

Towers calls this realistic style Kennedy's "breezy,

quasi-journalistic narrative voice" (11); however, he also remarks that a substantial movement from the journalistic to a poetic, or lyrical, style eventually takes place in the course of Kennedy's literary development. This change in style is noticeable as the reader progresses from the earlier novels to _Ironweed_:

> _Ironweed_...reveals a radical shift not only in its angle of vision but also in its style. In it Kennedy largely abandons the rather breezy, quasi-journalistic narrative voice of his previous fiction and resorts to a more poetically charged, often surrealistic use of language as he re-creates the experiences and mental states of an alcoholic bum, Francis Phelan.... (11)

Kennedy's style in _Ironweed_ remains consistent in its effort to develop contrasts; this effort renders a unique voice to Irish-American literature and to American literature in general. Towers says Kennedy's Irish-American voice in _Ironweed_ establishes the

> contrast between sordid event and exalted illusion, between remembered past and threadbare present, between precise description and blunt colloquialism on the one hand and on the other a style so heightened as to become rhapsodic. (12)

This interchange of styles from the journalistic to the lyrical ushers in Kennedy's distinct Irish-American voice, one which simultaneously juxtaposes the seemingly contradictory styles of journalism and lyricism while it also fuses them in an Irish-American imagination open to a range of human emotions: from pessimism to optimism; from realism to idealism.

Similar to Dunne, Kennedy manages "to bridge the gap

between journalism and literature" (McCaffrey, Diaspora, 84), propelling the "city room slang, love of fact, bottom-line bluntness, and headline speed" (Flower, 375) of Legs and Billy Phelan into the poetic and lyrical style of Quinn's Book and Ironweed. Hunt notes that the "most impressive feature in Ironweed is the ease with which Kennedy moves...from brutal realism to lyrical and symbolic resonances" (374). Citing a passage which depicts Kennedy's ability to shift styles, Flower conveys Kennedy's versatility:

> Fine writing creeps in to overpower the colloquial rightness. The blear-eyed bum [Francis Phelan] is made to think, "He was at war with himself, his private factions mutually bellicose, and if he was ever to survive, it would be with the help not of any socialistic god but with a clear head and a steady eye for the truth; for the guilt he felt was not worth the dying." (Hudson Review, 376; Ironweed, 207)

Such prosaic language substantiates Kennedy's ability to bridge the gap between a colloquial style and the fine writing of a lyrical style because it demonstrates the capacity of his writing to use the common voice of a bum to express the abstract emotional concepts felt inside an experienced soul. A shift from "colloquial rightness" to "fine writing" is only part of Kennedy's concern with conveying a lyrical style, though. The ability of his protagonists to give voice to--to integrate--the lyrical effects of his writing is also important.

In "The Lyrical Novel: Retrospect and Prognosis," Ralph Freedman discusses the "lyrical 'I'" (191). Accord-

ing to Freedman, the protagonist-storyteller (Phelan and Quinn are storytellers of sorts) integrates the lyrical effects or process of the fictional work. In a sense, the protagonist becomes the lyrical "I" who filters perceptions through a window-like eye on the world:

> The "I" of the lyric becomes the protagonist, who refashions the world through his perceptions and renders it as a form of the imagination.... The lyrical process expands because the lyrical "I" is also an experiencing protagonist. (191)

Kennedy employs the lyrical "I" in a style which moves fluidly between the journalist's sense of colloquial and realistic writing and the lyrical novelist's sense of prosaic language. For example, in a beautiful passage, charged with the rhythmic cadence and poetic diction of well-wrought syntax, Kennedy describes the exaltation of his poet-bum; he voices the perceptions of Francis's lyrical, yet realistically perceptive, imagination:

> The new and frigid air of November lay on Francis like a blanket of glass. Its weight rendered him motionless and brought peace to his body, and the stillness brought a cessation of anguish to his brain. In a dream he was only just beginning to enter, horns and mountains rose up out of the earth, the horns--ethereal, trumpets--sounding with a virtuosity equal to the perilousness of the crags and cornices of the mountainous pathways. Francis recognized the song the trumpets played and he floated with its melody. Then, yielding not without trepidation to its coded urgency, he ascended bodily into the exalted reaches of the world where the song had been composed so long ago. And he slept. (Ironweed, 90)

In this passage, Francis's soul (Freedman's lyrical "I") ascends on the music of Kennedy's lyrical prose. The rhythm and diction of the passage climbs to a crescendo, an

explosion of sound which heralds the exalted dead into the kingdom of peace.

