George A. Birmingham in the Gaelic League: The Stepping-Stone to a Universally Appealing Novelist

Masahiko Yahata

Introduction

George A. Birmingham, the pen name of James Owen Hannay (1865-1950), was born to a Protestant family with a strong Unionist background in Belfast. When Birmingham was still an infant, his father hired the leader of Northern Ireland's Orangemen as Birmingham's private tutor to imbue his mind with faith in Unionism. But, against his father's expectation, Birmingham came to sympathize with Irish Nationalism and joined the Gaelic League. While he stayed in Westport as a Church of Ireland rector, Birmingham started writing novels. His first two novels, *The Seething Pot* (1905) and *Hyacinth* (1906) caused great controversies. Birmingham was mistakenly regarded as hostile to the Irish and was denounced in the Gaelic League. He then withdrew himself from the League's executive and started writing humorous novels, in which conflicts between Nationalists and Unionists were settled with the protagonists' ingenious tricks.

Although Birmingham called his brief relations with the Gaelic League "ill-starred", it seems to have played a significant role in Birmingham's growth as a novelist. The purpose of this paper is to prove how Birmingham's troubled relations with the Gaelic League contributed to his growth as a novelist and to reveal how his novels appeal to universal minds.

Birmingham's admission into the Gaelic League

Birmingham came to Westport as a Church of Ireland rector in 1892. According to his autobiography, *Pleasant Places* (1934), Birmingham's interest in Irish politics started after he founded a literary society in the town.³

Most of the members were Protestants of Unionist sympathies. In the society's last meeting of 1903, Birmingham's wife spoke about the literary merits of some poets who joined the Young Ireland Movement of the mid-19th century. There happened to be a man of Nationalist sympathies present at the meeting. When he vehemently admired Birmingham's wife for her speech, the other members were upset. Then Birmingham recited some of James Clarence Mangan's poems, expecting that their beautiful musical tones would sooth the savage mood. However it produced a counter effect, for Birmingham came to be resented more by his friends and parishioners.⁴

This trouble drove Birmingham and his wife further in the direction of Nationalism. Birmingham sympathized with Douglas Hyde who founded the Gaelic League in 1893. Hyde was also the son of a Church of Ireland Clergyman and a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin. Birmingham believed Hyde was perfectly honest in his assertion that the Gaelic League was "a non-political body", and felt that the League contributed to the revival of an Irish consciousness and the creation of pure patriotism among Irish people. ⁵ Correspondence between Birmingham

and Hyde indicates that they first met in Westport before May 26 in 1904.6 May 20 of the same year, The Church of Ireland Gazette bitterly criticized Hyde and the Gaelic League for their anti-English attitude.⁷ Birmingham made an objection to this criticism and defended Hyde and the Gaelic League in the June 3 issue of the Gazette.8 A long controversy followed in the Gazette. Hvde was moved by Birmingham's earnest support of the Gaelic League and pleaded with Birmingham to join the executive of the Gaelic League, the Coisde Gnotha. Birmingham accepted Hyde's plea and became its member in December, 1904.



Birmingham as a small boy (Trinity College, Dublin, Manuscripts 3457/15)

Fierce controversies caused by The Seething Pot and Hyacinth

Birmingham was detested by Protestant Unionists due to his support of Nationalism. However, at the same time, he was condemned by Catholic Nationalists for his portrayals of the Irish in his first two novels, and got involved in fierce controversies.

Birmingham's first novel *The Seething Pot* (1905) describes the political battle of a young man, Gerald Geoghegan, for an independent Ireland. Gerald's father, who is a Protestant of English descent, owns a large estate in Clogher in the west of Ireland: the town represents Westport. In the time of the Young Ireland Movement, Gerald's father instigates local farmers to a rebellion against the English force. However, the rebellion fails and he is captured and deported to Australia.

Gerald is born in Australia and crosses the sea to Ireland to inherit his father's estate in Clogher, and to fight for an independent Ireland. Gerald soon comes into odd terms with a local Catholic priest, Father Fahy. The priest demands that Gerald should rent his estate to the farmers for an unduly small charge. Gerald rejects the priest's demand in accordance with the advice of the leader of the Nationalist Party, John O'Neill. He is also a Protestant of English descent. O'Neill pleads with Gerald to join his party and stand for the parliamentary election. Gerald accepts O'Neill's plea. However, when they go out for an electoral campaign to the neighboring town, a band of police officers blocks them. O'Neill says with conviction that this blockage is ordered by Father Fahy and other priests. O'Neill goes as far as saying that those priests are receiving bribes from the English Government to suppress every anti-English movement. In torrential rain O'Neill desperately tries to break into the police barricade. But it proves futile and he dies of pneumonia. Realizing the overwhelming power of Catholic priests, Gerald withdraws himself from the battle for an independent Ireland.

