



Night Boat to Tangier, by Kevin Barry
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, March 2020

Irish writer Kevin Barry's third novel, *Night Boat to Tangier*, was nominated for last year's Booker Prize and deemed a Top Ten book by *The New York Times* as well. The tragicomic tale is infused with the lyrical and often salty prose endemic to classic Irish writing. In particular, its plotline channels Saul Bellow's iconic *Waiting for Godot*.

Night Boat to Tangier begins on an October night at the Andalusian port of Algeciras in southern Spain. A pair of "fading gangsters from Cork" are sitting on a bench near the port's terminal: "Maurice Hearne and Charlie Redmond are in their low fifties. The years are rolling out like the tide now. There is old weather on their faces, on the hard lines of their jaws. But they retain—just about—a rakish air."

The two men are waiting at the port on a tip that Maurice's daughter Dilly might be leaving or arriving on a boat from Tangier. Dilly, now 23, has been missing for three years. Maurice and Charlie, with a fading photo of Dilly, taken three years prior, ask people passing by if they've seen Dilly, describing her as possessing the "pale green eyes" of her Protestant mother Cynthia. Dilly might, they say, still wear dreadlocks that she had the last time they had seen her in Ireland.

As Maurice and Charlie wait at the port, they ruminate about how they had drifted into smuggling Moroccan hashish to Ireland and how they had absconded to Spain, "a country vast and made for hiding." They "talk about those they have crossed and those they have helped, of first loves and lost loves, of their enemies and friends."

Dilly, with the resiliency of youth, is the most appealing character in the novel. She had left Ireland soon after her mother's death because she "wanted a place that did not know the meaning of her grief. She wanted to travel to the far recesses of herself and see what she might find back there."

Maurice and Charlie, on the other hand, are dark, brooding characters, and their story is a melancholy one. Mr. Barry's skillful writing and sardonic wit, however, keep *Night Boat to Tangier* afloat and make the novel well worth the read.