

From Despair to Hope: Glenn Patterson's Portrayals of Belfast in *Burning Your Own*(1988) and *The International*(1999)

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Glenn Patterson (1961-) is one of Northern Ireland's most promising young novelists. In his comprehensive study on Northern Irish writing, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965*(1996), Richard Kirkland appraises the novels by Patterson and Robert McLiam Wilson(1964-), remarking that they have "allowed the debate on Northern Irish identity to be relocated in discourses other than the poetic and to suggest other forms of cultural expression."⁽¹⁾ He explains that, even though Northern Ireland has tended to favour poetry or drama rather than fiction as written expressions of its culture, the appearance of both Patterson and Wilson made it possible to have debates on Northern Irish identity through fiction. In her devoted study on Northern Irish fiction, *Writing the North: The Contemporary Novel in Northern Ireland*(1998), Laura Pelaschiar also cites Patterson and Wilson together with Colin Bateman(1962-)and Deirdre Madden(1960-)as young talents who have emerged in the 1990s and points out that their novels present the reader with "a new version of Northern Ireland."⁽²⁾

Glenn Patterson has published four novels to date. His debut novel, *Burning Your Own*(1988), won the Rooney Prize

for Irish Literature and a Betty Trask Prize. It recounts a strange friendship between a Protestant boy and a Catholic boy in Belfast, which ultimately ends in tragedy. His second novel, *Fat Lad*(1992), which was shortlisted for the G.P.A Award, depicts a Belfast youth who hovers between Britain and Ireland in quest of a Northern Irish identity. His third novel, *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain*(1995), is set at the construction site of Euro-Disney in France. The story is about a Belfast construction worker, a German canteen assistant, and an American madman who takes them both hostage in plotting to subvert the construction project of the amusement park. His latest novel, *The International*(1999), describes human "dramas" which unfold in a Belfast hotel called The International on a Saturday of January in 1967. Then it goes on to relate how the staff and guests in the hotel get involved in the Troubles in Northern Ireland, which last for 25 years from 1969 until 1994.

Even though both Kirkland and Pelaschiar discuss *Fat Lad* exclusively to endorse their arguments for Patterson's merits, I believe that his other novels are endowed with as much depth and insight as *Fat Lad*. In this article, by giving close examinations to *Burning Your Own* and

The International, I attempt to reveal that Patterson, through various approaches to and descriptions of Northern Irish identity, presents a new version of Northern Ireland in both novels. As I stated, both of these novels are endowed with as much depth and insight as *Fat Lad* and just as successful. I will apply a new literary concept termed “suburbanism” to the discussion of both novels and, at the same time, investigate humor, humanism and pathos Patterson displays in them. I will also analyze his rhetorical techniques such as homophone, metaphor, personification and symbolism. Then I will investigate the effective use of symbolism Patterson makes in *Fat Lad* in presenting Northern Irish identity and a new version of Northern Ireland. As a final point I will refer to the “old version” of Northern Ireland that is presented in many novels on Northern Ireland or the so-called “Troubles novels,”⁽³⁾ in order to make clearer the distinction between both versions.

For the first step to revealing how Patterson presents a new version of Belfast in both novels, let me refer to a new literary concept termed “suburbanism” and apply it to the discussion of both novels. In the December 1999 issue of *Éire*, the journal of the Japan-Ireland Society, Noriko Ito argues new trends in Irish literature in her article, “Suburbanism”⁽⁴⁾. According to Ito, Ireland experienced a sudden upheaval in all sections of society during the 1960s and, as the result of a great economical shift, people started migrating explosively from cities and countries into suburbs. Suburbs are a new world where there is no tradition or

standard to guide one. To live in suburbs in harmony with others, people have to shake off old traditional values and take a liberal stand devoid of sectarian biases. Ito tentatively terms this suburban spirit, or this free and non-biased view, “suburbanism.” As this suburban trend progressed, Irish novelists started writing issues and problems arising from it. As the novelists who have been tackling with the new suburban reality, Ito cites Dermot Bolger(1959-), Roddy Doyle(1958-), Sebastian Barry(1955-), Joseph O’Connor (1963-) and several other writers, and call them suburban novelists. In her another essay on contemporary Irish fiction in the February 2000 issue of *Eureka*, Ito also quotes, among Northern Irish fiction, Wilson’s *Ripley Bogle* (1989), Madden’s *Remembering Light and Stone*(1992) and Patterson’s *Burning Your Own* as suburban novels.⁽⁵⁾