Birmingham's second novel *Hyacinth* (1906) describes another young man's battle for an independent Ireland. Hyacinth Conneally is the son of a man who converted from Catholicism to Protestantism through the missionary movement conducted by the English Government in the mid-19th century. Hyacinth enters the Divinity School of Trinity College, Dublin, and aims to become a Protestant clergyman. But he is totally shocked by the "superlative Imperialism" of the Unionist students

who regard the English as the pioneers of civilization and justify their occupation of the Boers. He detests the English, believing that they are inflicting equally cruel oppression upon the Boers and the Irish. After knowing Hyacinth's sympathy with Irish Nationalism, other students start bullying and humiliating him. Consequently Hyacinth resolves to join the underground Nationalist organization led by a militant lady known as Finnola. She recruits the volunteer soldiers fighting against the English in the Boer War. She declines Hyacinth's volunteering, and instead introduces him to a woollen mill run by a soldier's brother. Hyacinth then aspires to work for the revival of the Irish industry as a sales representative for the mill.

However, Hyacinth encounters the incidents which make him disillusioned by Irish Nationalism. He finds that the two drapers are selling cheaper English products by labeling them falsely as Irish products. He also finds that a convent mill employs girl workers at starvation wages though it is funded by the Government. It leads Hyacinth's mill to go bankrupt. The final blow to his faith in Nationalism is given by a Protestant clergyman, Canon Beecher. The Canon solemnly preaches against the militant Nationalism professed by Hyacinth. Convinced that the Canon is right, Hyacinth withdraws himself from the battle for an independent Ireland and goes to England to become a Protestant clergyman.

After both novels were published, speculation was rife concerning the true identity of "George A. Birmingham". At last Father McDonald of Westport discovered that it was the rector of the town, James Owen Hannay, and bitterly accused him of insulting Catholics and Nationalists in the *Mayo News* of April 28, 1906, mentioning that "the books in question contain gross libels on living men, and virulent attacks on bishops, priests, and nuns." Father McDonald and his followers denounced Birmingham in a series of articles of the same paper. At the Conference of the Priests of the Deanery of Westport held on May 15, a resolution of protest against Birmingham was adopted with the signatures of the sixteen priests present. At the weekly meeting of the Westport Board of Guardians held two days later, they resolved to demand an apology from Birmingham, who was also a member of the Board.

Many Irish Catholics and Nationalists considered that Birmingham was totally hostile to them. However, a closer reading of both novels

reveals that Birmingham sincerely loved Ireland and hoped for an independent Ireland. His intentions in both novels were to expose the deplorable condition of Ireland ruled by a handful of hypocritical Nationalists and Unionists, and thereby to show the difficulties facing the battle for an independent Ireland. In the closing chapter of *The Seething Pot*, the editor of a Nationalist newspaper compares Ireland to "the seething pot", a phrase in *The Old Testament*¹², and tells Gerald with a strong passion that the Irish must go on fighting for their independence from England:

"You will not be angry with me for my parable of the seething pot. It is not mine, you know, but the prophet's. I have only fitted it to Ireland—our dear Ireland, which we love best of all things, in spite— Would we love Ireland so well as we do if we had not got to love her in spite of her breaking our hearts?"¹³

In *Hyacinth*, too, Birmingham's deep faith in Christianity is discernible. When Canon Beecher tells Hyacinth that a true Christian must love his enemy, he realizes the truthfulness of the Canon's view and decides to part with militant Nationalism. In the following novel, *Benedict Kavanagh* (1907), Hyacinth reappears as a clergyman and meditates upon what he can do to make Ireland a more peaceful country. The trilogy of *The Seething Pot*, *Hyacinth* and *Benedict Kavanagh* is the representation of Birmingham's deep faith in Christianity and hearty love of Ireland.