For example, the passages starts out softly and quietly with Francis falling asleep beneath the protective cover of a crystal blanket of frost. The cold air stills, or brings peace, to his tired body and anxiety-fatigued mind. As he drifts into deep sleep, Francis's dreams take over reality; they carry him into a sublime world where nature expresses the divine glory of heaven. The trumpets announce Francis's arrival, and usher him into the region of the exalted dead--into God's kingdom. In his sublime dream, Francis enters the world of the dead without dying himself. The rhythm of the prose progesses from an early, slow, soft (pianissimo) movement, through a strong (forte) movement signaled by blaring horns announcing the sublime beauty of God's natural world, to a finale of "coded imagery" where Francis enters an altered state of mind (a dream). The accompaniment of musical, ethereal trumpets complements the bibilical imagery of bodily ascension and exalted reaches. These biblical elements contribute to a sort of narrative symphony that progresses by movements in a literary passage where imagination is heightened by the inspirational impact of Kennedy's lyrical style.

In a manner similar to Joyce, Kennedy also uses stream of consciousness to explore the past and to convey a lyrical style. A 500-word sentence of stream-of-consciousness

prose in Ironweed (156-57) captures Francis's free association on his experiences with women. The associative thought process in this passage originates in contemporary North End Albany and reaches back to archetypal images of an "ancient cave or some bogside shanty" (156-157) in Ireland. The stream technique carries Francis back into the repository of memory, to a past predating his existence, where he can assess the connections of events in history which have led to his present-day existence.

Another stream-of-consciousness sequence conveys one of Francis's concentrated daydream sequences about Albany's ethnic history. In this passage, local citizens appear in his vision of a sandlot baseball game (Francis was once a professional baseball player) at his wife's home in the North End:

> The bleachers were all up, and men were filing silently into them and sitting down, right here in Annie's backyard, in front of God and the dog and all: Bill Corbin, who ran for sheriff in the nineties and got beat and turned Republican, and Perry Marsolais, who inherited a fortune from his mother and drank it up and ended up raking leaves for the city, and Iron Joe himself with his big mustache and big belly and big ruby stickpin, and Spiff Dwyer in his nifty pinched fedora, and young George Quinn and young Martin Daugherty, the bat boys, and Martin's grandfather Emmett Daugherty, the wild Fenian who talked so fierce and splendid and put the radical light in Francis's eye with his stories of how moneymen used workers to get rich and treated the Irish like pigdog paddyniggers, and Patsy McCall, who grew up to run the city and was carrying his ball glove in his left hand, and some men Francis did not know even in 1899, for they were only hangers-on at the saloon, men who followed the doings of Iron Joe's Wheelbarrow Boys, and who came to the beer picnic this day to celebrate the Boys' winning the Albany-Troy League pennant. (176)

Francis's repeated use of "and" and the parade of names in this dream sequence stimulates the rhapsodic flow of one thought to the next. Also in this scene, Francis's poetic train of thought explores the historical content of his life as well as that of Albany. As an Albany Irishman, Francis's personal history relays the ethnic history of the city's inhabitants; Kennedy presents this flow of ethnic content in stream-of-consciousness prose.

Kennedy's language of the stream technique is a lyrical expression of Francis's inner soul (Freedman's lyrical "I"). Robert Gibb, in his dissertation, "The Life of the Soul: William Kennedy, Magical Realist" (1986), explains:

> Ironweed could not have the content it does without using the language it does. The novel's lyricism, to echo Wordsworth, is not the dress but the embodiment of its thought.... (51)

What distinguishes Kennedy's use of stream of consciousness from a mere imitation of Joyce is the significance with which he employs the technique to define Francis's personality; he uses stream of consciousness to portray Francis, an uneducated vagrant, as actually being a man of integrity--a bum with a poet's soul. This poetic consciousness of Francis conveys Kennedy's distinct Irish-American voice. Kennedy makes stream-of-consciousness prose, the "language of memory" (Craig, 494), emphasize its capacity to show the interdependence of ethnic content and lyrical style.

