



## City of Bohane

*Kevin Barry*

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**City of Bohane** Kevin Barry

**Shortlisted for the 2011 Costa First Novel Award**

Forty years in the future. The once-great city of Bohane on the west coast of Ireland is on its knees, infested by vice and split along tribal lines. There are the posh parts of town, but it is in the slums and backstreets of Smoketown, the tower blocks of the Northside Rises and the eerie bogs of Big Nothin' that the city really lives.

For years, the city has been in the cool grip of Logan Hartnett, the dapper godfather of the Hartnett Fancy gang. But there's trouble in the air. They say his old nemesis is back in town; his trusted henchmen are getting ambitious; and his missus wants him to give it all up and go straight... And then there's his mother.

*City of Bohane* is a visionary novel that blends influences from film and the graphic novel, from Trojan beats and calypso rhythms, from Celtic myth and legend, from fado and the sagas, and from all the great inheritance of Irish literature. A work of mesmerising imagination and vaulting linguistic invention, it is a taste of the glorious and new.

## City of Bohane Details

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Author : Kevin Barry

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# From Reader Review City of Bohane for online ebook

## Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

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## Ethel Rohan says

Kevin Barry is a genius. He is doing with his life and his gift exactly what he was put on this earth to do and continues the long and great line of Irish writers. His debut novel *City of Bohane* is an original and remarkable work of inventiveness.

Set in the fictional and futuristic city of Bohane, somewhere in the West of Ireland in 2053, this is a dark and harrowing tale that is at turns horrific and stunning. For all the memorable and well-dressed characters, gripping plot twists, and brilliant molding of lyric language, the work holds up a truth about the Irish psyche that has long and deeply troubled me: A savage violence. We're fierce about land, love, family, and reputation and all that brings out both the worst and the best in us. Of course in both Irish life and literature, it helps that however dire our circumstances and dark our urges, we know how to have a good time. *City of Bohane* is also, thankfully, sprinkled with wit, humor and humanity.

This novel won't be for everyone. *City of Bohane* is not an easy read and requires work of the reader. There's a large and colorful--and sometimes confusing--cast, dense dialect and colloquialisms, and visceral violence. Hell, Barry even makes up words throughout, and delightfully so. For me, it is the strange, twisted and beautiful language that makes this novel so compelling. As I read, I felt fortunate to gawp at this wondrous treasure trove of Barry's creativity and mastery.

I could qualify all of the above with 'in my humble opinion,' but feck that.

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## Owen Curtsinger says

While reading this book I was reminded of what it's like to read William Gibson's *Neuromancer* for the first time. At first it's a little unclear what the meat of the story is, but if you just hang on and let the rhythm and cadence of the prose take you for a ride, you will find yourself in a new and fascinating place. And what a place; Bohane is a weird and wild mash-up of Jamaican shanty-towns, Soviet tenements, and Little Italy and Chinatown. It's true that the plot and characters are lacking a little cohesiveness, but ultimately you'll find yourself turning the pages not for the story-line, but to explore the city as Barry describes it. You feel yourself prowling backstreets and lingering in the memories that the lights and the smells conjure. Reading the novel is similar to reading a poem in which the message may be hard to grasp at first, but the language is so rich and deftly wielded that you've got to stop and admire the lush imagery that you find yourself conjuring.

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## GoldGato says

*A place should never for too long go against its nature.*

Bohane. Mid-21st century after some un-named calamity which has affected Ireland and, apparently, Britain also. Perhaps the rest of the world? That is one of the conceits of this ~~sci-fi~~ ~~steampunk~~ something novel, the first by the wonderful Kevin Barry. Bohane is a wicked city...think San Francisco of Barbary Coast fame in the 19th century. Everyone has a game, an angle to play and safety and security are part of the *Lost-Time*.

There are no illustrations for this book, because the author provides the Irish words, but is this a picture of Bohane?

Or this?