As Ito points out, suburbanism is not just a geographical shift but a cultural one as well. *Burning Your Own* can be called a suburban novel from a geographical point of view because the story unfolds in a new housing estate called Larkview located in the suburbs of Belfast. The question is whether it can be called a suburban novel from a cultural point of view and fit the suburbanism that Ito argues. The novel’s time frame is July of 1969 and its protagonist is a 10-year-old Protestant boy, Mal Martin. There are three main themes; Mal’s relationship with his parents and relatives, his involvement with the local Protestant gang, and his strange friendship with Francy Hagan, a Catholic boy about 14 years of age. This last theme is the most important one. As

Esther Aliaga observes in her illuminating article about this novel, Mal is still forming his own view of the world and has no convictions yet at his tender age.⁽⁶⁾ With a keen sensitivity, he is very curious about all which surround him and attempts to explore them. He avoids having biased views about his surroundings and merges himself not only with the Protstant gang but also with Francy Hagan. He can not accept the old traditional values (the Protestant Unionist values) which his parents try to impose on him. He is at odds with them like many protagonists of suburban novels are with their parents. Meanwhile his father also seems to be a typical suburban father. Ito explains that, while fathers depicted in the novels which belong to the category of regionalism are very strong and patriarchal, those depicted in the suburban novels are only "ersatz"⁽⁷⁾. They are weak and have little power over the other family members. Mal's father fails in his business as the shop he owns goes into bankruptcy. He often quarrels with his wife. He is often drunk and scorned by a number of boys who live in the same housing estate. They are members of the Protestant gang. One of them knocks him down in front of Mal when he gets drunk and speaks mockingly of the unsuccessful bonfire on the 12th of July. Thus Mal's father is very weak and could not compete with the strong fathers described in the regional novels. His weakness stands out if he is compared to Gavin Burke's father in Brian Moore's *The Emperor of the Ice-Cream*(1965), one of the regional novels. He rules over the other members of his family like a tyrant and forces his begoted allegiance to Catholicism and Nationalism on them.

After the disgraceful incident in which her drunken husband is knocked down by the boys, Mal's mother decides to leave him and goes with Mal to stay in her parents' house. The present landlord is her older brother. He has a wife and two daughters. Here Mal has a number of new experiences, which will have strong impacts on his sensitivity. While watching the launch of the space shuttle Apollo on television, his two female cousins join him to watch it and one of them grips his arm. The two young girls coming into such a close contact thrill him. Then when he watches Apollo landing on the moon, he can not believe the achievement at first. He wonders at it so greatly that he feels himself losing control. But, after recovering his lost control, he enjoys the thrill of the achievement, fixing his eyes on the television set. He feels as if he were merging with the astronaut waving his hand on the moon. Patterson accounts the emotional shift which Mal undergoes in watching the Apollo achievement:

I am here, he told himself, in this room, in this house, on this street, in this country, on this island...But already he could feel himself losing control and the enormity of the distances swirled inside his head, making a nonsense of his efforts. He concentrated on the smooth leather of the cushion beneath his bottom and thighs, willing himself to become, with it, an unquestionable part of all that surrounded him: mother, uncle, aunt, cousins, in the almost daylight of the lounge, watching television. He banished from his mind any thoughts of the vastness of space. The astronaut waved. In his visor was

reflected the capsule, the capsule whose camera filmed him. Waving reflecting. Encapsulated within the television set, which Mal's mother, uncle, aunt, cousins watched. Which Mal watched, forcing his weight upon the cushion. Merging.⁽⁸⁾

Mal's emotional shift presented here seems to parallel his emotional shift in developing his friendship with Francy Hagan. Francy's family lives in the same housing estate as Mal's. His is one of the few Catholic families in the estate. Nevertheless, away from his house, he stays in the dump at the edge of the estate where broken furniture, worn-out goods and litter are thrown away and rats meander. One day when a milkman tries to kill a big rat creeping from the dump, he threatens the milkman with a hatchet. Although all the parents living in the estate forbid their children to have any friendship with Francy, Mal ventures into the dump to meet him. He feels himself losing control when he speaks to Francy just as he does when he first watches the Apollo achievement. However, after he is accepted as a friend by Francy, he wills himself to "become an unquestionable part of all that surround him." It is the dump. He tries to banish from his mind any thoughts of the outer world. He feels as if he were merging with Francy and even kisses him:

Across the park, the meeting at the pavilion had been galvanised by the gunfire. Three loud whoops of assent rang out and then the cheering regulated itself into a simple chant: "Out, Out, Out."

