

"Rhetoric Is Always My Indulgence": The Effect of Metaphor and Personification in Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle* (1989), *Manfred's Pain* (1992) and *Eureka Street* (1996)

Masahiko YAHATA

Northern Ireland has witnessed the emergence of talented young novelists since the late 1980s such as David Park (1954–), Deirdre Madden (1960–), Glenn Patterson (1961–), Eoin McNamee (1961–), Colin Bateman (1962–), Robert McLiam Wilson (1964–) and Anne Dunlop (1968–). Laura Pelaschiar's comprehensive study of Northern Irish fiction, *Writing the North: The Contemporary Novel in Northern Ireland* (1998) can be regarded as a valuable sequel to John Wilson Foster's *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction* (1974). Foster's work concludes with discussions of Brian Moore (1921– 1998) and Maurice Leitch (1933–), and Pelaschiar's work deals with novelists who have emerged since them. She cites Madden, Patterson, Bateman and Wilson, among others, as the young talents of the 1990s (1). I am also attracted to the novels by these four writers, especially to the three novels which Robert McLiam Wilson has published to date. In this paper, I attempt to give an analysis of Wilson's skills in rhetoric with emphasis on his use of "metaphor" and "personification", and endeavor to reveal the effect they have in conveying the author's messages more accurately.

Robert McLiam Wilson was born into a working-class Catholic family in Belfast in 1964. He went to various secondary schools in Belfast and entered Cambridge University where he read English literature. But he dropped out of the university and, despite his education, became a tramp in London. His first novel, *Ripley Bogle*, published in 1989 won four literary prizes: the Rooney, Hughes, and Betty Trask Prizes, and the Irish Book Award. After publishing a work of non-fiction, *The Dispossessed*, in collaboration with Donovan Wylie in 1991, Wilson published his second novel *Manfred's Pain* the following year. This novel received poor reviews and a certain critic alleged that Wilson was finished as a novelist. Looking back on *The Dispossessed* and a series of BBC documentary films which Wilson produced at that time, the same critic remarked that Wilson was losing his imaginative talent and becoming more adept at the portrayal of social reality (2). His allegation, however, proved to be wrong when Wilson's third novel *Eureka Street* appeared in 1996. This novel received significant critical acclaim, such as

Edna Longley's review, "Quality Street", in the October 1996 issue of *Fortnight* (3). The novel was also translated into French in 1997 (4). The BBC and RTE co-produced a television version of the novel in 1999, which was widely praised.

There is a paragraph in *Ripley Bogle* which represents Wilson's skills in rhetoric:

There you have it. That was the Ireland of our birth and growth. It affected us differently. All that Gaelic, nationalist, Celtic superiority bollockspeak. Because he had known nothing else, Maurice saw it as his birthright and treasured its insanity as his own.....It was somebody else's crime and thus somebody else's problem. My answer would be my exit. This used to drive Maurice potty.

We used to have these wonderful juvenile arguments on the thing called Irish Politics. This vexed theme was a real scratching post for my oratorical claws. I told Maurice that he was talking bollocks, that he was full of shit and that his opinions were a pile of piss. (Rhetoric was always my indulgence.) (5)

As *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines, rhetoric is "the art of using language so as to persuade or influence others"(6). The examples of the rhetorical strategy that Wilson employs in this paragraph to persuade the reader are rude words ("bollockspeak", "bollocks", "full of shit", and "a pile of piss"), sarcastic expressions ("treasured its insanity" and "these wonderful juvenile arguments"), slang ("potty"), an emphasis ("the thing called Irish Politics"), and a metaphor ("a real scratching post for my oratorical claws"). Through Wilson's skill in rhetoric, this paragraph is most likely to impress on the reader the fact that Ripley Bogle has hearty scorn for his friend's devotion to Republicanism. It seems that rhetoric is always Robert McLiam Wilson's indulgence.

Ripley Bogle is a story of the eponymous hero who is born into a Catholic working-class family in West Belfast and eventually becomes a tramp in London. The circumstances in which Ripley Bogle is born and bred contributes to the formation of his extraordinary character. He is born the unwanted child of an unemployed ex-baker and a prostitute one month after they get married. An overwhelming array of extravagant words which is applied to the description of his birth makes clear the parents' unwillingness to have the child. The mother is screaming her way to the "unwilling production" of Ripley Bogle, and the "dirty", heavyheaded, eponymous "bastard" is "shoving his angry way out". The midwife creases her brow "in distaste". There is "no song, no celebratory ode, nor any rejoicing nor merrymaking". The "little bastard" is pushing hard, and "stretching the mother's loins to impossible, inelastic lengths". It is his first "debt". His birth is a "pox" on the others. Being "ugly", he makes "little impression" on them. With his rhetorical strategy again, Wilson succeeds in persuading the reader that his parents have deep hatred for Ripley Bogle.