It's a city that has lived on a *diet of hard booze and fat pills against the pain* of its long existence. It's where we are heading, now, as we destroy the planet of trees and shelter and clean air. The novel centers around the denizens (I wouldn't call them citizens) of the town, none of whom seem to have any redeeming characteristics. Over it all is Girly Hartnett, a 90+ year-old tough-ass octogenarian whose son is the head of the toughest gang.

*Girly liked old movies and menthol ciggies and plotting the city's continued derangement.*

Girly is whacked. Ya sketchin'?

The Pikeys rule Smoketown but make a play for the Traces, because the Logan needs the help. Ya heedin'? Wolfie Stammer is terrifying but lovelorn for his Jennie, the devious player being groomed by the Girly. Each character is described in turns of the clothes they wear, as style is all even as the world is dying. Ya flockin'?

The polis are even worse than the gangstas and the newspaper men record it all. Brews and bushweed and elderflower gin. Who freaks the clips, ya zazzing'? Not one decent lot to choose from...except maybe the lone "good guys", the paramedics. Yeah, that's the life in the Bohane because if you leave the dark city and its dark waters and its maddened seagulls, you can only go to the Big Nothin', where the children are mutes and grow up with the Goatspeak.

Ya poobahin'?

The first 63 pages were agony for me. I've never been a reader who can tolerate dialects and Cagney-esque rapidfire exchanges. Then I hit page 64, and the world opened up for me. Yeah. Kick a plan then the sky

burst. Bohane is Mad Max. Bohane is Digible Planets. Bohane is Miles. Bohane is the Beats. Bohane is Oliver Reed in *The Damned*.

Is it Joyce for the here-and-the-now? Can't speak to that, but what a ride. The last chapter keeps the visual and musical vibes glowin' with a wild *West Side Story* montage coming to mind. Yeah.

Snazzy, no?

Book Season = Winter (freestyle morphine jazz)

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## Paul says

City of Bohane takes place 40 years in the future, in a fictional Irish town by the name of Bohane. Some kind of socioeconomic calamity has taken place and the 'distant' past is referred to as "the lost times". It's unclear exactly what has transpired to bring Bohane to it's knees, but all indications are that it was something, as i say, of an economic collapse. The result is that the town is largely run by several gangs that coexist in a fragile detente. Law and order is largely impotent and redundant. But things are coming to a crisis point as the leaders of the various factions are aging and the youngsters are getting frisky.

The almost (at times), impenetrable 'Oirish' slang make this heavy going at first, but in short order one comes to understand, through the author's deft use of context, the meaning of even the most obscure terms. It gives the story an authenticity that might otherwise be lacking and at times lends a grim humour to what at times is a brutal recital of violence and mayhem.

Quote;

Jenni Ching was on her hands and knees, with her slender rump in the air, and a brass herb-pipe clamped in her gob. She cast over her shoulder a bored glance at the Gant. He looked as if his heart might at any moment explode. His face was purpled, blotched, sweaty.

"If y'wanna take five," she said, jus' holler."

The mocking tone was too much for him, was too delicious, and the Gant spent himself. He fell onto his back and was ashamed then. His heart was a rabid pit bull loose inside his chest.

Jenni Ching consulted the wall clock.

"Three minutes even," she said. "You're comin' on, kid."

and;

Bohane was thrun down, as we say, with winter.

Oh give us a grim Tuesday of December, with the hardwind taking schleps at our heads, and the rain coming slantways off that hideous fucking ocean, and the grapes nearly frozen off us, and the dirty ice caked up top of the puddles, and we are not happy, exactly, but satisfied in our despair.

Highly recommended.

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## **Zoeytron says**

What a tasty feast this was! I suspect this book will either be devoured with great relish or it will have you demanding to be excused from the table - pronto. Be prepared for something different from almost any other book you might pick up to read. A fresh idea, what a novelty!

