

Universals out of localness: What contemporary Northern Irish fiction tries to represent

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地域性の中の普遍性—現代北アイルランド小説が訴えるもの—

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【要 旨】

1969年から30年間に亘って続いた北アイルランド紛争の間、北アイルランドの大多数の小説家たちは「紛争小説」を書き続けた。一方、1990年代、和平に向けての動きが進展するに従って紛争以外のテーマを取り扱った小説が徐々に現れ始めた。1998年ベルファスト和平合意が締結され、北アイルランドが平和になるにつれ、小説家たちは、紛争以外の、人間社会や人生をテーマにした作品をさらに多く書き始めた。そして紛争時代は家庭に閉じこめられていた女性たちの社会進出が顕著になるに従って、女性小説家たちの台頭も目立ち始めた。本稿では、1980年代以降の北アイルランド小説の変遷を辿りながら、グレン・パタソンの『老人をすり潰して若者に変身させる製粉所』（2012年）と『後はただ従うだけ』（2014年）を中心に論じ、現代の北アイルランド小説家たちがどのように彼らの作品の普遍的意義を訴えようとしているのかを明らかにする。

【キーワード】

現代北アイルランド小説 ベルファスト和平合意 女性小説家の台頭
グレン・パタソン 地域性の中の普遍性

Introduction

This paper aims to discuss contemporary works of Northern Irish fiction, especially those which have been published since the implementation of the Belfast Agreement in 1998. Thereby it intends to reveal how those works of fiction appeal to universal minds and to show what type of research is expected to be done on Northern Irish fiction in the future.

The “Troubles novels”

Until the Belfast Agreement was implemented, the Troubles of Northern Ireland had been going on for nearly 30 years since 1969. Meanwhile many novelists had been writing about the Troubles and those novels are commonly called the “Troubles’ novels”. Among the masterpieces of the Troubles’ novels are Bernard MacLaverty, *Cal* (1983),

Deirdre Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* (1986), Glenn Patterson, *Burning Your Own* (1988), and Brian Moore, *Lies of Silence* (1992). *Cal* is a story about a Catholic youth who is forced to join the IRA terrorist campaign. *Hidden Symptoms* reveals the agony of a university female student whose twin brother is killed by the IRA bomb. *Burning Your Own* describes a friendship between a Protestant boy and a Catholic boy which ends in a tragic death of the Catholic boy. *Lies of Silence* discloses the mental conflict of a hotel manager who is ordered to place a bomb and explode his hotel by the IRA, while they hold his wife a hostage. These novels emphasize the fact that the ordinary, innocent citizens are the victims of war. In this sense these novels can be regarded as a microcosm of war and appeal to universal minds.

Two novels during the progress of the peace talk

On the other hand the peace talk was progressing in the 1990s and during that period novels which deal with broader themes began to appear. Robert McLiam Wilson, *Eureka Street* (1996), which begins with "All stories are love stories." depicts ordinary Belfast citizens who are living amid the Troubles, trying to overcome them and to bring peace and wealth to the city.

MacLaverly, *Grace Notes* (1997), narrates the life of a Northern Irish woman who overcomes various hardships and achieves success as a composer. This novel was shortlisted for the 1997 Man Booker Prize.

The emergence of female novelists after the implementation of the Belfast Agreement

The Belfast Agreement was implemented the year after MacLaverly's novel was published. The danger of civil war was gone from Northern Ireland, though unstable political conditions remained to last until today. Belfast has grown to be a modern European city. Tara West, *Fodder* (2003), is a novel which shows the development of Belfast as a modern European city through the display of Belfast punk culture. The protagonist is a funky boy and his mother is a rock musician. The mother disappears from home and the boy searches for her. When the boy comes to the Belfast city center, he says looking around the city hall, "War torn? Us? Nah. We're modern, we're European, we're affluent, we've moved on, we're different now." ¹⁾



Belfast city center
— August 31, 2015

As Northern Ireland became wealthier and more peaceful, Northern Irish novelists started writing more about themes other than the Troubles. Several characteristics are noticed in the works of Northern Irish fiction which have been published since the implementation of the Belfast Agreement. One is that they are dealing, not only with the Troubles, but also with other phases of human life and society. Another is the emergence of fe-

male novelists, and another is the emergence of independent female characters who act of their own free will.