In his childhood, Ripley Bogle is obsessed by the written word and shows unusual interest in books. He reads Dickens, Thackeray, Shakespeare, Webster, Marlowe and Spenser. He even studies Nihilism. Orwell, Camus, Sartre, Mann and Eliot depress him. The list of the authors he becomes familiar with is impressive. The reader may think it

implausible that Ripley Bogle grows to be such an intellectual despite the fact that his parents have no intellectual background. However, it is similar to what actually happened in Wilson's life. Even though Wilson was born into a working-class family in West Belfast, he read *David Copperfield* at the age of six and decided to become a writer (7). Ripley Bogle's growth is also reminiscent of Frank McCourt's autobiography, *Angela's Ashes* (1996). McCourt was also born into a family with a working-class background. His father was an ex-IRA soldier. He rarely worked and drank heavily like Ripley Bogle's father. The mother was almost useless in any job she attempted, and suffered from material adversity like Ripley Bogle's mother. But McCourt developed his interest in books in a Limerick slum, became a schoolteacher, and eventually wrote his autobiography which ultimately won him the Pulitzer Prize.

Ripley Bogle develops complex views about Ireland and Britain. Even though he is born and bred on the Falls Road, the stronghold of Republicanism and hotbed of the IRA, he holds no sympathies with Irish Nationalism. He calls his female teacher who has a strong Republican mind "the grim young bint". She tells her students that, even if "the Misguided Soul", which is a metaphor for one who regards Northern Ireland as British, tries to call them British, their names must remain Irish to the core. By her words Ripley Bogle is "buggered up no end, dazed, anxious, worried and confused". Then, in the spirit of compromise, he decides to dub himself "Ripley Irish British Bogle". He points the finger at the Troubles by telling a story of an innocent girl involved in an accident caused by mistaken identity. One night in the 1970s, Muire Ginchy, a girl who lives in Ripley Bogle's neighborhood, walks a tightrope of barbed wire. A British soldier called Wilson mistakes her for a terrorist in the dark and aims his gun at her. She screams in terror, drops straight down and her open legs straddle the barbed wire. She bleeds badly. Then Ripley Bogle says:

Who do we blame for that? Young Wilson? Me? Anyone? No, I don't think any of those fit this bill. I prefer to blame Belfast. It's all Belfast's fault. Something should be done. Belfast shouldn't be allowed to get away with this kind of thing. Belfast has to be stopped. Its time will come. I hope.(8)

Belfast is personified in this paragraph. The city is described as if it were a human being with emotions who acts at his or her own will. Ripley Bogle's hatred for the city appears intense because Wilson's description here gives the impression that his hatred is pointed towards a person called "Belfast" who has committed a grave crime, not just towards a mechanical, will-less city under human control. He goes on blaming the personified city, saying, "I wonder what old Muire Ginchy is doing these days....She's probably just a rancid, hard-eyed Irish tart like the rest of them now. Belfast does that to you. Thickens your body and your brains. Chases your soul away"(9). However, Ripley Bogle's view of Belfast is not entirely accurate. The whole blame should not be attributed to Belfast. Britain and Ireland should also be blamed because it is the conflict between the two countries that has eventually led to the present-day Troubles in

Northern Ireland.

It is interesting to note that Ripley Bogle, even though he is from the Nationalist community, has sympathies with Britain. He says, "The British were onto a very bad thing in Ulster. They couldn't win: if they left there was civil war and if they stayed they got crapped on from all sides"(10). As he points out here, as long as the majority of the inhabitants of Northern Ireland want to remain British, the British should not withdraw from the province because the Unionist cause looks as legitimate as the Nationalist cause. If the British leaves the North and lets it unify with the South, civil war will surely break out. The British soldiers are to be sympathized with. They are there to maintain the peace of the province. But they "get crapped on", if not from all sides as Ripley Bogle says, from many sides of both Catholic and Protestant communities. He shows further sympathies with the British by citing their involvements with other race conflicts in the world; the conflict between Indians and Pakistanis and that of the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine. He says that the British are "philanthropic" and "noble" in their attempts to settle those conflicts. However, provocatively enough, he adds:

Of course, *little hiccoughs* like Amritsar, Bloody Sunday and the Veldt Camps didn't help. But nobody's perfect. It's hard to like the British but I try. (11) (Italics mine)

By comparing these tragedies to "little hiccoughs", Ripley Bogle means to say that they are not worth thinking of gravely and tries to tolerate Britain's brutalities. It is too insensitive to regard these awful massacres as such trivial errors. The characters in Wilson's novels express their provocative views openly, and Wilson's skills in rhetoric make their provocativeness more evident.