As the story opens, the city 'had taken to the winter like an old dog to its blanket'. Bohane is over-run with street gangs. The reader will need to hang tough with the street jargon and just roll with it. Context is king here, and you'll get used to it soon enough. There are "f" bombs aplenty, so be advised. If this is a deal-breaker for you, you'll want to find something else to read.

Loved the author's descriptions of the folk of Bohane. 'Tommy the Keep, a wee hairy-chested turnip of a man', and The Gant, who 'had a pair of hands on him the size of Belfast sinks'. And how about this one - 'Eyes Cusack, named so for the two tiny smoking holes set deep in a broad porridgy face'. It was noted that Eyes Cusack also sported an unfortunate calypso-style mustache.

We learn of mute children who have the gift o' goat-speak, and we are admonished to always be wary of a thin butcher. There are herb pipes and dream pipes, winklepickers, and smiles packed with nuance. The mention of a Zippo lighter ('no other providing sufficient protection against the abrupt gusts') was fun.

This was a first-reads giveaway and it is a keeper, thank you. I was genuinely sorry for it to be over.

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## **Rob Kitchin says**

Kevin Barry is well known for his short stories. He has a vivid imagination and is an excellent wordsmith, crafting some lovely, expressive prose. City of Bohane has received high praise from some of Ireland's literary stars such as Roddy Doyle, Joseph O'Connor and Hugo Hamilton. I therefore had high expectations for Barry's first novel. With the exception of the prose and some of the characterisation, for me, it failed to deliver. For the most part, the characters are difficult to identify with and I couldn't have cared less what happened to them; they're a bunch of scoundrels hooked on vice and violence. The tale has no back story. We're forty years into the future, Ireland seems to have slipped backwards a couple of hundred years minus the colonial rule, and we have no idea as to why this occurred or the general wider socio-political landscape of Ireland or Europe. Rather we're isolated in a fictional city, with the sea on one side and surrounded by bog otherwise, and all we have is a nostalgia for a 'lost-time' that's never explained. The plot is wafer thin and is largely feuding clans seeking to remain in charge of the city. My sense when I got to the end was, 'yes, and?' Given the literary plaudits, I was expecting a lot more and yet there is no great sociological, political or economic unveiling, no sense of philosophical or theological reflection, no feeling that story served any purpose. Barry does manage to create some sense of place, but the city is very simply structured into five zones, lacking the complexity of a real place and it's really not clear how large a town it actually is. It felt quite small town to me, certainly not a large city. There is also a first person narrator who drifts in very occasionally and seemingly with no purpose. Barry rightly deserves the plaudits for his ability as a wordsmith, and there are some very nice passages in City of Bohane, but as a novel length story for me it fell short of what it could have been.

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## Hugh says

This is my second experience of Kevin Barry - I read the equally compelling and original but very different *Beatlebone* in January. This one is a mixture of genres that I would normally steer well clear of - gangland thriller, dystopian fantasy, steampunk and graphic novel clichés abound. What carries it is the sheer vibrancy and humour of the language and the many cultural reference points that echo the likes of Joyce and Flann O'Brien.

The setting is the fictional city of Bohane, on the west coast of Ireland and the time is 2053 to 2054, in a country that has become an anarchic battleground between rival gangs, loosely under the watch of a corrupt city authority and a police force that is largely content to keep the main players in place. For a futuristic setting, the reference points are surprisingly old-fashioned, in fact the dominant inspiration seems to be the 50s and early 60s, and many Irish traditions and cultural divisions survive in modified form. The language is a complex hybrid of Irish street speak and other influences such as Rastafarianism and the Catholic church, and the characters are all cartoonish and larger than life.

I found the whole thing surprisingly compulsive and satisfying, and although Barry's vision is a bleak, profane and violent one, dark humour is never very far from the surface. In some ways this reminded me of his compatriot and namesake Sebastian Barry's *Days Without End*, another book which shouldn't work but is sustained by the brilliance of its narrative voice.