Francy tried to get up, but Mal threw his arms about him and parting his lips kissed his open mouth. Roughsmooth face. A smelltaste of dirty nappies and emulsion paint.

A torch-led procession had set out from the pavilion and the chanting grew fainter: "Out, Out, Out."⁽⁹⁾

Mal tries to ignore the sectarian conflict which goes on outside the dump and merge with Francy. It can be said that Patterson's description of Mal's wonder and thrill at the Apollo achievement has a positive effect on showing Mal's keen sensitivity more vividly and intensifying his wonder and thrill at meeting Francy.

Through his friendship with Francy, Mal attempts to get over the boundary fixed between Protestants and Catholics and "take a liberal stand devoid of sectarian biases," to use Noriko Ito's phrase. He seems to be a typical suburbanite. However there is still a problem in asserting that *Burning Your Own* is a suburban novel. Ito emphasizes that one of the characteristics of suburbanism is its positivity and the protagonists of suburban novels face the reality more positively than their parents do in spite of their despair.⁽¹⁰⁾ One is convinced from Ito's argument that the most important of all the characteristics of suburban novels is this "positivity" that the protagonists retain whatever despair they fall into. A question arises whether Mal can face the reality positively after witnessing Francy's tragic death.

Let me compare *Burning Your Own* with Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle* and Deirdre Madden's *Remembering Light and*

Stone, which Ito also regards as suburban novels. Even though they are not truthfully suburban novels from geographical points of view, they can be called suburban novels from cultural points of view because both protagonists retain their positivity and try to overcome despair. Ripley Bogle detests the sectarian biases which are deeply rooted in both Catholic and Protestant communities in Belfast and he leaves the city to become a tramp in London. Although he experiences many agonies and suffers starvation there, he maintains a positive attitude to life and speaks optimistically of his future:

I smile without reason. Things aren't so bad. Perhaps the situation may be resurrected. After all, I am young. I've done it before. Dragged myself out of destitution. The world could still let me in. Perhaps I should go to Oxford this time. Who knows? Smoking with steady, slow compassion, I begin to make some plans.⁽¹¹⁾

Aisling, the protagonist of Madden's novel, also rejects the old traditional values which her family tries to impose on her and leaves Ireland for foreign lands (France, Italy and America) in quest of self-fulfilment. But she returns home to Ireland after she finds it impossible to fulfil her goal in any other country. However her attitude to life remains as positive as Ripley Bogle's in spite of the despair she is in :

Then I thought of Italy, and at once the decision came into my mind, clear and resolute in a way it would never have been had I mulled over the

question for weeks. I would leave S. Giorgio. When I went back to Italy, I would stay only as long as was necessary to pack my things, and work my notice in the factory. I'd come back here.⁽¹²⁾

She resolves to find something positive back in Ireland. However, unlike the endings of Wilson's and Madden's novels, the ending of *Burning Your Own* is so tragic that it may put the readers in doubt whether Mal can overcome the despair and face the reality with as positive an attitude as Riply and Aisling.

Most of the residents who live in the same estate as Francy's family are Protestants. They keep secretly in the nearby forest a long centrepole which will be used for the bonfire on the Twelfth of July night. But it is burnt to ashes by Francy and consequentially they decide to force him and his family out of the estate. The day when they leave there, Francy goes crazy. He sets fire to the objects piled in the dump one by one and throws them towards the other residents including Mal. By mistake he catches fire, it covers him totally and he dies at last. The next morning Mal finds the graffiti drawn on the wall: "FRANCY HAGAN, REST IN PIECES."⁽¹³⁾ The witty graffiti with the homophone of "peaces" make Francy's death even more tragic. Even though Mal's reaction to his friend's death is not described, this tragic ending of the novel may lead some readers to doubt if Mal can overcome his despair and hold such a positive attitude to life as the protagonists of Wilson's and Madden's novels do. Those readers may regard that Mal is also a victim of the sectarian