Jo Baker, *Offcomer* (2001), portrays a Scottish woman who believes that she is Jewish and suffers a sense of displacement. Then she comes to work in Belfast and at last finds that Belfast is the very place where she can establish herself.

Sharon Owens, *The Tea House on Mulberry Street* (2003), relates human dramas of those who come to the cozy tea house which stands on a street in South Belfast. This tea house is run by a husband and wife, and they share joys and sorrows with customers. This and her following two novels, *The Ballroom on Magnolia Street* (2004) and *The Tavern on Maple Street* (2005), strongly emphasize that Belfast is not merely a city of troubles but a city full of warm-hearted people. These novels by Owens, which uncover unfamiliar aspects of Belfast, captured so many readers' minds that they were published in translation in several countries.

Claire Allan, *The First Time I Said Good-bye* (2003), traces the journey to the past of a woman who was born in Londonderry and emigrated to America. Although the family she was born to was big and poor, they had such a strong tie that this novel makes the readers reconsider what true happiness is.

The protagonists of these novels by Jo Baker, Sharon Owens and Claire Allan are women. They are independent, act of their own free will, and solve the problems befalling to them and to those around them. What are the reasons for the emergence of those female novelists and the emergence of those independent and liberated female characters after the implementation of the Belfast Agreement?

In her article on female novelists in contemporary Northern Irish fiction, Maeve

Eileen Davey mentions that, while the women's movement was progressing in the South in the 1970s and 1980s, it was severely hampered by the sectarian conflict in the North.²⁾ Certainly, several female characters in Northern Irish fiction in the 1970s and 1980s have to suffer and persevere under the Troubles, like Theresa of Deirdre Madden's *Hidden Symptoms* and the female characters of Mary Beckett's collection of short stories, *A Belfast Woman* (1980). The reasons for the emergence of those female novelists and that of those independent and liberated female characters are supposed to be that the Troubles were over and that Northern Ireland has been becoming modern, more peaceful and wealthier. Maeve Eileen Davy picks up as an example of an independent and liberated woman Lily of Sharon Owens' *The Tavern on Maple Street*, who tries to prevent her small, cozy tavern from being destroyed by greedy land developers.

Glenn Patterson, *The Mill for Grinding Old People Young: Belfast in a European context*

Another contemporary Northern Irish novelist who writes about broader themes as well as the Troubles is Glenn Patterson. Patterson was born in Belfast in 1961, and has published nine novels and two works of non-fiction until today. In those books Patterson has been writing about his native city Belfast and trying to show its universality or its global characters as well as its unique locality. Patterson's novels have three features. The first feature is the representation of Belfast in European or international contexts. The second feature is the unpredictable proceeding of the story which comes to an unexpected ending. And therefore, as the third feature of his

novels, they present the possibility of various interpretations. It can be said that those three features serve to make Patterson's novels more interesting.

For example, Patterson's seventh novel, *The Third Party*, is a story of a Belfast businessman who visits Hiroshima to promote his company's products. In Hiroshima he meets a Belfast novelist who is invited for reading at an international peace conference. Through various incidents in Hiroshima, their mental conflicts are gradually unveiled and the novel comes to an unexpected ending, in which the businessman throws himself out of his hotel room's window and commits suicide. But, regarding this ending, it is also possible to consider that the businessman only gets drunk after the third party and has the illusion that he kills himself.

The Mill for Grinding Old People Young (2012) also has those three features which are noticed in Patterson's novels. This queer title is the name of a pub which actually existed in Belfast in the past. The novel recounts the life of Gilbert Rice who will later become a successful businessman.