However, Ripley Bogle's remark that it is hard to like the British shows that his views of the British are not always sympathetic. His views of them are as complex as those of Ireland. He enters Cambridge University, and he is puzzled by its snobbery. He observes "little personality and no soul" in his fellow students. He scorns their snobbish support of any "modish" current in politics, art, fashion and scholarship. He finds that the students are trying desperately to attach themselves to large groups of their comrades. At Cambridge he prefers to remain a rough Irishman. He can not adjust himself to his fellow students, disobeys his lecturers and at last drops out of the university. In a paragraph in which a Cambridge professor warns Ripley Bogle about his offensiveness, Wilson employs personification so effectively that his description persuades the reader that it is absolutely impossible for Ripley Bogle to liberate himself from the Cambridge tradition of elitism:

As the old bloke spoke, the very room itself, that dusty wooden cavern seemed to muster its ancient strength and come brownly to his aid. Bravo! Encore! What price Varsity Rebels? Hardly used.....In the rich paled and paling light I heard the reedy hymn of the past, all the legioned history at the old man's side. I felt less

momentous. I shouldn't really have been fucking about with all this well-established poshery. It wasn't right and surely they wouldn't stand for it. They'd get the Tradition troops out, the Culture Commandos. I sensed the wide panorama of all those dead guys to whom this room had access and power. (12)

The professor's room, the university's past, and its tradition and culture are personified. Those personified objects look like a great troop of soldiers who attempt to crush Ripley Bogle in an instant. Now that Ripley Bogle finds himself unable to join any formal society of human beings, he leaves the university and becomes a tramp in London. He explains the reason why he chooses London for his vagabond life:

The nicest thing about London is that London doesn't care. In Belfast I was fettered like all the Irish by the soft mastery of my country, by its mulch of nationhood and its austere, parental beauty. London will play ball if you make the effort but the city will leave you mostly unmolested. It provokes the pleasant spur of loneliness yet populates your dreams, despair or solitude. In dark suit striped with ancient grey London remains polite but distant. This is admirable behaviour on the part of any city and should be loudly commended. (13)

In this paragraph, Wilson personifies London and his narrative has a strong effect in persuading the reader that London is the fittest place for Ripley Bogle to lead his tramp life because of the liberty, coolness and solitariness which the city can offer him. He regards himself as "a victim of circumstance, timing and nationhood"(14) and attributes every sin to Ireland, saying "The world did me wrong by making me an Irishman....I'm practically faultless....It's Ireland's fault, not mine."(15) The world and Ireland are personified and Ripley Bogle's accusation of them appears very intense.

Another incident also manifests that Ripley Bogle is a victim of circumstance, and Wilson's description of it reveals his skills in rhetoric. Before entering Cambridge University, he falls in love with a Protestant girl. His mother is violently opposed, and his uncle even threatens to kneecap him. Then Ripley Bogle leaves his house and makes love with the girl. She gets pregnant but has a miscarriage. Ripley Bogle recounts with extravagant words and slang what has happened between them. He says that he helped her to terminate the childbirth. He stuck a long-handled paintbrush up her "twat" and "rooted around for about fifteen minutes -- shoving, poking, plunging, cranking." Then "a lot of mucky stuff came out amongst which there were one or two encouraging little lumps."(16) He goes on saying that he even tried to "roger" her right after the abortion and the girl went "potty" subsequently. With this rhetorical strategy, Wilson persuades the reader that Ripley Bogle is indeed a victim of circumstance. It seems that the circumstance of his own birth has led him to regard the childbirth as only scornful.