conflict, and fear that he will find it totally impossible to get over the fixed boundary between the two opposing communities. It may be quite impossible for him to take a liberal stand devoid of sectarian biases. On the other hand, a positive interpretation is also possible with reference to this novel in spite of its tragic ending. Esther Aliaga points out that the readers are left to hope that Mal will now take on the responsibility to make others see the essence of Belfast that is represented by the dump.⁽¹⁴⁾ As Aliaga views, while the housing estate is “a small Northern Ireland”⁽¹⁵⁾ which is corrupted by civilization and the sectarian conflict, the dump is a place free from civilization and the conflict, as made known by the fact that Mal and Francy have fostered their friendship there. The readers may sympathize with Mal’s rebellion against his parents who try to prevent him from going to the dump, and find something positive or even encouraging in it. Therefore, while some readers may only find that Mal is a poor despairing victim of the sectarian conflict, others may expect that he will continue on with his attempt to get over the sectarian boundary by prevailing over his despair. In this way it is also possible to regard that *Burning Your Own* is a suburban novel and represents today’s new trends in Irish literature.

While *The International* is not a suburban novel from a geographical point of view, it seems to hold more factors as a suburban novel from a cultural point of view than *Burning Your Own*. But I do not mean to say that *Burning Your Own* has less insight and depth than *The International*. Both novels reveal a new version of

Belfast and appeal to the readers in different ways. I attempt to show in what way *The International* presents the new version of Belfast. For the most part, this novel deals with human dramas which unfold on a Saturday of January in 1967. It starts off with a fire which occurs in a shopping arcade near the hotel on the same day. This fire has a quite different feature from the one described in *Burning Your Own*. It is unusual to see a fire in Belfast in 1967 before the Troubles break out. People including the novel’s protagonist, Danny Hamilton, gather to see the unusual fire. When a TV crew arrives to report the fire, they clap their hands, give cheers and attempt to be pictured by the TV camera. Patterson’s humorous description of their attempt makes it look funnier:

Slow handclapping had broken out on the southern rim of the crowd, in front of the City Hall. It spread, picking up momentum and volume, climaxing in a raucous cheer. Barney raised himself on his tiptoes.

“UTV’s arrived.”

“That’s quick for them,” I said, and the woman next to me said, “Maybe they heard it on the BBC.”

Soon everyone around me was on tiptoes too. The more energetic bounced on the spot.

Can you see anything? Are they interviewing people?

The first shoves followed shortly.

That’s my foot!

Get your fat arse out of my road!⁽¹⁶⁾

Humor, pathos and humanity are the features which Patterson adopts for his

description of a new version of Belfast in this novel. They are quite rare in the Troubles novels or the novels presenting the old version of Belfast. His humorous description of people's behavior on the spot of the fire emphasizes that Belfast is peaceful, even though superficially so, in 1967 and that few people expect the outbreak of the Troubles two years later.

On the same Saturday, The International has a variety of guests. Here let me again refer to the suburbanism which Ito argues. As mentioned before, suburbs are a new world where there is no tradition or standard. As Ito explains, in this "new unknown soil," people have in common with each other "the sense of displacement and loss" and that sense necessarily drives them to seek something with which the void made by the loss can be filled.⁽¹⁷⁾ Ito goes on to say that that "something" is "humanism or human love."⁽¹⁸⁾ The International can be compared to suburbs because there are a number of guests who suffer loss and displacement and try to compensate them with something positive like humanism or human love. Among them are Bob and Natalie Vance, a married couple from the United States. They are very rich but seem to suffer some kind of loss or displacement and lead frustrated lives. They are desperately looking for something to compensate their loss, displacement or frustration. They try to be humanistic. They offer generous tips to the hotel's employees and buy drinks for the local customers at the hotel's bar. They call to their guest room Danny Hamilton and persuade him to have sex with them. Patterson describes the scene with brilliant humor again:

"You ever done it with two people before?"