Another piece of evidence for the significance of *Hyacinth* is that it inspired Graham Greene to write his last novel *The Captain and the Enemy* (1988). The title was taken from the sentence in *Hyacinth*: "Will you be sure to know the good side from the bad, the Captain from the enemy?" These words were uttered to Hyacinth by his father, implying that it would be impossible to declare which is right, Nationalism or Unionism. It seems that both Birmingham and Greene, being devoted Christians, had serious concern about what is good and what is bad. As R.B.D. French commented, *The Seething Pot* and *Hyacinth* are "the work of a Christian moralist".

Although Birmingham was denounced bitterly by Irish Catholics and Nationalists when he published both novels, he remained a faithful

Nationalist. He was the only one who voted for Home Rule at the Church of Ireland Synod in 1912.



Birmingham at Westport Rectory (TCD MSS 3457/42)

Correspondence between Birmingham and Canon Macken

Controversies over *The Seething Pot* and *Hyacinth* were restaged at the Gaelic League meetings in late 1906.

On Thursday, September 27 of that year, a meeting of the Connacht council of the Gaelic League was held at Claremorris to discuss the possibility of holding the Connacht Feis the next year. The meeting was attended by twenty-two delegates including Birmingham and chaired by Canon Macken of Tuam. When John Hamilton, honorary secretary of the council, proposed a motion to form the Feis committee which would consist of all present and also several other members, the chairman objected to it and claimed that they should exclude Birmingham because his two novels "had outraged and trampled on the dearest sentiments and aspirations of Catholics and Irishmen." Father Connolly of Ballaghaderreen protested against the chairman, saying that putting such

an objection would be a breach of the constitution of the Gaelic League. It sparked a dispute between the supporters of Birmingham and those of Canon Macken. Birmingham himself expressed his obligation to Canon Macken for voicing his frank opinion about both novels. Birmingham then agreed to be excluded from the Feis committee, and left the meeting in company with Father Connolly.

At the Gaelic League's executive meeting on October 15, which Birmingham declined to attend, the legality of Canon Macken's action at Claremorris and the treatment of Birmingham were on the agenda. But it was resolved that the issues should be postponed on account of the fact that correspondence was under way between Birmingham and Canon Macken. Meanwhile, the Canon made a public statement in his own defence and described Birmingham's position in the Coisde Gnotha as that of "a canker worm eating into the vitals of the League" The statement fixed Birmingham's mind to resign from the League's executive and he submitted a letter stating his will of resignation to the executive. It was read at their meeting in November, from which Birmingham absented himself again. Consequently his resignation was approved.

Today the correspondence between Birmingham and Canon Macken is held in the Manuscripts and Archives Library of Trinity College Dublin.¹⁷ The letter Birmingham wrote to Canon Macken on September 29 reads as follows:

Dear Canon Macken,

I am sorry that my presence at the meeting in Claremorris on Thursday last should have put you in an uncomfortable and disagreeable position.

I received a notice to attend from the secretary and it did not occur to me that there was likely to be any strong objection to my taking part in the deliberations of the financial committee. I may say that if I had been given the slightest hint beforehand that you as a chairman of the meeting, intended to take the line you did, I should not have gone to the meeting. I have never pushed myself forward in the Gaelic League, and this year before the Ard-Fheis. I opposed to being in my place on the Coisde, fearing that my membership of that body might be injurious to the interests of the League. For the same reason I should have refrained

from taking any part in making arrangements for the Connacht Feis if I had supposed that the success of the Feis was likely to be endangered by my doing so.

I thought however and not unnaturally that having, by my reelection to the Coisde Gnotha six weeks ago, received a party of confidence and good will of my fellow members of the League I am not likely to be strongly objected at a Gaelic League meeting.

I may perhaps add that I have no doubt whatever that you acted in a manner inconsistent with the spirit of the League and that I fear your action might be criticized by those who are hostile to the League, as an assertion that the League is not, what it proposes to be, a national organization.

I close by ensuring you that, although I object strongly to your action as chairman of a Gaelic League meeting and therefore bound for the time being by the constitution of the League, I recognize your right in any other capacity to express your findings about me and my writings in any way you choose. So far from resenting such criticism as yours and other attacks on me of a similar kind, I am grateful for them. Since they enable me to justify to myself, and since they justify to the public much that I have written.

On October 2, Canon Macken wrote back to Birmingham insisting that his objection to Birmingham's membership of the Connacht Feis committee was never inconsistent with the spirit of the Gaelic League. He mentioned:

...If I objected to your inclusion in the League as a member (which I never did) there might be some ground for this contention. But my objection was solely to your promotion to membership of the committee, and this objection was based on your attacks on Catholics and on Irishmen as such. (See Report in the Evening Mail.)