In her article on Glenn Patterson's *Burning Your Own* (1989) and Wilson's *Ripley Bogle*, Esther Aliaga gives an illuminating analysis of the fatal effects which the birthplaces of both protagonists have on their growths.(17) Mal is born into the Loyalist

community and Ripley Bogle, into the Nationalist community. Their communities impose on both boys "a series of expectations they have to live up to", as Aliaga puts it. But they attempt to mix with the other community against those expectations, as the reader sees in Mal's strange friendship with a Catholic boy, Francy Hagan, and Ripley Bogle's love with the Protestant girl. Patterson and Wilson describe both boys' failures in their attempts and persuade the reader that they are victims of circumstance. There is a difference, however, between their life courses. After finding himself a victim of circumstance, Ripley Bogle leaves his community to become a tramp in London, while Patterson's novel ends with an implication that Mal is likely to return to his community.

Wilson attempts to portray another victim of circumstance in his second novel, *Manfred's Pain*. Manfred is a Jew born in London. His parents' married life is far from happy. His father fails in his business, and his mother has to work "hard and bitterly in order that the family might survive". Manfred learns that his father once beat his mother in his attempt to subdue her not long after their marriage. His mother never forgives him for the beating. As his father becomes old and feeble, her supremacy over him grows and he is totally "powerless to resist". Manfred sees his father slapped hard by his mother when he is overheard ruefully talking about his marriage. He also sees his father beaten in the wartime discrimination against the Jews. Manfred joins the British army and fights against Germany and Italy. After the war, he marries a Jewish girl, Emma. Their married life crumbles soon after and Manfred starts beating his wife violently. Emma leaves Manfred but does not divorce. They talk on the phone once a week and meet in Hyde Park once a month. Then a mysterious pain begins to torment Manfred and eventually dies as a result.

This novel seems to be Wilson's attempt to cultivate "new terrain", as Gerald Dawe put it. (18) Wilson's narrative style is more reserved and serious in this novel than in *Ripley Bogle*. The reader observes much less extravagance, obscenity and cynicism. This new reserve was not well-received. A number of reviewers cited the novel's lack of persuasiveness. One of them was Rudiger Imhof, who commented that Manfred, Emma and the other characters "hardly ever come to life". By comparing this novel with Van Gogh's painting, he pointed out that, while Van Gogh successfully makes his painting of a pair of "well-worn" boots glow, Wilson fails to make Manfred's "pain" glow (19). Certainly there are several implausible events. For example, Emma is moved by Manfred's tearful begging of forgiveness and has sex with him after she is violently beaten by him. It is difficult to believe that Emma would not try to divorce Manfred after being beaten repeatedly, and Wilson also fails to convince the reader here.

In spite of these defects, however, this novel does contain descriptions which reveal Wilson's talents. Imhof admits that, in the chapter dealing with the war, Wilson "shockingly succeeds" in rendering the brutality, butchery and insane horrors of war. The description of Manfred clearing away the dead corpses is as grim and truthful as Brian Moore's description of Gavin Burke working in a morgue in *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* (1965). Instead of dramatical descriptions of battling soldiers, both novelists give

accounts of the dead corpses and people who work to clear away the carnage. Both Gavin and Manfred drink whisky and tea to give fortitude to their feeble hearts, but with little effect. But their bosses coldly bid them return to their jobs. Moore accounts:

"Here", Freddy said, passing the whisky, "Have a swig". The whisky, strong and biting did not refresh, as had the tea. Gavin swallowed, then, his stomach heaving, threw up, the tea coming up too. The medical student, Geary, was similarly sick. "You'll get used to it", Willie advised. "Now, here's what you have to do". (20)

The incidents surrounding Emma's involvement in the war also expose its brutality. Wilson narrates innocent and brutal incidents with shockingly sharp contrasts. While Emma lives in Prague in her childhood, the Germans invade the city and start inflicting brutalities on the Jews. But she and her two sisters, Dana and Rachel, are barely conscious of the German invasion. They play innocently and joyously. Soon after, however, the family is forced to move to a Jewish ghetto. When Emma and Rachel go home with a loaf of bread, the German soldiers grab it from them and play catch with it. Rachel, pitifully enough, responds each time they throw it because she does not want to spoil their good humour. But one of them crushes the bread with his boot. When Rachel bends to pick it up, the soldier violently kicks her face. She is thrown back and her head smacks on the pavement. Moreover, he spits thickly on her face. She dies a few days later.