"Not at the same time," I said, though I could more truthfully have said not even in the same week and oh, God, I was starting to feel very, very uncertain, but Bob and his Albuquerque cock were poised above Natalie and I wanted so badly to watch them, even for just a minute -- she had placed her feet on the bed now and her legs were two sides of a V with Bob in between lowering himself and I swear I thought he was never going to get there and I didn't know suddenly whether I wanted to push him aside or her aside or push them both together but I was over by the bed myself and Natalie's hands were tugging my belt and Bob said shit and fuck and baby and Natalie said shush, over and over again.⁽¹⁹⁾

Patterson's description of their sex is as amusing and impressive as Robert McLiam Wilson's description of Chuckie Lurgan's fraudulent attempt in selling giant dildos in his widely-acclaimed novel, *Eureka Street*(1996). The metaphorical phrases like "two sides of a V" and "Bob in between lowering himself" successfully present the readers with a clearer vision of their act. And Patterson's funny description of Danny's confusion in his involvement with their sex exposes the couple's patheticness and humanity to the full. The humor, pathos and humanity displayed here have a notable effect on distinguishing this novel from many cliché novels on Northern Ireland which mostly expose the terror of the violence. There is another pathetic female guest, or "intruder" if she should be called more

exactly. Her name is Ingrid. She also looks desperately for something which can compensate her loss or lost love. When she was sixteen, she was called frigid by her best friend. Then she tried to sleep with as many boys as possible in her desperation. Eventually she met a boy whom she truly loved but he decided to marry another woman. Ingrid comes to The International where their wedding ceremony is held and tries to take photographs of the events inside and outside the hotel that day “to have a complete record of how her world looked like the day she gave up on love for ever.”⁽²⁰⁾ She is barred from taking a shot of a certain scene by the hotel employees because it is against the hotel regulations. In the midst of her trouble, she is rescued by Ted Connolly, a professional soccer player who suffers a different kind of loss. He can not play soccer at present because he has injured his leg. In his desperation he drinks at the hotel’s bar for almost half a day. He may well rescue the woman because he is pushed by an impulsive desire for humanism. Another pathetic guest to the hotel is a puppet-show entertainer named Stanley. He desperately wants to be accepted by a London director for the chance to appear on a popular television program. At the hotel’s bar he waits patiently for the director to come for the negotiation. But at last the director’s secretary comes to the bar to let him know the director’s refusal of his show. While suffering despair and loss, he meets Ingrid at the bar and falls in love with her.

The International, with those pathetic and humanistic guests, gives the

impression of being like “suburbs”. They come to the hotel in quest of something that may relieve them of their loss, displacement and despair. They pay little heed to the boundaries between Protestants and Catholics, between locals and outsiders. Like the dump in *Burning Your Own*, the hotel serves as a symbol of non-sectarianism. And, quite importantly, Patterson presents the detached views of Belfast from both non-sectarian places and emphasizes how different and worthy of affection the city looks to the outsiders. When Mal sees Belfast from the dump, he does not recognize the city, and reveals his impression by saying that “roofs merged in strange teetering formations, half-houses, quarter-houses were grafted on to the sides of others, filling every gap, blinding every alley and driveway.”⁽²¹⁾ He seems to express his wonder why people hate and fight each other in spite of the fact that they live in such a close neighborhood. In *The International*, Danny Hamilton presents the Vances’ impression of Belfast which they can observe from the hotel:

Natalie in particular kept on about how *cute* everything was, as though Belfast was a doll-sized version of the real thing. From what I saw those first couple of days — the little winks and smiles that passed between them, the under-the-table nudges — she and Bob regarded the inhabitants with the same mixture of affection and amusement. Nothing is too serious in a toy town. And of course they were in a hotel. A hotel is already a holiday from the everyday world.⁽²²⁾

It seems that, through those humanistic observations of Belfast by Mal and the Vances, Patterson suggests his hope for a reconciliation between the two opposing communities in the city. Their observations of the city also seem to indicate Patterson's unfixed view of Northern Irish identity. In many novels on Northern Ireland, the characters hold clear-cut identities, Catholic Nationalist or Protestant Unionist. But, in *The International*, many characters' views of Northern Irish identity are vague and the vagueness seems to signal the author's view of it. There is a scene in which a customer tells a joke to a barman named Oscar:

"Do you get it? England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are standing at the bar, looking miserable, and the guy says, "UK?"

Oscar caught my eye and made a play of looking at the other man as though deeply perplexed.

