

The Trouble with Hindsight
Comparing depictions of pre-Troubles Northern Ireland
in pre-1968 and post-1968 fiction

Barry Joseph McAuley – August 2013

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine how hindsight concerning significant historical events affects the writing process, with particular reference to the case of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

I explore fictional depictions of Northern Ireland before the Troubles (pre-1968) and compare how novels which were written in that era (and therefore without hindsight) compare with novels written after the Troubles began. I go on to discuss my own attempts at dealing with the weight of hindsight in writing two novels set in Northern Ireland, the first of which, *Black Dog*, is a post-Troubles novel, while the second, *Turquoise Car*, is a pre-Troubles novel.

I have found that novels written before the Troubles are less self-conscious with regard to depicting sectarian tension in Northern Ireland, with some novels featuring strong (unrestrained) depictions, and other novels choosing to exclude the topic.

In novels written post-Troubles, i.e. those with a retrospective viewpoint, I have found that both the writing and the reading of the novel appears heavily weighted with the burden of hindsight, such that the authenticity of naturalistic¹, everyday elements is, in some cases, questionable.

I have concluded that writing naturalistic fiction about pre-Troubles Northern Ireland demands careful consideration of how hindsight can skew or constrain the work, and that it is not possible to exclude sectarian depictions in a way which was possible for writers writing before the Troubles.

Interviews with two of the novelists discussed – Glenn Patterson and Deirdre Madden – can be found in the appendices.

¹ More detail on naturalistic fiction in relation to Northern Irish writing is given in pages 4-6.

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Introduction

Northern Ireland is world famous. Its name evokes images of violence and conflict, of armed struggle. An author who is Northern Irish – as I am – is perhaps *expected* to write about the Troubles. Even a novel – such as my first, *Black Dog* – which is set in Belfast in 2008, and from which I chose to exclude any significant mention of the Troubles, gives them a weight of some kind. Perhaps they are made notable by their absence.

When I started my second novel, I wanted to explore the Troubles from the other side, that is, to go from a *post-* to a *pre-* viewpoint.

While working on my first draft of *Turquoise Car*, I restricted my reading of similar Northern Irish literature to one book: *The Liberty Lad* (1965). I had a notion that, being published in 1965, it was in some way ‘safe’ to read – being *almost* a primary source, much like the *Belfast Telegraph* microfiches from the period which I examined for research. At the time, I had another book – *The International* by Glenn Patterson (1999) – and I decided that I would read it *after* completing the first draft of my own novel, in case it influenced my own writing in some way.

For me, the notion of the contemporaneous² work as being *almost* like a primary source developed: what were the differences between *The Liberty Lad* and *The International*? Which representation of 1960s Northern Ireland was more accurate? Or more valid? And when it comes to authenticity, should *The Liberty Lad* enjoy a ‘special’ status, because it was written without foreknowledge of the conflict, and therefore with no intentional irony and arguably more honesty?

Later in my research, I brought in a third work on which to focus my primary

² In the course of this essay I will use the term ‘contemporaneous’ to refer to fiction which was written to depict, approximately, the time at which it was written (for example, a novel written in 1965 which is set in 1965). ‘Retrospective’ refers to fiction which was written later than the period it depicts (for example, a novel written in 1999, which depicts 1967).

literature study: Deirdre Madden's *One by One in the Darkness* (1996), which I feel demonstrates some important truths about representing Northern Ireland retrospectively in relation to the historic record. A fourth work, *The Maiden Dinosaur* by Janet McNeill (1964), illustrates the relative lack of constraint available to Northern Ireland novelists working before the Troubles, compared to those working afterwards.

The International, *The Liberty Lad* and *The Maiden Dinosaur* are set in 1960s Northern Ireland, whereas *One by One* features a double time narrative either side of the Troubles.³ *Liberty Lad* chronicles a year in the life of 24-year-old Frank Glass, a schoolteacher who is becoming disillusioned with the (fictional) mill village of Kildargan, while *International* features 19-year-old Danny Hamilton, a barman in the eponymous Belfast hotel. *One by One*, published in 1996, tells the story of a family of sisters and their mother, trying to come to terms with how the Troubles have affected them. *The Maiden Dinosaur* is a snapshot of middle-class angst among a group of inhabitants of early 1960s Belfast.

The detailed analysis of these four novels is supplemented in this essay by the study of a further seven novels, which depict the pre-1960s period, and most of which were written before the 1960s.

By investigating naturalistic fictional depictions of *pre*-Troubles Northern Ireland, I hope to elucidate how the history of the Troubles may have affected these retrospective fictionalisations.