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## Krista says

Whatever's wrong with us is coming in off that river. No argument: the taint of badness in the city's air is a taint off that river. This is the Bohane river we're talking about. A blackwater surge, malevolent, it roars in off the Big Nothin' wastes and the city was spawned by it and was named for it: city of Bohane.

Set in a near-future (2053), vaguely post-apocalyptic fictional city on Ireland's west coast, *City of Bohane* is fueled by sex, drugs, and gang violence, written in language gorgeously inventive, and while it was a fun and interesting read in the moment, it amounts to little more in the end than the “wisps of steam like spectral maggots (that) rose from their damp coats in the inn's fuggyheat”. I kept waiting for the *point* of this book – perhaps some explanation for the lost-time years that led to this bizarre society; an explanation that would then lay bare some truth of humanity, as the great books do – but there's nothing below the surface here: this is like a very clever language experiment that delights only at the sentence-level. But oh, those sentences do delight.

“Hear this!” Ol' Boy cried. “Bohane city don't always gots to be a gang-fight story. We can give 'em a good aul' tangle o' romance an' all, y'check me?”

There's something quite surreal about *City of Bohane*, and perhaps there's an unwritten rule to surrealism that one shouldn't ever explain; never attempt to make the vision plausible. This is only forty years (from the time of the book's publication) into Ireland's future, but most technology has been wiped out (there are jukeboxes and record players but no television; knives but not guns; trains but no cars), the political system is anarchic (with a gang, or Fancy, ruling the bowl of the city and maintaining Calm with the rival factions in the surrounding hills and the near-savages on the beach), the religious zealots pray to "Sweet Baba Jay on the cross", people listen and dance to calypso music as though it's a secret *lingua franca*, and the gangbangers dress like dandies. None of this is explained except for some vague references to the lost-years and some reel-to-reel films that show the streets of Bohane once bustling with cars – this is our own world, but somehow, lost. We're promised a good aul' tangle o' romance, so let's meet Logan, leader of the Hartnett Fancy:

He had that Back Trace look to him: a dapper buck in a natty-boy Crombie, the Crombie draped all casual-like over the shoulders of a pale grey Eyetie suit, mohair. Mouth of teeth on him like a vandalised graveyard but we all have our crosses. It was a pair of hand-stitched Portuguese boots that slapped his footfall, and the stress that fell, the emphasis, was money.

Logan has been devotedly married to Macu (for Immaculata; an Iberian beauty whose wonky eye everyone fetishises) for twenty-five years, and the man he stole her from – the Gant, who used to head the Fancy – is rumoured to have returned to the city.

The Gant's humours were in rum condition – he was about fit for a bleed of leeches. His moods were too swift on the turn. He was watchful of them. He had a sack of tawny wine on him. He untwisted its cap and took a pull on it for the spurt of life – medicinal. There was pikey blood in the Gant, of course – the name, even, was an old pikey handle – but then there's pikey blood in most of us around this city. Have a scone at the old gaatch of us – the slope-shouldered carry, the belligerence of the stride, the smokey hazel of our eyes; officer material we are not. Of course if you were going by the reckoning of pikey bones the Gant was old bones now for certain. He was fifty years to paradise.

Not only does Logan need to deal with old jealousies, but the clans in the hills are spoiling for a fight, and as young folks are wont to do – as he himself had done a quarter century earlier – Logan's lieutenants are plotting their own takeover of the Fancy. Seemingly besieged, Logan proposes a Feud (which is a formal declaration, written in his ninety-year-old mother, Girly's, "mannish" hand and delivered to the rival leader on foot), and Eyes Cusack accepts by handing over a ceremonial receipt (in this case, a drawing of a stick-figure man with genitals growing out of his forehead). As the hilltop clans begin their war-drumming and light huge bonfires encircling the bowl of Bohane, the temper in the city becomes frenzied and anticipatory:

He always enjoyed the eve of a Feud. He knew that Eyes Cusack would not for long keep his mongrels leashed, and his mood was high and expectant. When you were running a Fancy, regular demonstrations of rage were needed to keep the town in check, and just as importantly, the Fancy boys in trim. Too much sweetness and light and they got fat, unpleasantly smiley and



over-interested in the fashion mags.