Wilson's shocking description of the brutalities that the Germans inflict on the Jews is reminiscent of Brian Moore's description of similar incidents in his novel, *The Statement* (1995). It is a story of a French commandant, Pierre Brossard, who kills 14 Jews in the World War II and the Jews' revenge on him. In Moore's novel, those on whom the abuse is inflicted are male Jews who fight for the Resistance, and it is described from the viewpoint of Brossard who inflicts it. On the other hand, in Wilson's novel, those on whom the abuse is inflicted are female Jews who are innocent and powerless, and it is described from the viewpoint of Emma. Therefore the reader may regard Wilson's description as more brutal and shocking. Rudiger Imhof's comment is correct concerning Wilson's portrayal of the brutality, butchery and insane horrors of war. It is shockingly successful in spite of the defects elsewhere in this novel.

The other notable description which represents Wilson's skills in rhetoric is that of Manfred's grim solitude and decay after Emma leaves him. Wilson uses personification effectively to emphasize his solitude. To reveal Manfred's depressed mood, the following description Wilson gives is remarkably effective:

Death seemed easy. The old man felt himself closing life in common with the century and prey to its ephemeral decay. Neither of them had made much of it. All they shared now was the late-evening drama of two old fools swapping their ruinous sentiments. Their joint conclusions were fitting. The years to come were blunt and hostile. Death seemed easy. (21)

Personification is applied to "the 20th century". The closing of the century and that of Manfred's life overlap each other. Manfred's solitude and decay are doubly emphasized by his ruined hopes for his own life *and* the century. Personification is also applied to London streets to emphasize their grimness:

Dawn. London was rufous and deplorable. The sun rubbed the streets into the warmthless tinge of shaving rash and Manfred's thoughts turned to all the headaches he had ever had. Dawn. The street was bedraggled and lugubrious. London seemed sorry but without good excuse. (22)

Wilson seems to be portraying grim and depressed persons called "the 20th century" and "London". The use of personification in these paragraphs bring to mind a paragraph in *Eureka Street*: "[Chuckie Lurgan] winced at the Lagan, which gurgled and bubbled loud, bright water. Under his feet, the bridge felt unsteady as though it, too, were drunk. Frightened, Chuckie picked up his pace to cross the intoxicated bridge." (23) The personified Lagan Bridge has a strong effect on emphasizing how drunk Chuckie is.

In his third novel, *Eureka Street*, Wilson returns to his "old terrain", in which he makes full use of his rhetorical strategy. The return to this terrain turns out to be a great success. To use Wilson's own words, this is "a big 19th-century novel in terms of size, with lots of characters and it's about Belfast finally".(24) In this novel, which Edna Longley terms "the most richly Dickensian Belfast novel"(25), the reader observes almost as many characters and events as in a Charles Dickens novel, and finds that Belfast is as rich as London in terms of the possibilities of fictional representation. Wilson's portrayal of Belfast in this novel is different from that of the city in *Ripley Bogle*. While a direct accusation is pointed at Belfast in *Ripley Bogle*, the city is described with satire, caricature and, most significantly, with love in *Eureka Street*.

The novel's setting is Belfast immediately before and after the Ceasefire in 1994. Its two protagonists are Jake Jackson, a Catholic who lives in Poetry Street and Chuckie Lurgan, a Protestant who lives in Eureka Street. They are close friends. A satire on the Troubles is observed in the story of Jake Jackson's love affairs. He used to live with an English girl called Sarah. But the girl leaves him because she hates living in Northern Ireland. Then Jake meets a waitress called Mary. She agrees to have sex with him even though she loves a man who works for the RUC. One evening the policeman comes to Jake's flat and beats him out of a grudge against him. Fortunately Jake's injuries are not serious. Then he meets a girl with a strong faith in Republicanism and talks to her about the policeman's assault. He explains that it is purely a personal affair and never an act of police brutality against Catholics. However, the girl would not believe what Jake says, and exclaims that police brutality against Catholics will go on until the whole country of Ireland is united. A few days later, the *Belfast News Letter* publishes an article about the policeman's assault upon Jake. It says:

Republican agitators have accused the RUC of conducting a campaign of police brutality against a South Belfast man. The accusations concern Jake Jackson, a 29-year-old debt counsellor and Roman Catholic. Allegedly, Mr Jackson was seriously assaulted earlier this month by a number of uniformed but off-duty police officers who broke into his home in the early hours of the morning. Sources claimed that Mr Jackson's injuries were serious and that he is currently too frightened to talk to the press.(26)

Here Wilson gives a harsh satire on both Republicanism and Unionism through the pitiful RUC policeman, the bigotted Republican girl and the newspaper giving the distorted report. Wilson cynically refers to the *Belfast News Letter* as "a soundly Protestant newspaper that had been printing soundly Protestant news for two hundred and fifty years"(27).