The novel consists of three chapters. The first chapter gives a brief description of 85-year-old Gilbert Rice on Christmas Eve in 1897. The second chapter occupies a large part of the novel and depicts Gilbert's young days, mainly relating his love with Maria in 1831. The third chapter returns to Christmas in 1897 and gives a brief description of the life Gilbert has led since he parted with Maria.

In the first chapter Gilbert Rice is 85 years of age and already retired from his business. He is invited by his young friend to a dinner at Ulster Reform Club. This is a gentleman's club which was established in 1885 in the Belfast city center. Those who attend the dinner talk about what a great development

Belfast is making recently. When Gilbert returns home, he gets sick and goes to bed.

In the second chapter the time lapses back to the early 19th century and Gilbert's young days are recounted. Gilbert's father and mother die while he is still an infant. Then Gilbert is brought up by his strict grandfather. In 1829, at the age of 16, Gilbert starts working at Belfast Harbor as a laborer. In those days many merchant ships from abroad are coming into the Belfast Harbor for trading goods. Gilbert's job is digging sands and stones in the shallow riverbed of the Lagan River to enable those merchant ships to pass the river more smoothly. Those sands and stones are called ballast, and the company Gilbert belongs to is called the "Ballast Office" which is today's Customs House of Belfast.



The Customs House of Belfast
—August 20, 2012

For almost every night after work Gilbert goes to pubs with his friends and drinks. Two years later in 1831, when Gilbert turns 18 years of age, he climbs Cave Hill with his friends at the time of Easter and plays the game of egg-trundling. Cave Hill is a hill located in the north of Belfast. Gilbert wins the game and, when he goes to take his egg, he slips on the slope and gets severely injured. He is taken to a pub at the foot of the hill.

This pub is “The Mill for Grinding Old People Young”. There Gilbert has his injury treated by a mysteriously beautiful girl from Poland called Maria.

Gilbert and Maria soon start dating. Maria talks about her life to Gilbert. She is 24 years of age and a fugitive from Poland. Poland is under Russian rule. Maria’s father has been fighting for the liberty of his country. Maria falls in love with a comrade of her father’s who is already married. Maria’s father makes her leave Poland for Paris. But, in Paris, Maria meets the wife of the man she loves and decides to leave Paris for London. Then she remembers a story which her father told her about a Belfast man named Wolf Tone. Before Maria was born, her father stayed in Paris as a fugitive and met Wolf Tone. He sympathized a great deal with Tone who was fighting for the independence of Ireland from England. Soon after their meeting, however, Maria’s father knew that Tone was arrested by the English force and committed suicide in the ship bringing him to the place of his execution. Calling her father’s story to mind, Maria resolves to go to Belfast instead of London.

After arriving in Belfast, Maria tries to visit a pub named “Dr. Franklin” because she hears that the pub is owned by Peggy Berkley, the wife of one of the freedom fighters, James Berkley. But Maria finds that the pub was transferred to another person and that Peggy now owns “The Mill for Grinding Old People Young” in the suburbs of Belfast. Then Maria goes to the pub and starts working as a waitress there. Dr. Franklin used to exist in Waring Street in the Belfast City Center. In those days many people in Belfast lived on these narrow lanes.



Waring Street
—August 20, 2012

Maria is waiting for the letter from her lover, the married man who is fighting for the independence of Poland from Russia. But, however long she waits, the letter does not come. Maria gets impatient and desperately wants to go home, but she has little money. She then finds a Belfast ship owner who says that he can take her home in his ship. Instead of asking for money, the man demands sexual relations with her. Maria escapes from the man and runs to Gilbert’s house for help. There Gilbert and Maria make love.

