

Dear Reader

Apologies<sup>1</sup> first for the spidery, neurotic handwriting – evidence of a gifted mind? – which is an affront even to my own eyes. It has changed very little since I was a child and so is similar to what my two penpals would have had to decipher.

I don't remember his name but one was a lad in Texas. We were both about ten and had expressed mutual interest in the other's life and culture. Mine involved morbid levels of television, white-sugar dependency and hiding from the light – my penpal told me that he mainly liked to drive his truck around the ranch. I was at this point still unable to ride a bicycle. I would try, even so, out in the back garden, the trainer wheels removed, but would inevitably teeter sideways and over after a yard or two. I can still see my father, pale with shame, as he looks out at me, clambering up from the muck, tearful, scuff-kneed, and approaching puberty.

My other penpal was a little girl somewhere in Switzerland who very charmingly wrote that as I was so interested in her country's culture, I was more than welcome to come and visit for a holiday. My ability to talk to girls being more inept again than my bicycling, I replied that I would not be able to make it, but given that she was so interested in my culture, I enclosed four postage stamps featuring typical scenes of Irish life. All true, I'm afraid.

I think I was about thirteen before I could ride a bike, and I took to it with the zeal of a convert, the summer of what must have been '82 or '83 spent circling obsessively the estate, thrilled by the sensation of velocity. I learned to swim when I was 29, and I published my first 'slim vol' of stories<sup>2</sup> when I was 37. In the last year, at 43 going on 44, I have learned to drive, and like nothing more now than powering my 11-year-old Megane through the drizzly Sligo hills, the window down, the wind rustling my hair, and the radio on.

Yours,

Kevin Barry<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Attentive readers may remember that we appealed in the previous issue for our writers not to feel the need to apologise. The appeal seems to have gone unheard; during submissions our editorial office received apologies from writers for: not writing neatly enough, writing in an unusual shade of ink, not sending a nicer envelope, not using fancier paper, mislaying the photograph that was supposed to be photocopied and included, spilling various substances on the page, not writing sooner, not mentioning vital information sooner, and even, in two instances, for writing to us at all.

<sup>2</sup> The 'slim vol' was *These are Little Kingdoms*, which was published by Stinging Fly in 2007 and won the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature in the same year.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Barry was born in Limerick and now lives in Dublin. His debut novel, *City of Bohane*, was published in 2011 and won the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award in 2013. (Readers who notice these things will recall that our first issue also featured an IMPAC award winner, Colum McCann. This is a trend we fully intend to continue.) He also won the Edgehill Short Story Prize in 2013 for his collection *Dark Lies the Island*, and in fact has probably won enough prizes for the time being.