As well as my memory serves me now I am of opinion there is scarcely an institution in the country you have not scorned in your writings, religious, political, educational or social. The Roman Catholic Church, The Church of Ireland, the National Party, the Unionist Party, Trinity College, Maynooth College, the Congested District Board all came

in for a lash of your whip. You have scarcely a word of praise even for the Gaelic League. Much of your criticism is deserved and I agree with you that the influence of the Catholic clergy is sometimes unduly extended. But a great deal of your criticism is unfair, and can serve no useful purpose. In reading your works what pained myself most was your ferocious and unjust attack on the Foxford nuns¹⁸ and your representing Joe and Mick as dishonest and guilty of forgery.

I have known a very able and sympathetic critic of your books to say, "Why one is inclined to fling them against the wall, he can see no good in anything, he would make one sit down, fold one's arms and do nothing. It is pessimism, criticism, gloom, despair anywhere."

Myself, I honestly believe you have a genuine love of the country, and that you hope that, in some mysterious manner, out of the chaos you would bring about a better order of things will evolve itself. Combine more of the qualities of heart with your brilliant gifts of intellect, gifts which I recognized about 15 years ago at a meeting held in Westport for the relief of the poor. Give us a book that will have something of sunshine and hope in it, a book that will inspire us all to sustained efforts towards good and I will endeavour to undo the work of last Thursday. I will do all that in me lies to please you side by side with Douglas Hyde for the regeneration of our country.

Canon Macken's reply contains some truths. While many Irish readers were only attracted to Birmingham's critical descriptions of Catholics and Nationalists, Macken recognized that Birmingham gave a lash of his whip to Unionists as well, and admitted that the influence of the Catholic Church was sometimes too strong.

Macken also admired Birmingham for brilliant gifts of intellect he showed at a meeting in Westport for the relief of the poor. Westport Poor Law Union was formed in 1840 and its operation was overseen by an elected Board of Guardians. Birmingham was a member of it and they met each week on Thursday. Although it is impossible to identify the meeting that Macken mentioned, Birmingham's autobiography *Pleasant Places* indicates that Birmingham was doing brilliant works as a member of the Board.

In the late 19th century, the Old Age Pension Act was passed in

Ireland, through which it became possible for the Irish to receive pensions when they came to a certain age. A number of people made up fictional stories and tried to cheat the Board members about their ages and receive pensions before coming to the required age. There were also troubles in determining their incomes. However, Birmingham found a lot of amusement in dealing with those people and mentioned:

It does not seem to me now that the English are getting half as much fun out of their Means Test as we got out of ours. They appear to get angry about it, a very stupid thing to do. Public business ought never to be taken seriously. It is always comic and should be treated as a joke.²⁰

Canon Macken's admiration might have reminded Birmingham of this experience. It might be probable that the Canon's advice, "Give us a book that will have something of sunshine and hope in it, a book that will inspire us all to sustained efforts towards good", stayed deep in Birmingham's mind. Therefore it might be probable that Canon Macken letter inspired Birmingham to write humorous novels which had something of sunshine and hope in them.

Those humorous novels show Birmingham's hearty wish for reconciliation between Nationalists and Unionists. At the same time, they represent Birmingham's belief that humor is indispensable for reconciliation between every human being.



Birmingham at Holy Trinity School, Westport in 1898 (TCD MSS 3457/22)

Birmingham's message from his humorous novels

In 1908, Birmingham published a humorous novel, *Spanish Gold*, the tone of which was entirely different from those of his previous serious political novels. It became one of the best-selling novels at that time and Birmingham established himself as a novelist.

J.J. Meldon is an easy-going, optimistic young clergyman without any political conviction, while his friend, Major Kent, is a conservative, sceptical retired soldier with a strong faith in Unionism. Although their dispositions present a striking contrast, they are good friends. Meldon persuades Kent to go with him for gold hunting on a small island off the west coast of Ireland. They come across rival hunters. When it becomes clear that the gold is secretly kept by an old man living on the island, Meldon and Kent give up the hunt. But the rival hunters attempt to rob the old man's gold. Meldon fights bravely with them and restores the gold to the old man. Meldon captures the two villains with the assistance of a local Catholic priest. Birmingham's sense of humour is best represented in the scene in which Meldon breaks the windows of a government official's house to hide the oars of a boat in it. Meldon justifies his action, telling the dismayed Kent that he will prevent the two villains from using the boat for their wrongdoing. This scene is a reminder of Birmingham's notion: "Public business ought never to be taken seriously. It is always comic and should be treated as a joke."