Gilbert is inspired by Maria to do something to change Belfast society. At that time a lot of estates in Belfast were owned by a landlord and Member of Parliament called Lord Belfast. The lord is obstinately opposed to the city’s Harbor Reform Act because he does not want to lose his estates. Gilbert attempts to murder Lord Belfast. He writes a fake letter to Lord Belfast saying that he wants to meet the lord for business matters. At the same time he leaves a message to Maria indicating that something grave will happen soon. While Gilbert is waiting with a gun for the lord to come, his grandfather runs on horseback to stop Gilbert’s murder attempt. Gilbert wonders how his grandfather knew his murder at-

tempt. His grandfather tells him how. Maria told Gilbert's grandfather about the message which Gilbert left her. Then he went to Gilbert's study to look for him, where he found the draft of Gilbert's letter addressed to Lord Belfast.

Ironically enough for Gilbert, this incident makes Maria determined to leave Belfast forever. Gilbert runs to the port, where the ship which Maria is on board is about to leave. He cries out that she should not go. Maria takes Gilbert's hand and kisses it. The ship departs from the port. But soon the wind ceases and the ship comes to a halt some yards away from the port. For hours Gilbert and Maria are gazing at each other without exchanging a word. When the night comes, the wind begins to blow again and the ship moves and goes out into the ocean heading for Liverpool.

Now starts the third chapter and the story lapses ahead to the opening of this novel, the Christmas of 1897. The readers are told that Gilbert Rice is dead at the age of 85. The life he has led since he parted with Maria is recounted briefly.

Gilbert established his own company dealing with ship designs and had success. He occasionally visited the capital of Poland, Warsaw, but could never meet Maria again. He never married in his life. He was given the title of baronet on account of his contribution to the development of Belfast. He left a will which mentioned that his corps should be cremated in Liverpool and his ashes should be scattered from the ship bringing them back to Belfast because he hoped that they might reach both Warsaw and Belfast.

The Mill for Grinding Old People Young also has the three features which are noticed in Patterson's novels. This novel represents Belfast in a European or international context and the story proceeds as the readers can

never expect or predict. This novel focuses on a love story between an Irish young man and a Polish girl, and thereby reveals that the 1798 Rebellion has significant relevance to other European wars. The love story between Gilbert and Maria shows that the 1798 Rebellion interweaved with Poland's War of Independence, and therefore shows the fact that the rebellion is not only important in Irish history but also important in European history. Another piece of evidence to represent Belfast in an international context is that in the 19th century Portuguese and Chinese merchant ships came into Belfast Harbor for trading goods and contributed to the development of Belfast, which attached more importance to Gilbert's job as a digger of ballast.

The third feature of Patterson's novels is that they present the possibility of various interpretations. For instance, the novel's title, *The Mill for Grinding Old People Young*, seems to have several connotations. The title originally derives from the pub where Maria works. It also seems to be connected with the structure of the novel. Gilbert Rice makes his first appearance as an 85-year-old man and then the novel recounts his young days. Moreover the title seems to indicate Patterson's message from this novel. Patterson is likely to emphasize that since the past Belfast has been making a development with destruction and construction to become a modern European city. Patterson has conveyed this message from his other novels like *Fat Lad* (1992), *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* (1995), *The International* (1999) and *Number 5* (2003).

What *The Rest Just Follows* means to convey.

Patterson's latest novel, *The Rest Just Fol-*

lows (2014) also exemplifies a characteristic of contemporary Northern Irish fiction. This novel describes human life dramas as well as the Troubles. It traces the lives of the three main characters from the 1970s up until today; a female character, Maxine, and two male characters, Craig and St John.

In the 1970s they are in their teens and know each other at a party. Although Craig is attracted to Maxine and gets her telephone number, he loses it and can not meet her again until years later. In the early years of her schooling, Maxine has good grades and her teachers praise her. But her life changes after her older brother Tommy is arrested by the police on suspicion of his involvement with the terrorists. Tommy soon disappears from home. Maxine's grades get much worse when she graduates from the school and she blames her brother for causing damage to her life. While she is rambling around the Belfast city center, she is scouted by a boy to become a model for his beauty salon. The night she meets him, they have a sexual relationship. She starts working there. She gets addicted to sex and makes love to numbers of boys including St John. Meanwhile she goes to a technical college, and later gets a post as a typist at a car dealer's. After that she switches to an accountancy firm, and then to a construction company. When her father dies, her brother Tommy comes home during the funeral. After the funeral is over, he whispers to Maxine,

"Don't make yourself the same as everybody else here", and leaves. A couple of weeks later, when Maxine is at a bus stop, a strange man approaches her and makes a threat, saying that if her brother Tommy sets foot in Belfast again the man will kill him. Maxine cries to the man, "Cowardly bastard!", and jumps onto the bus. Then she determines to stay in Northern Ireland and outlast those ter-

rorists.