This isn't actually the climax of the book, but there is much reefing committed with shkelpers, against Fancy, Cusack, and pikey alike, and factions and alliances are regrouped and redrawn; paving the way for the actual climax. This occurs at the August Fair – when the summer heat draws in an obscuring Murk from the nearby ocean – and the narrative is suddenly told in jump scenes: a fat and blind old madame sings a dirge; a feral goat is chosen and raised on a platform for sacrifice; the clickheels on a Fancy's boots trace a route over the cobblestoned wynds; Girly rises from her bed and gets dressed to go out for the first time in decades; the hoss polis face down the sand-pikeys; jump; jump; jump. The action culminates in a satisfying ending, but then...it's over and nothing has been learned. The action has all been for its own sake.

I believe in the maxim, “Good books don't make good movies”, and the best thing I can say for *City of Bohane* is that I think it would make an excellent movie (currently in development). It's all atmosphere and costumes and bloody, sexy action; a steampunk *Mad Max*; *A Clockwork Orange* without the message. I picked up this book because it won The International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award for 2013, and I thought that would guarantee a good, literary read. It's not quite that (I don't really understand what the IMPAC jury was thinking here), but I did enjoy this book in the moment.

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## **Ian Young says**

“Tricky the paths a long love might follow, like the spiral down twists of a raindrop on a windowpane.” Kevin Barry's first novel is underpinned by the story of such a love, but distinguished by its swagger and vitality.

The City of Bohane is somewhere in the West of Ireland in the distant future, an Ireland that is real yet warped and seen through a dirty and distorted lens. The language of the book reflects the vision of the City – it too is bent and twisted, mixed with partly real, partly imagined dialect. Bohane is full of passionate life and vicious, sudden death, seedy glamour and sudden violence. In Bohane emotions are strong, as are colours, smells and squalor. The people of Bohane are proud, of their heritage and fashion and place in the world. They are outsiders, yet see themselves as its centre. Stretching into the distance are the Boglands, emptying their waters and people into the cesspit of the city. There is no advance technology here. It is unclear what has happened in the world, but there has been a regression to a more primitive way of life.

Kevin Barry has written an unusual and original novel which will not be easily forgotten by anyone who reads it. Logan Hartnett, the Long Fella, is its central character, an albino who runs the Hartnett Fancy which in turn controls the underside of Bohane – and in Bohane, the underside is what matters. He is known for his style and his ruthlessness, but also for his jealous devotion to one woman, Macu, who has been by his side for thirty years. In Bohane terms Logan is an old man, and young rivals are beginning to circle – Wolfie Stanners and Fucker Burke, inseparable since their shooldays, and Jenny Ching, the girl who is coming between them and has ambitions of her own. Into this mix comes The Gant, Logan's chief rival for the affections of Macu from years gone by. The Hartnett Fancy will have to fight for their position as the families from the tenements on the hill become restless, and the Sand Pikeys from the Dunes encroach from the rear and Logan will have to work hard to retain his position and his woman. Overseeing it all, his ancient mother Girly Hartnett plots and schemes from her attic bedroom.

The City of Bohane contains many stories. Love, ambition and violence are central. The writing is striking and at times clearly cinematic – inventive and playful language, striking word pictures, close ups and

tracking shots. There are recurring motifs, such as descriptions of the clothes of the central characters. Above all there is extraordinary vitality and exuberance, laughter and tragedy. The men are larger than life, the women seductive and deceptive and ultimately in charge. There is more than a hint of Gypsy Wedding but this is a well crafted and memorable piece of writing that should appeal to anyone who loves a dystopian view of the world. Kevin Barry is a very talented Irish writer – his two volumes of short stories are markedly different to this novel and show the breadth of his vision. If you haven't discovered him, now is a good time to start.