The newspaper also publishes the comment of a political party "Just Us", which is a fictionalized Sinn Fein. The party also makes a false charge against the RUC. The party leader "Jimmy Eve" and a Republican poet "Shague Ghinthoss" are caricatures of Gerry Adams and Seamus Heaney. Jake says scornfully of Ghinthoss that he is "inappropriately famous" and writes about "frogs, hedges and long-handled spades". He also says cynically that, although the poet is "a vaguely anti-English Catholic", the English love him because they have a real appetite for hearing what "a bunch of fuckers" they are. Through the caricature of Heaney, Wilson alleges, provocatively enough, that the poet writes only about those landscape-related objects and a hatred for the English and avoids dealing seriously with Northern Ireland's political situation. Wilson voices his view straightforwardly in an *Irish Times* interview, saying, "I'm not going to ignore the political questions. I am not Seamus Heaney"(28). However, Wilson's view of Heaney is not accurate. He makes no effort to understand Heaney's grave concerns about Northern Ireland's political situation, which the poet tries to present symbolically or metaphorically through his descriptions of those landscape-related objects. Certainly Wilson's caricatures of Heaney and Adams are quite funny and amusing owing to his skills in rhetoric, but they can not be accepted entirely. If he makes a caricature of Adams, he should present a caricature of Ian Paisely, too. Then his accusation of Republicanism would be on a par with that of Loyalism, and his satire on the Troubles would be more persuasive.

However, except for the caricatures of Heaney and Adams, the other stories Wilson has invented for caricature, satire and love are compelling. The story of Chuckie Lurgan's business enterprise has two contradictory implications; a mockery of the politically divided people of Northern Ireland and a sincere hope for their reconciliation, or a deep love of them. Jake has never worked a day since he was born, and is drinking in pubs every day. But, when he reaches the age of thirty, he resolves to work and make a big money. In order to raise funds for his business, he attempts to cheat Northern Irish people out of their money. He puts up a false advertisement in a newspaper for the sale of "giant dildos". He succeeds in cheating more than four thousand Northern Irish

people and earning more than forty thousand pounds. Then, as he wants to gain more funds for his business, he visits a government industrial board set up to encourage investment in Northern Ireland and, with fiery eloquence, talks to them of non-existent projects and never-intended ideas. He succeeds in cheating them and gaining a huge grant. Through this amusing story in which Northern Irish people are easily cheated, Wilson makes a mockery of them by implying that they can be cheated commonly even though they are irretrievably divided politically. While engaged in a series of cheating, he meets an American girl who inherited a large fortune from her father. He wins her love, expands his business with her money and creates jobs for Northern Irish people. Therefore his plot eventually works for the benefit of Northern Ireland. Wilson describes Jake's emotion:

He [Jake] was confident that his pragmatic announcement of massive job-creation projects would silence Jimmy Eve's feeble ideological spoutings. Ideology was a thick enough blanket but it wasn't as warm or sustaining as employment. Eve could arrange for the odd bomb here and there but he, Chuckie Lurgan, would bring back work to the city single-handed. He would be a hero.(29)

Wilson's rhetorical strategy is observed here in the form of metaphor again. By comparing ideology and employment to the two different blankets, Wilson makes clear his belief that political ideology is less useful than economic prosperity to bring about peace and stability to Northern Ireland.

Wilson's skill in rhetoric is also apparent in the story of the mystery of a three-letter word "OTG". In Northern Ireland one sees a number of three-letter graffiti like "IRA", "UVF" and "UDA". One day, a new three-letter word "OTG" begins to appear throughout the province. People wonder what it stands for, Orangemen Try Genocide, Omelettes Taste Good, Oxford's Too Green, etc. After various speculations, people come to a conclusion that it is the name of a new paramilitary organization. People also suspect that the OTG might have been responsible for the bomb explosion in a sandwich bar, which I will refer to later. As the novel progresses, the reader becomes more curious and more nervous about the OTG mystery. However, when the mystery is disclosed at the end of the novel, the reader may feel that he or she has been made a fool of by the author. At the same time, the reader is impressed by the ingenious plot Wilson invented. This is a bitter satire on the Troubles and Wilson's plot in the OTG mystery is as ingenious and tactful as Colin Bateman's plot in the "DIVORCE JACK" mystery in his prize-winning novel, *Divorcing Jack* (1994).