"You-OK? Do you still not get it?"⁽²³⁾

This witty joke, in which the four provinces of the U.K. are personified, seems to demonstrate Patterson's view of Northern Irish identity. Northern Ireland looks miserable because, even though she stays with the other three in the U.K. at present, nearly the half of her body wants to leave them and join Southern Ireland. The other three look miserable, too, because they do not like her to be with them. Patterson's confused or unfixed view of Northern Irish identity, and his hope for the reconciliation of the two opposing communities, can also be perceived in his description, again with

humor, of Danny Hamilton and his family background. Talking about his parents, Danny mentions that one was born Catholic and the other, Protestant, but he was "never quite sure which was which." He also discloses that "in this most God-obsessed of cities they had lost their religion." He reveals the truth in his birth and maturity that "no church marked [his] arrival into the world" and that he was educated as a Protestant only because the local State primary school was a mere two-minute walk from his house.⁽²⁴⁾

Certainly the debate on Northern Irish identity is easier with *Fat Lad* because the quest for it is the most apparent theme of the novel. Symbolism again serves as an effective tool for showing the protagonist's and the author's views of Northern Irish identity. Patterson's ingenious rhetorical technique of symbolism can be noticed in the novel's title itself. The six letters in the title are the initial letters of the names of Northern Ireland's six counties; Fermanagh, Armagh, Tyrone, Londonderry, Antrim and Down. "Fat Lad" also seems to indicate the novel's protagonist, Drew Linden. The word "fat" means "dull" or "slow-witted" in certain contexts, as well as "weighty" or "lumpy." Drew, with a pair of spectacles, sometimes looks funny and absurd, and holds a confused or vague view of Northern Irish identity. Therefore this novel's title not only stands for Northern Ireland's six counties but also symbolizes Drew's personality and his view of Northern Irish identity. Symbolism connected to Northern Irish identity can be noticed in a number of descriptions in this novel. The most remarkable symbol of it is a goldfish which

Drew's grandmother keeps in a tiny bowl. As Drew's sister Ellen feels pity for the goldfish being confined in such a tight place and swimming only in little circles, she moves it to a much bigger bathtub so that it can swim freely. However, the goldfish continues to swim likewise. When she forces it to swim straight, it dies. This incident seems to have two symbolical meanings. That is, it seems to symbolize Northern Ireland's situation and Drew's situation as well. First, the goldfish can be compared to Northern Ireland itself. The province has been doing the same thing exactly as the goldfish does. It has repeatedly been witness to the conflict between Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists. Every attempt at its solution, which can be compared to Ellen's attempt to make the gold fish swim freely, has resulted in failure. Second, the goldfish, the tiny bowl and the big bathtub can be compared to Drew Linden, Northern Ireland and Britain respectively. In Northern Ireland (the tiny bowl), Drew (the gold fish) is far from comfortable in the situation he is in, being at a loss or confused about Northern Irish identity. Even though he goes to Britain (the big bathtub) hoping for a better situation, he feels himself segregated and can not adjust himself to the country. He can not free himself from being Northern Irish wherever he goes, and yet he is always at a loss about his Northern Irish identity, wondering whether he is truly British or Irish. Thus the second symbolical meaning of the gold fish incident indicates Drew's fate as a Northern Irish.

Another episode which symbolizes Drew's confused view of Northern Irish

identity is about his love affairs with three women linked to Britain, Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland respectively. Drew starts his career as an assistant at a chain bookstore in Britain. When he is transferred to the Belfast branch, his British girl friend, Melaine Bishop, rejects going with him to Northern Ireland. She tries to shun every contact with him. When he moves to Belfast, he gets a new girl friend, Kay Morris. She leads a decadent life but has a disciplined Protestant Unionist view of Northern Irish identity. He also gets to know Kay's half-sister, Anna, who works in Dublin. Before she meets Drew, she had a Republican boy friend who was jailed and died in a hunger strike. Drew dates and has sex with the three women on alternate interludes. He can not love one more than the others, and, before finding the best of the three, he is transferred to the Paris branch because the Belfast branch is going to be closed. It can be said that Patterson presents Drew's unfixed view of Northern Irish identity and the insecure situation of the province symbolically through his ambivalent love with the three women. The fact that the end of his love affairs is not shown symbolizes the unpredictability of the future of Northern Ireland.