Similar to Ironweed, Quinn's Book is also a lyrical

novel. Its poetic and imagistic language displays the lyrical "I," rhythmic cadence, and poetic diction of a musical narrative--a story with a prose style that focuses on the lyrical process and a protagonist whose first-person voice is lyrically expressive. The lyrical "I" in Quinn's Book is more directly expressed by the protagonist's actual words than it is by those of the protagonist in Ironweed. As a journalist and would-be novelist, Daniel Quinn, protagonist and narrator of Quinn's Book, articulates the force of history from within and voices it in his writing.

For Quinn, truth resides in fiction. Toward the end of the novel, he decides, as a result of his experience as a war correspondent, "to live [his] life according to the word" (280). He also realizes that journalistic prose does not fully express what he intends words to mean, so he decides to become a novelist--"to move beyond the barricade of empty facts into some grander sphere" (280). This sphere is the lyrical world of the literary imagination, where "the harmony that [lurks] beneath all contraries and cacophonies [is] revealed" (280). This harmony is an expression of lyrical language underlying Quinn's consciousness: "Mine was clearly a life fulfilled by language, and I was coming to see that through that, and only that, could I perhaps in some unknown way gild...my own thrumming symphony of mysteries" (280). Language for Quinn, the lyrical "I," is a poetic diction expressing the historical memory

of a poet.

Kennedy's choice of words infuses many passages in Quinn's Book with vivid imagery and verbal energy. Several examples demonstrate his invigorated style as well as the lyricism created by its diction. Kennedy describes a dead body:

> [Its] skin was a gray transparency, the color of exhausted night, the perfection of [its] death exuding a radiance that awakened swooning sounds in the onlookers. (42)

And the powerful verbal energy in the description of a storm scene in the opening pages of Quinn's Book demonstrates Kennedy's capacity to forge a spectacular array of images into a crescendo of lyrical narration:

> The torrent...roared down upon us from the northern river--a rush of ice...careening with tumbling, tumultuous dudgeon..., dislodging...heat-weakened blankets of ice, crunching and cracking and pushing...until...the glut bedammed itself...with chunks and prisms of ice in a sudden upthrust....
>
> The wall of ice...continued building...a pyramid, a mountain, an instant Albany iceberg.... It grew swiftly upward with boundless force, brilliant chaos,...which exploded...into a Vesuvius of crystal, showering the shores of both Albany and Greenbush with fragments.... (10-11)

This graphic depiction of an ice storm reconstructs a scene nearly sublime in effect. The primal forces of nature render a visual and aural display of power; Kennedy heightens the impact with descriptive adjectives (tumbling, tumultuous, heat-weakened, boundless), forceful verbs (roared, careening, dislodging, crunching, cracking, exploded), and substantial nouns (torrent, rush, glut,

chunks, pyramid, mountain, iceberg). The scene is terrifying, but not chaotic; the storm may be a frightening show of nature's irrational strength, but its sublime beauty is replete with lyrical purpose. Kennedy's use of alliterative consonants and vowels (roared...rush; tumbling, tumultuous dudgeon; heat-weakened; crushing...cracking; instant Albany iceberg; boundless...brilliant; showering...shores), ononomatopoeia (roared, rush, crunching, cracking), and repetition (especially of participles: careening, tumbling, dislodging, crunching, cracking, pushing, building, showering) re-creates the feeling of nature's rebellion against the rational, technological inventions of man, including his boats, wagons, buildings, and other objects of civic activity and progress.