Another story which reveals Wilson's skill in rhetoric is that of a bomb explosion in a sandwich bar, which kills 17 people. Metaphor works very effectively to emphasize the tragedy. The chapter describing the incident opens with a long and detailed description of a 26-year-old woman called Rosemary Daye. She has smoked three cigarettes for the past week. She goes into her favorite dress-shop and tries on a skirt. She assumes that it will delight her boyfriend. She has been conscious of her hair-style since the age of

thirteen and has spent a lot of money on it. Recently she is beginning to like herself. She thinks that, if she were a man, she might like to have sex with a woman like herself. She also thinks of her boyfriend and of the future they may have. It is quarter past one in the afternoon. She goes to her favorite sandwich bar. She stops at the door to let a handsome young man pass by. But, as he notices her, he holds the door open for her to go ahead. She steps under his arm and turns to murmur some thanks. The description up to here never leads the reader to expect the bomb explosion. Then Wilson remarks quite suddenly that she "stopped existing"(30). The reader is most likely to wonder what has happened to this woman. The reader soon discovers that she has been killed by a bomb which terrorists placed in the bar. Wilson's narrative intensifies the tragedy of the bomb explosion and reveals the fact that it has closed the innocent woman's life in an instant. The metaphorical expression, "she stopped existing" has a stronger effect than a direct expression like "she was killed" in emphasizing the tragedy because it reveals more vividly that the woman's life has come to a sudden end. Wilson also likens the lives of the 17 dead to long novels and says: "They all had stories. But they weren't short stories. They should each have been novels, profound, delightful novels, eight hundred pages or more"(31). This metaphor implies that, though their lives were rich with many experiences, they were abruptly shattered by one bomb. The metaphor also serves to emphasize the tragedy. The contrast Wilson gives to the portrayal of the innocent build-up and that of the brutal end is extremely and shockingly sharp. Therefore Laura Pelaschiar is right when she comments that Wilson's account is "one of the best descriptions of the horror of a bomb explosion ever to appear in a Northern Irish novel"(32).

Jake Jackson expresses his contradictory sentiments about Belfast : hatred and love. He says that he always wants to leave Belfast when the bad things like the terrorist bombing in the sandwich bar happen.

When the bad things happened, I always wanted to leave and let Belfast rot. This was what living in this place was all about. I got this feeling twice a week every week of the year. Like everyone here, I lived in Belfast from day to day. It was never firm. I always stayed but I never really wanted to.(33)

However, soon after voicing this hatred for the city, he sees people walking in the street in the early morning and feels affection for them, saying, "Belfast was only half awake and its citizens were mild and lovable as children"(34). Throughout the novel, Wilson personifies Belfast in various ways, as seen in the expression: "Belfast was only half awake". The reader feels as if Belfast were a human being with emotions like joy and sorrow. Wilson also likens Belfast to a novel and says, " The city's surface is thick with its living citizens. Its earth is richly sown with its many dead. The city is a repository of narratives, of stories. Present tense, past tense or future. The city is a novel." (35) In this paragraph, Wilson tries to emphasize that, despite its long troubled history, Belfast is an ordinary city, like many other cities in the world, where innocent people live and

die. His comparison of Belfast to a novel also reveals his love of the city:

[M]ost of all, cities are meeting places of stories. The men and women there are narratives, endlessly complex and intriguing. The most humdrum of them constitutes a narrative that would defeat Tolstoy at his best and most voluminous.(36)

In the above paragraphs, metaphor serves to make clear Wilson's love of Belfast. His love of the city has surpassed his hatred at last. He successfully shows, with his rhetorical strategy, that Belfast is "Everycity" and its inhabitants are "Everyman", as Pelaschiar put it.

There is another evidence of Wilson's ingenious rhetorical strategy. This novel, *Eureka Street*, opens with the sentence, "All stories are love stories"(37). The reader may assume that the stories told in this novel are various stories of love between men and women. Certainly love stories are told about Jake Jackson and the English girl, and also about Chuckie Lurgan and the American girl. Unexpectedly, however, the reader comes to discover that the best love story told in this novel is that of the author's love for his native city, Belfast. In his essay on literature, *The Story Begins* (1999), Amos Oz discusses Thomas Mann's novel, *The Chosen*.(38) The novel starts with a chapter entitled "Who Tolls the Bells?". The reader assumes that it is "the spirit of the story" that will toll the bell. However, Mann tactfully chetas the reader and discloses that the bell-toller is an Irishman called Clemence. Wilson cheats the reader of *Eureka Street* as tactfully as Mann does the reader of his novel. The reader will be impressed by Wilson's deep love of Belfast and his sincere hope for a solution to the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland.

