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Social Sciences

Ireland Unhinged: Encounters with a Wildly Changing Country
David Monagan
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In the mid-1990's, the Celtic Tiger, as the Irish economic boom was nicknamed, roared throughout the land bringing unprecedented wealth to the populace and precipitating a development frenzy. Wrecking balls flew into old historic buildings making way for new glass-encased apartment complexes and verdant hillsides mushroomed with million-dollar homes. In the midst of all this was a transplanted American carefully watching the fray unfold in his adopted country.

Monagan, author of *Jaywalking with the Irish*, packed up his family in 2000 and left Connecticut in search of an adventure. "Ireland was my tonic in those days—improvisational, wickedly fresh, and so very human—just what the doctor ordered after the New England chill." Soon, however, he noticed that the rich Irish culture he remembered from his year as a student in Dublin in 1973 appeared to be eroding, as disposable income soared and consumerism followed. SUVs packed the roadways, private helicopters filled the skies, and the price of a cheeseburger in Dublin rose to $25.

In response, Monagan began a quest to find a place that still held true to the traditional Irish spirit and way of life. On his journeys around the country he met with acclaimed authors and poets, a white witch fighting to preserve land belonging to the fairies, an embittered ex-IRA soldier, and myriad other characters who populated pubs and farms. He sought their impressions of the old Ireland and the new culture brought on by the economic boom. Many worried that the soul of Ireland was being lost, but not many predicted that just a few years later the economy would nosedive, taking Ireland from the wealthiest nation in Europe to, once again, one of its poorest.

Ireland Unhinged is a memoir packed with well-researched information on both the economy and history of Ireland. It is written in the cadence of an Irish speaker which, while it takes some time to digest, is filled with both wry humor and a poetic sensibility. It will appeal

both to those interested in a unique chapter of the world-wide economic problems of recent years and to those who simply would like a feel for what Monagan calls “one of the most extraordinary places on earth, the motherland of eccentricity and dream, subversion and surprise.”

Christine Canfield