Kennedy's lyrical style signals a mastery of language. This mastery is characterized by an energetic devotion to creating good literature and by the historical influence of his Irish-American literary heritage. It reflects a cultural expertise with language that has been "carefully and deliberately cultivated for centuries" (Browne, 74). David Craig remarks on the historical basis of Kennedy's language and its influence on his style:

> Style is [a]...distinguishing feature of Kennedy's fiction. Kennedy loves language, loves it in the way that Irish-American descendants of James Joyce do. To Kennedy, language offers countless variations of style, diction, and expression. His favorite stylistic modes include the language of memory, the prose poetry in which language aspires to lyric expressiveness, and the gritty dialogue of the down and out (always a source of energy in Kennedy's novels). Kennedy weaves these and

> many other styles together, until his books have the variousness of March weather. (494)

Examining Kennedy's use of language for journalistic and lyrical modes of style offers insight to the Irish-American experience in his novels. It affords the reader an opportunity to experience both styles in Kennedy's writing as distinct approaches to conveying this experience, but it also reveals the fusion of these distinct styles into one unique, yet fully human, Irish-American voice conveying a broad range of emotions.

Chapter IV Notes

[1]Kennedy began his literary career as an assistant sports editor and columnist for the Glen Falls Post Star in New York in 1949 and 1950. After two years (1950-52) as a sports writer and columnist for Army newspapers, he joined the Albany Times Union (1952-56). He then moved to San Juan, Puerto Rico, where he wrote for the Puerto Rico World Journal (1956). He briefly worked for the Miami Herald (1957), and later served as Puerto Rico correspondent for Time-Life publications. After writing for two years for various newspapers and newsletters, Kennedy founded and served as managing editor of the San Juan Star (1959-61). He began a full-time writing career in 1961, producing criticism, reviews, and fiction. Since 1983, he has been Professor of English at the State University of New York at Albany (from Contemporary Novelists, 4th ed., D. L. Kirkpatrick, ed., New York: St. Martin's, 1986: 493).

CHAPTER V

A PLACE FOR WILLIAM KENNEDY IN IRISH-AMERICAN LITERATURE

The interrelation of ethnic content and narrative method in the novels of William Kennedy depicts portions of the Irish-American experience. The Ink Truck, Legs, Billy Phelan's Greatest Game, Ironweed, and Quinn's Book comprise a series of novels which chronicle Irish-American ethnicity in the latter part of the nineteenth and the earlier part of the twentieth centuries. This dissertation shows how ethnicity interacts with character, theme, and style to recreate the Irish-American experience in Kennedy's novels. By examining the novels from these views, it also portrays how Irish-Americans demonstrate Werner Sollors's theory of consent relations in their process of assimilation and acculturation to America.

The approach in Chapter I has been to present Sollors's theory of consent relations as it is used in this study, to outline some of the ethnic historical and literary context of the Irish-American experience, and to apply Sollor's

theory of consent relations to ethnic content in Kennedy's writing. Each of Chapters II, III, and IV has then dealt with ethnicity as it emerges in the narrative forms of character, theme, and style respectively. Ethnic content in Kennedy's novels interacts with narrative method to relate how forms of narrative method (mainly of literary interest) interact with ethnic content (of historical or sociological concern) to generate original and provocative questions about literature.

This dissertation shows how Irish-Americans have earned their unique American identity without sacrificing completely their ethnic identity, including its heritage and traditions; in other words, it has conveyed how Irish-Americans in Kennedy's novels demonstrate consent relations in the process of assimilating themselves to life in the New World. In this discussion of consent relations in Kennedy's work, I have simultaneously explored the author's contribution to the proliferation of Irish-American literature in general, a contribution which deserves academic attention.

This present and final chapter, Chapter V, makes some concluding remarks about Sollors's theory as a critical approach in this disseration, considers Kennedy's place within the context of various historical stages of Irish-American literature, and highlights some contemporary thinking about Irish-American literature and Kennedy's situation with respect to it. This chapter acknowledges and establishes

Kennedy as a leader as well as an original voice in the contemporary effort to produce Irish-American literature.