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## **Janet says**

Profane, cinematic, hilarious, elegiac, brutal, poetic, original. I found *City of Bohane* to be all these things and more. The language is amazing. It took me a chapter or two to adjust to the vernacular Kevin Barry's characters employ, but it was well worth the effort. (You can view the author reading from the book at <http://vimeo.com/28112291>)

At the center of the story is the struggle between rival gangs for control of the Irish city of Bohane, but there are also several fascinating subplots involving the personal lives of the gang members. The story takes place in 2053 or thereabouts but this is a world where people interact face to face, not electronically. Mastery of technology is not what's important in Bohane; it's loyalty, charisma and ruthlessness that are indispensable in the age old pursuit of power.

I can't overstate how much I reveled in the language of this book. Two small examples:

"Mouth of teeth on him like a vandalised graveyard but we all have our crosses."

"Macu, polite as the seeping of a poison"

There are many other examples but chances are they're too bawdy or profane to post here. And be forewarned that these pages are populated by people who are not shy about employing slurs.

I would recommend *City of Bohane* to readers who like books by Paul Murray, Irvine Welsh, Dennis Lehane and George Pelecanos. Also recommended to lovers of Irish fiction and literary fiction readers for whom language is paramount.

If you think of books in cinematic terms, I would compare this novel to the films of Quentin Tarantino, Martin Scorsese, and Guy Ritchie.

So visit Bohane. I found it an unforgettable place and I think you will too.

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## **karen says**

i do not know if you will like this book.

usually, i am pretty good with the readers' advisory thing - i have this innate sense that automatically provides me with a list of names of people i think would appreciate the book, even if i didn't like it myself. call it a gift.

but this one - i am genuinely at a loss. i know that *i* liked it, but i also know that i am a little bit damaged from having read it. like my brain has been mooshed a little and i have had a hard time readjusting.

so it takes place in ireland, but some future-ireland that is unlike the ireland i love, in fiction anyway. and it is in dialect. sort of. not the pitch-perfect dialogue of tana french's Faithful Place, which made me feel wonderful, but an invented dialect, complete with burgess-esque slang and cadence that is very jarring.

i mean, you tell me:

*a pack of wannabe Fancy boys - fourteenish, hormonal, all bumfluff 'taches and suicide eyes, with the wantaway croak of bravado in their breaking voices - traced the hipsway of the rhythm outside the calypso joint, drew circles in the air with the winkled tips of their patent booties, passed along a coochie - eight of 'em drawin' on it - and they kept watch - so shyly - on the Cafe Aliados down the way*

you see??

*the Gant's humours were in a rum condition - he was about fit for a bleed of leeches. his moods were too swift on the turn. he was watchful of them. he had a sack of tawny wine on him. he untwisted its cap and took a pull on it for the spurt of life - medicinal. there was pikey blood in the Gant, of course - the name, even, was an old pikey handle- but then there's pikey blood in most of us around this city. have a scone at the old gaatch of us - the slope-shouldered carry, the belligerence of the stride, the smoky hazel of our eyes; officer material we are not. of course if you were going by the reckoning of pikey bones the Gant was old bones now for certain. he was fifty years to paradise.*

and usually that would give me fits.

but after a while, you kind of get into it. and even though the book expects much from its readership - understanding a ton of clans, geography, inbred feuds, unfamiliar expressions - i thought it was a great read.

but it is a bludgeoning one.

it's strange - stripped of its vernacular, the book can be reduced to two sentences: people fight. a marriage is tested.

that is it, honestly. but it isn't simply emptiness masked by linguistic cleverness.

the world-building is phenomenal. it reminded me, a little, of both Aurorarama and The Gone-Away World, but i thought it was much more successful than either. once you get into the rhythm of it, it is incredibly rich and satisfying, and with the other two, i had a lot of difficulty making sense of the world, but in this one, i felt more grounded.

but there were some strange decisions. why so much focus on the clothing? i swear, there was so much of this, and always in this format:

*ol' boy wore:*

*high-top boots expensively clicker'd with gold taps, a pair of hip-hugging jodhpur-style pants in a faded mauve tone, an amount of gold chains, a heavy mink coat to keep out the worst of the hardwind's assaults and a goatskin beanie hat set pavee-style at the crown of his head.*

it's a weird quirk in an already-quirky book. it definitely provides a strong mental image, but the whole name-followed-by-colon setup made me unhappy.

but there is a character named fucker burke and one named wolfie stanners, so that's obviously awesome.