John Bayley, husband of the late Iris Murdoch, claims in *The Characters of Love* (1960) that the author who best loves his own characters is the best on love.(39) In Bayley's definition, Wilson would be one of the best authors on love. *Eureka Street* is no doubt a "Quality Street", as Edna Longley put it.

In an interview with Esther Aliaga (40), Glenn Patterson remarked that he was opposed to some people's view that Northern Irish novelists would have nothing to write about after the Ceasefire in 1994. He said that, even if the Troubles ended, there would still be enough material that was of interest to them. He also predicted that some of the more interesting fiction about the Troubles would be written afterwards. His remark turned out to be correct. Northern Irish novelists proved to be capable of dealing with other subjects than the Troubles, as Wilson's *Manfred's Pain*, Moore's *The Statement* and Deirdre Madden's *Remembering Light and Stone* (1992) show. And, as Patterson predicted, while Wilson's *Ripley Bogle* and Patterson's *Burning Your Own* were successfully written in the midst of the Troubles, important novels on the Troubles have appeared since the Ceasefire. Among them Wilson's *Eureka Street*, Madden's *One by One in the Darkness* (1996) and Patterson's *The International* (1999).

The value and significance of the three novels Robert McLiam Wilson has published

lie in the fact that, through his remarkable skills in rhetoric, they represent the rich diversity and possibilities that Northern Irish fiction possesses. Wilson and other talented young novelists are likely to invalidate the popular view that Northern Ireland is less distinguished in fiction than in poetry and drama.

Notes

- (1) Laura Pelaschiar, *Writing the North: The Contemporary Novel in Northern Ireland* (Trieste: Edizioni Parnaso, 1998), p.13.
- (2) Richard Pine, "Wilson, Robert McLiam (1964–)", *Dictionary of Irish Literature: Revised and Expanded Edition, M–Z*, ed. by Robert Hogan (Westport: Greenwood, 1996), p.1255.
- (3) Edna Longley, "Quality Street", *Fortnight*, October 1996, no.354, p.34.
- (4) According to the website "Eirdata" (<http://www.pgil-eirdata.org>), the novel was translated into French by Brice Matthieussent and published by Editions Christian Bourgois in 1997.
- (5) Robert McLiam Wilson, *Ripley Bogle* (1989; rpt., London: Vintage, 1998), p.101.
- (6) *The Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition* (1989; rpt., Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p.857.
- (7) According to "Eirdata", he remarked it in an interview with *Figaro Magazine*, August, 1998.
- (8) *Ripley Bogle*, p.38.
- (9) *Ibid.*
- (10) *Ibid.*, p.111.
- (11) *Ibid.*
- (12) *Ibid.*, p.250.
- (13) *Ibid.*, p.324.
- (14) *Ibid.*, p.326.
- (15) *Ibid.*
- (16) *Ibid.*, p.313–314.
- (17) 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*", *Proceedings of the XIXth International Conference of Aedean*, ed. by Javier Perez Guerra (Universidade de Vigo, 1996), pp.105–110.
- (18) Gerald Dawe's review of *Manfred's Pain*, *The Linen Hall Review*, Vol.10, No.1, Summer 1993, p.25.
- (19) Rudigar Imhof's review of *Manfred's Pain*, *Ibid.*, p.29.
- (20) Brian Moore, *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* (1965; rpt., London: Paladin, 1988), p.234.
- (21) Robert McLiam Wilson, *Manfred's Pain* (London: Picador, 1992), p.5.
- (22) *Ibid.*, p.124.
- (23) Robert McLiam Wilson, *Eureka Street* (1996; rpt., London: Minerva, 1997), p.23.
- (24) Eileen Battersby's interview with Robert McLiam Wilson, *The Irish Times*, May, 1992. Quoted by Pelaschiar in *Writing the North*, p.22.
- (25) Edna Longley, "Quality Street", *Fortnight*, No.354, October 1996, p.34.
- (26) *Eureka Street*, p.148.
- (27) *Ibid.*
- (28) Battersby's interview with Wilson. Quoted by Pelaschiar, p.22. As regards Wilson's criticism of Heaney, see also "The Glittering Prize", *Fortnight*, No.344, November 1995, pp.23–25.
- (29) *Eureka Street*, p.381.
- (30) *Ibid.*, p.222.