Sollors maintains that ethnic identification in America is consent-based. Ethnic identity, especially as portrayed in literature, often idealizes the concept of inheritance, but Sollors insists that more adequate means of establishing ethnic identity have been developed, including a "process known as 'ethnicization'" (245):

> As Americans of different backgrounds share larger and larger areas of overlapping culture, they keep insisting on symbolic distinctions (often not those of "ancient origin" but freshly invented ones), the process known as "ethnicization." Instead of looking at various ethnic traditions as merely growing from very parochial beginnings to modernist assimilation, we may also see ethnic identification itself as a modern phenomenon. (245)

One of the results of this modern phenomenon of inventing ethnic distinctions is the desire to seek one's roots in literature, especially literature chronicling the ethnic experience.

Kennedy's nonstereotypical portrayal of characterization, theme, and style to present Irish-American ethnicity in his novels offers substantial material for an examination of Sollors's theory of consent and distinguishes his writing in the field of Irish-American literature. For example, many of the characters Kennedy develops are sensitive, intelligent, articulate, and poetic. According to articles by Lawrence McCaffrey ("Fictional Images of Irish-America"), Margaret Connors ("Historical and Fic-

tional Stereotypes of the Irish"), and Coilin Owens ("The Stage Irishman Transported"), these qualities have been lacking in Irish-American literature. However, as discussed in Chapter II, nearly all of Kennedy's characters have qualities which reveal them as unique individuals. The sum of their individual identities, in turn, represents their ethnic group identity. An interesting point about Kennedy's portrayal of Irish-American ethnic identity is that he either avoids stereotypical views of Irish ethnics or uses such views sparingly to serve as counterpoints of distinction for developing his characters.

Kennedy also depicts consent-based relations by writing about thematic issues recurrent in the lives of Irish-Americans striving to survive and endure in the New World. As discussed in Chapter III, Kennedy's treatment of the Irish-American immigrant experience along with the influence and interaction of family, politics, and religion is original in Irish-American literature. For example, he writes about the devastating experience of disease and unemployment for the Irish immigrant, the behavior of the father and mother and children within the family, the influence of the Irish Democratic machine in Albany, and the interaction of politics and religion in Irish-American life. His treatment of these last thematic issues--politics and religion--while familiar to many readers of Irish-American literature, is discussed in Chapter III be-

cause of the traditional influence of both politics and religion in the lives of Irish-Americans.

Kennedy's linguistic style also emerges as a unique contribution to the Irish-American experience in American literature. Not only does Kennedy draw upon the Irish-American literary tradition in his display of linguistic style, he also crafts his expressions with respect for the regional dialect of the Irish-Americans in Albany; as noted in Chapter IV, he often writes in the jargon of 1930s, depression-era Albany--the colloquial speech of its lower- and middle-class citizens. Because Kennedy's Irish-American characters come from diverse backgrounds, they reflect a range of linguistic expressions. Some are writers, editors, priests, and lawyers, and others are politicians, factory workers, domestics, policemen, bums, and thugs. Kennedy's command of all their various linguistic expressions is original and masterful.

What most accurately characterizes Kennedy's realistic portrayal of Irish-American ethnicity is how he shows Irish-Americans adapting to their new roles in America. He reveals their family struggles with sympathy for economic, social, and emotional hardship. He demonstrates the Irish control of politics in America through their parochial, grassroots sense of loyalty, and he shows how pressures of survival changed, yet reinforced, their religious faith as they consented to ways of the urban environment. Kennedy

also shows how language, especially the native ability to speak English, has reinforced the traditions of Irish-Americans by allowing them to adapt swiftly and with little cultural interruption to the New World. As a result, his Irish-Americans retained their ethnic identity as much as possible yet became part of the American identity. Kennedy takes a fresh approach to Irish-American literature; it is realistic, compassionate, and individualistic. The result is a dignified and fully human Irish-American voice.