*fucker wore:*

*silver high-top boots, drainpipe strides in a natty-boy mottle, a low-slung dirk belt and a three-quarter jacket of saffron-dyed sheepskin. he was tall and straggly as an invasive weed. he was astonishingly sentimental, and as violent again. his belligerent green eyes were strange flowers indeed. he was seventeen years of age and he read magical significance into occurrences of the number nine. he had ambition deep inside but could hardly even name it. his true love: an unpredictable Alsatian bitch name of Angelina.*

and when i read that, i thought, "maybe that is just this-book-slang for "german." but - nope. an actual dog.

indeed.

so, yeah. i liked this. a lot. but i do not know what anyone besides me will make of it.

read it and tell me, why don't you?

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## **Casey says**

I love this book so far. The language in both the dialogue and the narration is fantastic. It just pops. And there's a lot of really meaty subject matter going on- Revenge, love, growing old, legacies... Awesome.

Also, I promise that my endorsement of this book is not affected by the fact that Graywolf is publishing the US edition in March 2012. Honest. This book is straight legit. I am, however, super excited that we're going to be publishing the US edition in March 2012.

\*\*\*Update\*\*\*

The end of this book was great. It's this huge, building montage. The action is happening and not happening, and throughout the whole thing is a tinge of regret.

Regardless of who is publishing this book, CITY OF BOHANE is probably one of my favorite books that I've ever read.

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## **Steve says**

I picked up *City of Bohane* expecting a book of gang warfare, of violent dystopian action perhaps in the

expected mode of such stories (think *Gangs of New York*) in which events build to an brutal, climactic showdown. But *City of Bohane* isn't that book, it's far more than that, and reducing it "just" bloody violence would be a shame.

Though there is plenty of violence, and more often the threat of it, that's not the point. Those scenes are often deemphasized when they arrive, overshadowed by the long, paranoid waits they punctuate. Waits during which characters reminisce about "the lost-time," a glorious, glamorous past so palpably at odds with the run-down, musty present of Bohane city. These are characters — even the toughest, most violence gangsters among them — more focused on surface than substance (and the recurrence of rich, showy descriptions of dress makes that clear) even as the world rots around them.

In a way, that sense of rot reminded of nothing so much as Aidan Higgins' *Langrishe, Go Down*, that classic of deadly, paralytic Irish nostalgia. And I couldn't help thinking, as I read, that Kevin Barry's real accomplishment here is one of misdirection: to make readers expect, as I did, the almost prurient gratification of a violent thriller only to make us aware of how we're missing the point, and prolonging the problem, by asking for that. Because in a city where everyone is obsessed with a past that has come and gone, those few with vision enough to imagine the future — and the force of will to not be defined by what's happened before — stand poised to seize power simply because no one else can imagine a change.

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## **Ali says**

Unusual and memorable bog-soaked poetry of a small Irish city filled with whores, gamblers, criminals, lonely hearts, and every other kind of down-and-outer. It's a city where whoever schemes the best lives the longest, and you can't trust anyone. It's a city that breaks people.

Like drinking whiskey on a wintery day in a room with no heat, no light, and two-inch gaps between each wooden wall plank, Barry's book will shake you. It's a silent, desperate bellowing yellow to the moon. And it's also about love. If it were a human, City of Bohane would walk around with a switchblade in its backpocket and a crepe-paper heart pinned to its black cloth vest.

Barry's language is poetry to sharpen your teeth on.

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