In addition to those symbolical expressions of Northern Irish identity, Patterson presents straightforward expressions of it through Drew's notebook: "Duplicity is the Northern Irish vice. We are always (at least) two people and always false to (at least) one of them."⁽²⁵⁾ This paragraph seems to express Drew's, and Patterson's, view of Northern Ireland

most plainly. There are two opposing communities in the province, Protestant Unionist and Catholic Nationalist. One should be accused as much as the other of their false deeds.⁽²⁶⁾

At the end of this novel, Patterson adopts subtle symbolism again for the expression of Northern Irish identity. After Drew starts working for the Paris branch of the bookstore, his father dies of a stroke and he flies back to Belfast for the funeral. In the airplane, he hears an announcement of the co-pilot and a conversation between two female passengers:

The co-pilot apologised: visibility was poor all over today; the weather on the ground in Belfast was damp and drizzly.

Two women sitting along from Drew traded long-suffering sighs across the central aisle.

--Is it ever anything else? said one to the other, making conversation.⁽²⁷⁾

The co-pilot's announcement of the visibility of Belfast rendered poor by the bad weather and the woman's implication that the weather is always bad in Belfast seem to symbolize a vague and unfixed view of Northern Irish identity. They reveal symbolically that the present situation of the province is insecure and that its future is invisible, too.

As I have discussed so far, with the effective use of symbolism and other rhetorical techniques, Patterson's novels show that Northern Irish identity is undefinable or unaccountable. Although the endings of *Burning Your Own* and *Fat Lad* sound pessimistic, the possibility also

remains that both novels' protagonists will think positively of their future. After observing a number of conflicting views of Northern Irish identity, Mal Martin and Drew Linden may try to find different ways to a reconciliation of them. On the other hand, *The International* ends with a more positive tone. It is the reason why I regard that this novel holds more factors as a suburban novel from a cultural point of view than *Burning Your Own*. After a lengthy narration of the human dramas unfolding in the hotel on that Saturday of January in 1967, Patterson gives a shortened but gruesome account of the Troubles which break out two years later and come to an end by the Ceasefire in 1994. As his account of the violence is flinchingly cool and indifferent, and forms a striking contrast to his account of the events in the hotel that is full of humanism, pathos and humor, its tragedy stands out more. The employees and the guests in the hotel also get involved in the Troubles and some of them lose their lives. The *International* is closed in the midst of the Troubles in 1975. However, this novel does not end in tragedy. Some years before the Ceasefire, Danny Hamilton meets a woman named Paula who used to work for the hotel and talks with her about the hotel and the other staff nostalgically. While looking back on the photos of Belfast which Ingrid took on that Saturday of January in 1967, he says, "The city in these photographs is another place entirely, the mere passage of years cannot account for the sense of rapture."⁽²⁸⁾ It seems that Danny tries to determine something humane and encouraging in them. Besides, when the Captain of a Loyalist paramilitary force declares the

Ceasefire in 1994, he finds a slight hope for the future of Northern Ireland, saying, "It took me a while, but I believed him."⁽²⁹⁾

Aaron Kelly rightly observes that Patteron's novels, including *The International*, serve to "refute the once conventional dismissal of the city's inhabitants as irredeemable, inveterately tribalised barbarians."⁽³⁰⁾ Those barbarians are depicted in many novels on Northern Ireland or the Troubles novels which present an old version of Belfast. As they seem to put too much emphasis on terrorists and the terror that they cause, they may give outsiders a false impression that many Belfast inhabitants are "tribalised barbarians." But I do not mean to say that most of the Troubles novels are worthless. As Elizabeth Bouché claims, Bernard MacLaverty's *Cal*(1983) and Brian Moore's *Lies of Silence*(1990) are the masterpieces of the Troubles novels.⁽³¹⁾ They are excellent in their own lights. They reveal the importance and value of peace by exposing the terrifying reality of the Troubles. *Cal* was filmed in 1984 and *Lies of Silence* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. However, Patteron's novels are as valuable and important as both novels, but in different ways. His narrative technique is not less skilful and worthy of attention than both experienced authors' narrative techniques. His novels make "ordinary people" stand out more than terrorists and emphasize how they are affected by their violence. The readers realize that Mal Martin, Drew Linden and Danny Hamilton are basically ordinary citizens. They are sometimes driven to extraordinary behaviors because they are affected by their extraordinary