One night Maxine helps a woman to fix her troubled car and to get it started. The woman, owner of a textile rental company, is so thankful to Maxine that she offers the business partnership to Maxine. After Maxine joins her company, it gains more clients and grows bigger.

When she travels to Prague, she happens to meet Craig again after years. They soon get married. Then a female political party asks Maxine to be a candidate at the parliamentary election. In late April in 1998, when the Belfast Agreement is to be soon implemented, Maxine attends the party conference held at Stormont. There she comes across the man who threatened her brother's life and now is a politician. He speaks to Maxine amiably. A couple of years later, however, he is killed in a terrorist attack. Maxine gets disappointed with politics because her party does not do anything for him and also because her party is losing its power. Around that time she gets divorced, and also parts with her business partner because, as the company gains more profit from the South, her partner tries to establish herself near Dublin. Maxine then resolves to start her own business in Belfast, searches for property, and makes a contract for the building which used to accommodate the beauty salon where she worked right after graduating from her school.

Certainly the Troubles impact a great deal on Maxine's life, but this is not merely a novel of the Troubles. This novel, placing the Troubles in the background, displays varied phases of human life or ups and downs of human life. It is also evident in the representation of Craig's and St John's lives. In his school Craig meets a history teacher named Harrison, and comes to respect him. Harrison is such an ardent teacher as to carry on his class

after the bell rings and to say that the school is getting tuition from parents and paying him salary for this extra lesson. Craig is the only student who remains until the end of his extra lesson and discusses history with him. But Harrison is killed by the IRA. Craig can not recover from the shock for a while. However he resolves to pursue the study of history at a university and to become such an excellent teacher as Harrison. Actually he gets a post at a certain school and is soon elected to be the head of the department of the history teachers. He holds an open night for the parents to let them know what the school is planning on doing, and takes out his students for a field trip around Belfast to help them discover how they have become who they are and to take pride in Belfast.

As for St John, his father sympathizes with the extreme Republican movements and disappears from home. St John soon finds that his father lives in Londonderry, has two extra-marital children and teaches at a college in the South. After graduating from his school St John enrolls at the technical college, where he meets Maxine again and has a sexual relationship with her.

He discloses to Craig his relationship with Maxine and a crime he has committed at the filling station he works for. Later he gets a job at a television station in England and is assigned to make a program in which he and Craig talk about their school days. In the shooting of the program Craig uncovers St John's crime at the filling station and says that it is the reason for his defection to England. The television station is dismayed and decides not to include their talk in the program. At that time Craig is married to Maxine. Maxine is so surprised by and resentful of what Craig has done that she determines to divorce him.

The end of the novel gives a hint that

Maxine, Craig and St John will live through ups and downs of their lives in the future, just as they have lived through in the past. The novel's title, *The Rest Just Follows*, seems to derive from the course of life which each character has been taking and will be taking. There is a paragraph of Maxine, Craig and St John exchanging conversations, which explicitly tells what "the rest just follows" means to convey.

(Maxine) "Let's not be too hard on ourselves here. I mean, OK, there's a whole lot we could have done differently — done better — but you think of all the things that might have happened..."

"I suppose when you look at it like," said Craig. There were lines in his head, A Heaney poem, from back around the time of the cease-fire, which had troubled him oddly then, but which came into its own now, something about being alive and sinning, "Ourselves again," something else again, "not bad". Yes. His arms up around the others' shoulders now too, pulling them in until their three foreheads touched.