Malcolm Cowley, in The Literary Situation, remarks on the "racial provenience of American writers" (152), noting that several literary patterns distinguish the "integration of a new [immigrant] group into American culture" (153). Among the various racial groups that produce literary artists, the "literary pattern is clearest in the case of the Irish, because of their group consciousness and their long experience as an oppressed minority" (153). Cowley, in concurring with Charles Fanning (Mr. Dooley, xiii) and Lawrence McCaffrey (Diaspora, 84), notes that back in the 1890s Finley Peter Dunne was the "first Irish-American author who won, and deserved to win, a national reputation..." (153). F. Scott Fitzgerald was next in line as a truly significant Irish-American writer. Cowley notes that Fitzgerald was followed by James T. Farrell, whose downtrodden characters effectively dramatized the sordid and oppressed conditions of first, second, and third gener-

ation Irish at the turn of the century--those who struggled to assimilate themselves into urban, industrial Chicago. Cowley concludes that the "Irish were literary pioneers" (154).

Journalism was the literary inroad for many Irish-American authors who sought to write literature. Several reasons support their gravitation to journalism as an avenue to a literary career. First, the Irish already spoke English upon arrival in the United States; second, they came from a tradition of fine literature in Ireland; third, journalists of the Young Ireland movement, including Thomas Davis, John Blake Dillon, and Charles Gavan Duffy (they published the Nation in Ireland), inspired many Irish-American journalists; and fourth, "O'Rielly's [sic] Lightning Line" (Sollors, 246) and Samuel Sydney McClure's newspaper syndicate generated widespread attention to Irish-American writing. Eventually, an authentic Irish-American literature sprang from journalism, notably in the work of Finley Peter Dunne. Soon thereafter, notes McCaffrey, early Irish-American authors

> pioneered American urban ghetto literature, at the same time initiating a respectable school of Irish-American literature that came to include works by Eugene O'Neill, Edwin O'Connor, J.F. Powers, Jimmy Breslin, Pete Hamill, Joe Flaherty, Elizabeth Cullinan, Tom McHale, Thomas J. Fleming, Frank D. Gilroy, William Gibson, William Alfred, and many others.
> (McCaffrey, Diaspora, 84)[1]

Margaret Connors, in "Historical and Fictional Stereotypes of the Irish" (in Casey and Rhodes, 1-12),

makes the case that Irish-American writers still have a tendency to portray stereotypical images of the Irish in America. She maintains that many Irish-American authors still create characters of limited personality development. For example, they often portray an Irish husband who can be a "hard-drinking wife-beater" or who can be "cheerful when sober." Also the "quarrelsome" and "unsociable" Irish wife and mother, "determined...to hold the family together," surfaces regularly in contemporary Irish-American writing. Daughters still are often portrayed as either "careless and promiscuous" or "industrious and religious" domestics. Many of these unflattering portraits, along with the "caricatures of pipe-smoking Paddies, slatternly domestics, and riotous corner boys," were the result of nineteenth century prejudices. Some changes did occur, however. Connors says that "[clergy] and laity, dismayed at anti-Catholic literature and at the temptations posed by dime novels, began to write fiction with what Paul Messbarger[2] has called 'parochial purpose'" (2-3).

As mentioned earlier, Kennedy is a contemporary Irish-American author who does not stereotype images of his ethnicity without literary purpose. His intention is not to maintain the "ethnic...exclusivism" (13) that Sollors cautions against in Beyond Ethnicity but to develop characters, themes, and a writing style which depict the originality of Irish-Americans as they demonstrate consent

relations in America. For example, Kennedy does not view Francis Phelan as just a "hard-drinking" Irishman; to do so would be to misrepresent the message of his character's ethnicity. Rather, Kennedy portrays Francis as a clear-thinking, poetic man of intense compassion. He develops the character of Francis as an alcoholic bum to dramatize, among other things, the personal, yet universal, plight of the unfortunate. And Billy Phelan, Francis's son, is not just a "riotous corner boy" given to carousing and gambling. He is a man of his word, a human being of strong personal integrity; these qualities emerge in <u>Billy Phelan</u> to define the protagonist's personal code of ethics.