Birmingham continued to create the protagonists who were treating public business as a joke, such as Dr. O'Grady of General John Regan (1913), Dr. Whitty of The Adventures of Dr. Whitty (1913) and the Revd. Ponsonby of Appeasement (1939). In General John Regan, Dr. O'Grady displays his great leadership in uniting the people of Ballymoy in their attempt to fool an American millionaire out of his money. In "The Deputation", the first chapter of The Adventures of Dr. Whitty, the doctor conspires to include a Nationalist inn-keeper and a Unionist landlord, who are hostile to each other, in the same deputation asking the Chief Secretary of Ireland for a pier. In Appeasement, the Revd. Ponsonby struggles to settle the feud between a young reformer and the conservative villagers. He succeeds in settling it by marrying the young man and his cousin, a London schoolmistress. The young man is so contented with his married life that he loses his passion for reforming the village.

At the same time, those protagonists of Birmingham's humorous novels are brave and strong. They do not fear anyone except God. They work hard to bring benefits not only to themselves but also to those living in the same communities. It seems that they embody Birmingham's ideal of a Christian, which is represented in his books on theology.

Birmingham was a devoted Christian as well as a prolific novelist. In his book on theology, *The Spirit and Origin of Christian Monasticism* (1893), Birmingham mentioned that the ideal Christian is "brave and strong" and "fears God and no one except God." In *Isaiah* (1937), biography of a prophet in *The Old Testament*, Birmingham quoted Isaiah's words: "Let Him be your fear and you need fear no other. Let Him be your dread and you need have no dread." Birmingham also admired Isaiah for his faith in God which was "unfaltering even in times of utter hopelessness", love of his people, and gentleness which he showed "not to sin, but to sinners." ²³

J.J. Meldon, Dr. O'Grady, Dr. Whitty, the Revd. Ponsonby and other protagonists of Birmingham's humorous novels never give up their fights even in times of utter hopelessness because they genuinely love the people in the same communities and endeavor to give them benefits. Moreover they are tolerant and gentle to their enemies and sinners. As ideal Christians they give a message that humor is indispensable for solving every human conflict.

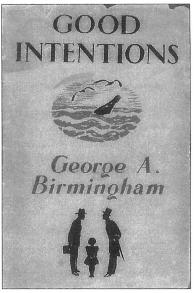
Conclusion

In *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (1988), Roy Foster strongly criticized Irish Nationalism around the turn of the twentieth century, asserting that it was sectarian and racist. For its endorsement Foster alluded to the incident of Birmingham's withdrawal from the Gaelic League's executive after being denounced by Canon Macken for his two novels, *The Seething Pot* and *Hyacinth*.²⁴ Certainly Canon Macken's sectarian attitude should be criticized. But, through the troubles with Canon Macken, Birmingham grew to be a novelist who was able to write humorous novels which appeal to universal minds.

Birmingham heartily hoped for reconciliation between every human being, and always tried to show his good intentions in his novels. However, they were sometimes misunderstood, as shown by the denouncement of *The Seething Pot* and *Hyacinth* and the riot which the play of *General John Regan* caused in Westport in 1914.²⁵ Birmingham

wrote a wartime novel, *Good Intentions* (1945). It is a story about a warm-hearted American girl whose good intentions are grossly misunderstood but bear fruit at last. Looking back upon the trouble with which many people have got involved, her father remarks "that's the way most of the real troubles in the world start—through good intentions".²⁶ This sounds like Birmingham's own voice.

Although Birmingham regarded his short-lived relations with the Gaelic League as ill-starred, it actually contributed a great deal to developing his talent as a novelist. It served as the stepping-stone to his growth as a universally appealing novelist.