"We haven't done too bad, have we?"³⁾

They intend to say that, although the Troubles might have impacted on and changed their lives, they have lived through them, done the utmost that they could do and become who they are today. They then expect that they may become someone else or someone better, if they are going to live through ups and downs of their lives. That is to say, they expect that the rest just follows.

The Rest Just Follows appeals to universal minds in that it shows the fact that human beings are influenced a great deal by their surrounding circumstances or events but they

try to live through them until they settle happily themselves.

Conclusion: Research on Northern Irish fiction in the future

As has been shown, many works of contemporary Northern Irish fiction are dealing with a variety of themes as well as the Troubles and representing diversified phases of human life and society, and thereby trying to appeal to universal minds. That is to say, what contemporary Northern Irish fiction tries to represent is universalness out of localness.

In general, research on Northern Irish fiction and books of criticism on Northern Irish fiction are not as popular as those on Northern Irish poems and dramas.⁴⁾ But what is common about those books is that each author endeavors to reveal from their own perspectives how Northern Irish fiction appeals to universal minds. The recent trend of research on Northern Irish fiction is its focus on the Troubles novels.

John Wilson Foster's *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction* (1974) is the pioneer work of criticism on Northern Irish fiction, which deals with writers from the 19th century until the 1970s and discusses strong forces and various themes which they represent. As novels dealing with a wide variety of themes including the Troubles are appearing today again, it is expected that researchers will also discuss them and help to show how contemporary Northern Irish fiction appeals to universal minds.

Notes

- 1) Tara West, *Fodder* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2002), p. 66
- 2) Maeve Eileen Davey, " 'She had to start thinking

like a man' : Women Writing Bodies in Contemporary Northern Irish Fiction", *Estudios Irlandeses*, Number 5, 2010, p. 13.

(www.estudiosirlandeses.org/portfolio-items/issue-5)

Quoting a passage from Linda Connolly and Tina O'Toole, *Documenting Irish Feminisms: The Second Wave* (2005), Davey mentions as follows:

"...although the women's movement attempted to erode the cast iron distinction between women and home, progress was severely hampered by the sectarian conflict (in Northern Ireland)"

(Parenthesis added)

- 3) Glenn Patterson, *The Rest Just Follows* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014), p. 307.
- 4) Books of criticism on Northern Irish fiction which have been published up to date are as follows:
 - John Wilson Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction* (1974)
 - Laura Pelaschiar, *Writing the North: The Contemporary Novel in Northern Ireland* (1998)
 - Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, (De-) *Constructing the North: Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969* (2003)
 - Masahiko Yahata, *Potential of Northern Irish Fiction: Quests for Reconciliation and Universality* (2003) In Japanese.
 - Peter Mahon, *Violence, Politics and Textual Interventions in Northern Ireland* (2010)
 - Caroline Magennis, *Sons of Ulster: Masculinities in the Contemporary Northern Irish Novel* (2010)

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【Abstract】

While the Troubles had been going on in Northern Ireland for nearly 30 years since 1969, Northern Irish novelists had been writing the “Troubles novels”. Meanwhile, as the peace talk was progressing in the 1990s, the novels dealing with themes other than the Troubles began to appear gradually. After the Belfast Agreement was implemented in 1998 and Northern Ireland became more peaceful, novelists started writing more about themes other than the Troubles, more about human society and life. As Northern Irish women who had been confined within the home during the days of the Troubles started participating in social activities more frequently, Northern Ireland witnessed the emergence of more female novelists. By tracing the progress of Northern Irish fiction since the 1980s and discussing mainly Glenn Patterson, *The Mill for Grinding Old People Young* (2012) and *The Rest Just Follows* (2014), this paper aims to reveal how contemporary Northern Irish novelists are endeavoring to write works which appeal to universal minds.

【Keywords】

Contemporary Northern Irish fiction The Belfast Agreement The emergence of female novelists Glenn Patterson Universality out of localness.