Although some critics, including McCaffrey ("Fictional Images," 239) and Bonnetti ("Interview," 77), point to Kennedy's stereotypical portraits of Irish-American women in <u>Legs</u>, <u>Billy Phelan</u>, and <u>Ironweed</u>, they are not fully justified in their criticisms. To write of women otherwise in, for example, <u>Billy Phelan</u>, would have made the novel historically inaccurate, notes Kennedy: "[It] was a book about men, about a society of males. You didn't <u>see</u> women in that society...tables for ladies, back entrance, that's the way it was" (Bonnetti, 77). Despite the criticisms aimed at his treatment of women, Kennedy can portray female characters with admirable qualities. In <u>The Ink Truck</u>, for instance, the women are mostly drawn with individualism and independence; they are often feminine and nurturant; many

of them are strong and thoughtful. Quinn's Book also presents women favorably. They are adventurers, actresses, and poets, and their personalities are explored for integrity of character and independence of thought. As individuals, they are portrayed as civilized personalities enduring the chaos of war, murder, and cruelty only to emerge strengthened for the experience. As a group, they are socially, culturally, and domestically considerate. Ultimately, Kennedy's female characters encourage others as they simultaneously accomplish for themselves.

In his introduction to The Exiles of Erin: Nineteenth-Century Irish-American Fiction (1987), Fanning discusses three nineteenth-century Irish-American literary generations by discussing the "intended audience for literature in each" (14). His examination helps situate Kennedy with respect to the contemporary revival of Irish-American literature. The first generation wrote for the

> pre-Famine Irish-American community [which] contained a large number of educated professionals, notably lawyers, and its writers produced a significant amount of fiction in which satire and parody predominate. (14)

This initial generation of writers sought to eliminate literary propaganda by satirizing "political campaign biographies, anti-Catholic 'convent revelations', anti-Irish character stereotyping, and the simplistic moralizing plots of popular sentimental fiction" (14). The audience, Fanning points out, was not only Irish-American; it was "a

wider and well-read public, appreciative of sophisticated literary effects" (14).

Following the pre-Famine generation came a reactionary generation; it heralded the arrival of the Famine. Fanning calls this reactionary generation the Famine generation, and notes that it wrote serious didactic fiction "dedicated to helping the people stay Catholic and survive in the New World" (14). This group of Irish-American writers lacked the sophistication of the pre-Famine satirists, and wrote almost entirely "for [its] own kind" (14). Its conservative, practical fiction did little to advance the sophistication of Irish-American literature. Instead, the Famine generation indulged itself directly in propagandistic prose, unabashedly producing fiction loaded with "sentimental rhetoric, stereotyped characters, simplistic conflicts, and moralizing themes" (14).

The third generation of Irish-American writers surfaced after 1875. Fanning writes that "[it] joined the enthusiastic debate between advocates of genteel romantic fiction and those of the 'new realism'" (15), reproducing both a middle-class audience hungry for didactic, propagandistic fiction as well as a sophisticated literary audience appreciative of satire and parody. The "weaker writers, the genteel romancers" (15), appealed to the maudlin tastes of the middle class, and the "stronger writers, the realists" (15), wrote for a broader audience interested in

ethnic culture.

Kennedy neither writes the didactic fiction of the Famine (second) generation of Irish-American authors nor is he strictly within the purview of either the first or the third generations of writers. Instead, he is somewhat closely aligned with the satiric voice of the pre-Famine (first) generation and the "new realism" of the third generation. His unique idiomatic expressions and authentic dialect writing predisposes him to a recently revived, satiric voice in contemporary Irish-American writing. And his harsh, often brutal, realism shuns "sentimental rhetoric, stereotyped character, simplistic conflicts, and moralizing themes" (14). _Ironweed_, for example, contains incisive and poetic passages, and its highly individualized protagonist has a complex personality whose conflicts arise not only from guilt but from concern for losing his identity in an economically depressed society.

Kennedy's writing combines the sophisticated narrative techniques of lyrical fiction and the details of journalism. The result is a fresh and original voice in Irish-American fiction. His writing is neither as heavy-handed and depressing as the social realism of Farrell nor as seductive as the subtle working of Irish themes in Fitzgerald's romantic vision. Kennedy ranges between the literary intentions of these two authors. Consequently, he renders himself accessible to a diverse literary audience.

