ABSTRACT

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Constructing Irish Masculinity: Re-defining and Re-imagining Irish Masculinity through the Short Stories of Kevin Barry

(Under the direction of Professor Mary Helen Thuente.)

As a colonized subject, the Irish man was precluded from privileges associated with traditional or “hegemonic” masculinity. In an attempt to re-masculate and redefine Irish manhood, depictions of Irish masculinity have evolved from the Stage Irish man to the hyper-masculine nationalist to the Celtic Tiger, and finally to the modern man. First cast as an ape-like, simple-minded brute, the Irish man embodied stereotypes of violence, drunkenness and expectations of social and economic dominance associated with hegemonic and Irish masculinity. However, modernity forced the Irish man to once again explore new modes of masculinity in the face of shifting gender roles and gender fluidity.

Kevin Barry’s portrayal of male protagonists in seven stories found in his collections *There are Little Kingdoms* and *Dark Lies the Island* explores the construction and complexities of modern Irish masculinity by personifying the struggle of the modern Irish man to establish his identity. “Atlantic City,” “Last Days of the Buffalo,” “Breakfast Wine,” “Beer Trip to Llandudno,” “Wistful England,” “White Hitachi,” and “Fjord of Killary” present men who struggle to establish their masculine identities in a modern world, “doing” gender as they attempt to come to terms with gender fluidity and to find their own place on modernity’s spectrum of hybrid masculinities. Each of “Barry’s men” calls into question derogatory assumptions and stereotypes revolving around Irish masculinity, including those of simple-witted, gargantuan brutality, the exhibition of physical and verbal aggression, excessive alcoholic consumption, and interactions and relationships between men and women. “Barry’s men” also embody significant emotional and mental states as they function in settings where they are displaced from personal, public, and economic power. From struggling with physical and gender displacement, “Barry’s men” progress from “doing” gender, to redefining stereotypes, to ultimately presenting a modern, more fluid model of Irish masculinity.