surroundings, that is, by the biased sectarian views and the violence. But, at last, they come to hold impartial, even though sometimes confused, views of Northern Irish identity. From Patteron's novels which present this new version of Belfast, the readers can sense the author's sincere hope for a settlement of the sectarian conflict and the violence. And Patteron portrays Belfast from various perspectives; from a local perspective in *Burning Your Own*, from an Irish and British perspective in *Fat Lad*, from an international perspective in *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain*, and from a local perspective again in *The International*. Those various portrayals, given with Patteron's ingenious narrative techniques, represent the reality that Belfast is full of interest, packed with human dramas of which the leading actors and actresses are its ordinary citizens, not terrorists. His novels invalidate some people's view that Northern Irish writers will have nothing to write about after the Troubles are over.⁽³²⁾ His novels are also expected to destroy the popular notion that fiction is less distinguished than poetry and drama in Northern Ireland.

Notes

- (1) Richard Kirkland, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland since 1965: Moments of Danger* (London: Longman, 1996), p.46.
- (2) Laura Pelaschiar, *Writing the North: The Contemporary Novel in Northern Ireland* (Trieste: Edizioni Parnaso, 1998), p.13.
- (3) Elizabeth Bouché uses this term to allude to novels on the Troubles in Northern Ireland in her essay, "No Big Thrill" (*Fortnight*, No.312, December 1992, p.46).
- (4) Noriko Ito, "Suburbanism," *Eire*, No.19,

- December 1999, pp. 104-117.
- (5) Noriko Ito, "About Contemporary Irish Fiction," *Eureka*, February 2000, pp.168-175.
- (6) Esther Aliaga Rodorigo, "Tell Me Where You Were Born and I Will Tell You Who You Are: Finding a Place to Fit in Glenn Patterson's *Burning Your Own* and Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle*, Javier Pérez Guerra et al. eds., *Proceedings of the XIXth International Conference of Aedean* (Vigo: Universidade de Vigo, 1996), p.106.
- (7) "Suburbanism," p.114.
- (8) Glenn Patterson, *Burning Your Own* (1988; rpt., London: Minerva, 1993), p.128.
- (9) *Ibid.*, pp.230-231.
- (10) "Suburbanism," p.112.
- (11) Robert McLiam Wilson, *Ripley Bogle* (1989; rpt., London: Vintage, 1998), p.326.
- (12) Deirdre Madden, *Remembering Light and Stone* (1992; rpt., London: Faber, 1993), p.180.
- (13) *Burning Your Own*, p.249.
- (14) Esther Aliaga Rodorigo, p.109.
- (15) *Ibid.*, p.108.
- (16) Glenn Patterson, *The International* (London: Anchor, 1999), p.14.
- (17) "Suburbanism," p.109.
- (18) *Ibid.*
- (19) *The International*, p.115.
- (20) *Ibid.*, p.158.
- (21) *Burning Your Own*, p.14.
- (22) *The International*, p.108.
- (23) *Ibid.*, p.178.
- (24) *Ibid.*, pp.41-42.
- (25) Glenn Patterson, *Fat Lad* (1992; rpt., London: Minerva, 1993), p.214.
- (26) In an interview with Richard Mills published as "Nothing Has to Die," in Bill Lazenbatt ed., *Writing Ulster: Northern Narratives* (Univ. of Ulster, 1999), Patterson also says that Nationalism and Republicanism are as dead as Unionism and Loyalism.(p.121) The following paragraph in *Fat Lad* can also be referred to as Patterson's cynical view or accusation of both Loyalism and Republicanism:
- Across the railway tracks directly below Drew's window, on the waste ground bordering the crossroads of Sandy Row and Donegall Road, wood was already being collected for the July bonfire. The working-class Protestants' annual burnt offering to the great dead hand of Ulster loyalism which had kept them, as much as their Catholic neighbours, in their slummy places for half a century while erecting the vast, mausolean pile of Stormont... (pp.129-130)
- (27) *Ibid.*, p.282.
- (28) *The International*, p.307.
- (29) *Ibid.*, p.318.
- (30) Aaron Kelly, "Historical Baggage, a review of *The International*," *Fortnight*, No.381, November 1999, p.28.
- (31) Elizabeth Bouché, "No Big Thrill," p.46.
- (32) See Esther Aliaga's interview with Glenn Patterson in Jacqueline Hurlley et al. eds., *Ireland in Writing: Interviews with Writers and Academics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 95-96.

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