In fact, his use of "magical realism"[3] places his writing before an international readership that appreciates experimentation with contemporary literary techniques. For a writer normally acknowledged as a regionalist, Kennedy's attempt to undertake the practice of "magical realism" has revived Irish-American literature and placed it before an international audience. Kennedy's effort to contribute a fresh, original voice to Irish-American literature has resulted in a cosmopolitan voice heard on the stage of contemporary American literature. George Hunt, Peter Prescott, Webster Schott, and Mary Gordon acknowledge this attempt. Hunt says,

> Back in the early 1960's literary critics of a chauvinist bent or not could point with pride toward F. Scott Fitzgerald, John O'Hara, James T. Farrell, Edwin O'Connor, Flannery O'Connor, J.F. Powers and others whose work was in our fiction's front rank. But 20 years then came and went, and whether or not the Irish sensibility...had grown runtish as some nasties intimated, the fact was that no Irish-American writer had in the interim produced a body of work that could be reckoned first-rate. That is, until...William Kennedy. (373)

Prescott writes of _Ironweed_ and its author: "This novel, if only enough people will pay attention, should place him among the best of our current American novelists" ("Albany's Mean Streets," 72). And regarding the Albany trilogy (_Legs_, _Billy Phelan_, and _Ironweed_), Schott says that "William Kennedy is making American literature" (6). Finally, Gordon lists Kennedy as the most recent candidate among Irish-American novelists to include in a course in

American Irish literature: "After [him], there would be nowhere to go" (37).

William Kennedy need not be the end of the line, though. Some authors appended to Casey and Rhodes's Irish-American Fiction: Essays in Criticism could extend Gordon's course list, for, as the list implies, a need will always exist for an Irish-American literature beyond even that of Kennedy. Before embarking on their own creative ventures, however, future writers of Irish-American literature would do well to listen to William Kennedy's hopeful and dignified voice--one of the finest in the Irish-American experience.

Chapter V Notes

[1]See Daniel J. Casey and Robert E. Rhodes, eds., in Irish-American Fiction: Essays in Criticism, for a somewhat exhaustive list of Irish-American authors and their works. Fanning says in the preface that this "book examines the whole ground of Irish-American writing" (ix); it focuses on modern Irish-American writers.

[2]Paul Messbarger's book, Fiction with a Parochial Purpose (Boston: Boston UP, 1971), discusses American Catholic fiction from 1884-1900, a period when, according to Messbarger, "the Church appeared first to have developed a direction, a moral authority, and a clear promise, and then to have lost that momentum--all within a single generation" (Preface, viii). Messbarger's focus on popular fiction read by Catholics is pertinent to Connors's point and to this dissertation as a whole because he examines "the way a minority group accommodates itself to the greater society...and how literature itself becomes a functional tool in the process of integration and assimilation" (viii). In Chapter 5 of his book, "Catholic Fiction with a Parochial Purpose," Messbarger gives "two options for the Catholic writer" (81): parochial fiction and cosmopolitan fiction. The first alternative is discussed throughout Chapter 5 as a matter of "social utility' (87).

[3]See Robert Gibb's "The Life of the Soul: William Kennedy, Magical Realist" (Diss. Lehigh University, 1986) for a thorough discussion of magical realism, "a mode concerned, through its presentation of reality, with a conception of what reality might be" (8).

In his discussion, Gibb takes care to note the origin of magical realism as a critical term used in art history "to distinguish some of the work of Rene Magritte, Pierre Roy, and Paul Delvaux from the more Freudian-based dream imagery of the Surrealists" (5). Gibb then moves his discussion into literature with the assistance of David Young and Keith Hollaman's "Introduction" (1-8) to the anthology, Magical Realist Fiction (New York: Longman, 1984). In his analysis of the literary application of the term, Gibb says that in "magical realism the real isn't abandoned; it is extended" ("Life of the Soul," 6). Magical realism, he notes, begins in everyday reality ("the external Albany," [6]) and "recognizes the external world as real" (7), but it also admits that dreams are a part of that reality. The writer of magical realism attempts to demonstrate "the workings of the miraculous" (7) in reality. Gibb concludes that magical realism involves the psychological dimension of reality, including the unconscious mind, archetypes, dream-visions, and eternity (7).

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The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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