Good Intentions (1945)

Notes

- 1. George A. Birmingham, *Pleasant Places* (London: William Heinemann, 1934), pp. 1-4.
- 2. Ibid., p. 183.
- 3. *Ibid.*, pp. 178-180 Before coming to Westport, Birmingham was a curate of Delgany, Co. Wicklow from 1988 to 1892. In lecture notes titled "Experience of a writer of a novel" (No date, Trinity College, Dublin, Manuscripts 3458-2), he also mentioned how uninterested he had been in Irish politics while he was in Delgany:
 - "I was almost totally uninterested in what was going on. This was all the more strange because I lived within a few miles of Parnell's house, where I used to play cricket sometimes and had the good fortune to have as my friend one of the few Roman Catholic priests who stood by the great leader in spite of the consideration of his church. Yet, in spite of all this, so well as I recollect, I knew little or nothing about what was going on round me."
- 4. Pleasant Places, pp. 180-182. The Mayo News of sometime in 1903 (No exact date, TCD MSS 3430/21) also gave a report of this meeting. It implied that heated discussion was going on, mentioning: "The last meeting of the Literary Society for this season created considerable interest and the Schoolroom was filled to overflowing. The title of Mrs. Hannay's essay was 'the Young Ireland Movement'."
- 5. Pleasant Places, pp. 182-183.
- 6. "Letter from Douglas Hyde to James Owen Hannay", 26th May, 1904, TCD MSS 3454/112.
- 7. "Language and Politics", Church of Ireland Gazette, May 20, 1904, pp.420-421.
- 8. James O. Hannay, "Language and Politics", Church of Ireland Gazette, June 3, 1904, p. 467.

- 9. "Father McDonald Unmasks the Author of *The Seething Pot* and *Hyacinth*", *Mayo News*, April 28, 1906, TCD MSS 3444/62.
- 10. "The Dignified Protest of the Priests of the West", Mayo News, May 19, 1906, TCD MSS 3444/66.
- 11. "Westport Guardians and Rev Mr Hannay: An Apology Demanded", Ibid., TCD MSS 3444/65.
- 12. "Jeremiah 1:1", The Old Testament
- 13. George A. Birmingham, The Seething Pot (1905: rpt., London: Edward Arnold), pp. 298-299.
- 14. George A. Birmingham, Hyacinth (London: Edward Arnold), p. 265.
- 15. "Gaelic League and the Rector of Westport", *The Irish Times*, 29 September, 1906, TCD MSS 3444/78.
- 16. Hannay, "Statement: To be read to the Coisde Gnotha at its meeting in November", TCD MSS 3455/350.
- 17. "Letter from Hannay to Canon Macken", September 29, 1906, TCD MSS 3455/320 and "Letter from Canon Macken to Hannay", 2 October, 1906, TCD 3455/323.
- 18. Many readers of *Hyacinth* considered that the existing Foxford Woollen Mill was the model of the Robeen Mill in the novel. See Peter Murray, "Novels, Nuns and the Revival of Irish Industries: The Rector of Westport and the Foxford Woollen Mill 1905-1907", *Cathair na Mart: Journal of Westport Historical Society*, No. 8, 1988, pp. 86-99.
- 19. "The Workhouse: Westport, Co. Mayo", http://www.workhouse.org.uk/Westport/
- 20. Pleasant Places, p. 149.
- 21. James Owen Hannay, *The Spirit and Origin of Christian Monasticism* (1903: rpt., Whitefish: Kessinger, 2003), p. 6.
- 22. George A. Birmingham, Isaiah (London: Rich & Cowen, 1937), p. 97.
- 23. Ibid., p. 57.
- 24. Roy Foster, Modern Ireland 1600-1972 (London: Allen Lane, 1988), pp.453-454.
- 25. See Brian Taylor, "George A. Birmingham and General John Regan, New York and Westport", Cathair na Mart, No. 12, 1992, pp. 90-112. and Masahiko Yahata, "George A. Birmingham, General John Regan: A Hearty Wish for Reconciliation between Every Human Being", Ibid., No. 30, 2011, pp. 8-18.
- 26. George A. Birmingham, Good Intentions (London: Methuen, 1945), p. 178-179.

My writing of this article was supported by the Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (The Grant Number: 22520288).

Masahiko Yahata is Professor of Irish Literature at Beppu University Junior College, Japan. His publications include *Potential in Northern Irish Fiction: Quests for Reconciliation and Universality* (2003) and *The Life and Work of a Novelist, George A. Birmingham* (2007), the textbook for an intensive course of Irish Literature at the Open University of Japan. His Birmingham website is at http://www.geo-birmin.com. He is currently working on a book of a critical study of Birmingham's novels.