Much of the fiction examined in this study could be considered as having features distinctive of the naturalist mode of writing. While it is true that the often unglamorous depictions of working class characters featured in many of these works could be

³ The first of the two timelines presented in *One by One in the Darkness* runs from the 1950s to the 1970s, while the second is centred in the year 1994.

described as realist,⁴ a description of these works as naturalistic is also plausible. While naturalism may share in common with realism a desire to portray life as accurately (and unflinchingly) as possible, it is more concerned with the belief – as put forward by Zola – that there are ‘immutable laws of heredity and even of social change’.⁵ Others have described ‘the task of the naturalist novelist to emphasize the physiological and environmental conditions that determine individual character.’⁶ In other words, naturalistic fiction seeks to portray characters with particular emphasis on how their inherited circumstances determine their actions and their fates.

It has been noted that ‘naturalism has clearly been one of the more significant and fertile aesthetic modes in twentieth century Irish literature’,⁷ and for fiction set in Northern Ireland this has a particular resonance because of the strong constraining influences of (inherited) religion and resulting sectarianism. Although not in a genetic sense, these inherited traits of characters in Northern Irish fiction, most particularly religion, are seen to determine how they are able to progress in life. This is particularly evident in the novels of Joseph Tomelty and Michael McLaverty, where Catholic working-class inhabitants of Belfast are unable to transcend the social bounds they have been born within, while Brian Moore’s middle-class Catholic characters are restricted by their religion, their families and the influence of the Church. *The Liberty Lad*

⁴ For example, Jeremy Hawthorn discusses how, in realism, the artist has tried to ‘include a wider and more representative coverage of social life... and in particular that he or she has extended the coverage of the work to include “low life”’. Jeremy Hawthorn, *Studying the Novel*, Sixth Edition, Bloomsbury, London, 2010, 67.

⁵ R.B. Kershner, *The Twentieth Century Novel: An Introduction*, Bedford/Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1997, 14.

⁶ Nicolette David, ‘Germinal: the naturalist novel’, in *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: Realisms*, Delia da Sousa Correa (ed.), Routledge, London, 2000, 358.

⁷ Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland*, Field Day, Dublin, 2007, 213.

A more in-depth discussion of naturalism in Irish literature can be found in the chapter of this book entitled: ‘The Thing of Darkness: Conjectures on Irish Naturalism’, 111-179.

features a Protestant working-class protagonist, trying – and failing – to further himself in a rural community constrained by religion and politics, while the protagonist in *The International* is most notable for the fact that he stands outside the rigid religious designations of those who surround him.

Naturalism has been described as being ‘usually pessimistic’,⁸ because it may feature character progressions which are uninfluenced by those characters’ endeavours or values, and it is true that many of the novels studied in this thesis do not conform to the ‘fictional order’ found in realism,⁹ whereby characters may succeed or fail depending on their morality and on their efforts.¹⁰

I have consulted studies on Irish and in particular Northern Irish writing, and socio-political studies around the period. This has allowed me to consider works by Leitch, Patterson, Madden, McNeill and others in the context of wider commentary in the area. I have interviewed Madden and Patterson and gained invaluable perspectives regarding the background to writing their novels, as well as their creative intentions. I have examined my own novel, *Turquoise Car*, to see how my own depictions of 1960s Belfast compare, and the examination has included themed sections based on particular characters and the functions they perform or the issues they illuminate.

Whilst it does not deal with *pre-Troubles* Northern Ireland, I have also considered my first novel, *Black Dog*, with a view to its contemporaneous representation of modern day (post-Troubles) Northern Ireland.

Ultimately, this question – of how the weight of history influences writing in retrospect – is, of course, not specific to depicting 1960s Northern Ireland or the Troubles. However, through my research, I hope to contribute to an understanding of

⁸ Kershner, *The Twentieth Century Novel*, 48.

⁹ John Peck and Martin Coyle, *Literary Terms and Criticism*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1993, 121.

¹⁰ Pam Norris, *Realism*, Routledge, London, 2003, 19.

style and technique used in depicting pre-Troubles Northern Ireland in fiction. I aim to assess the value of certain works and styles of writing as complementary adjuncts to the historic record, and finally, to relate some of these findings to my own creative process.

Literature Review

Contemporaneous and Retrospective Fiction

The historical novel, according to Lukács (1983), arose at the beginning of the nineteenth century, notably in the works of Sir Walter Scott. What Lukács means by ‘the historical novel’ is a form which differs from previous works with historical themes, in that it features ‘the specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of the characters from the historical peculiarity of their age’ whereas previous works would have featured characters in a previous age behaving with contemporary standards, morals, mannerisms, speech etc.¹¹

Jerome de Groot notes that the novel was not the first medium to feature historical elements; epics, drama and poems are noted to have done so beforehand. De Groot explains that before what is widely accepted as the first example of historical fiction (Scott’s *Waverley* (1814))¹², Gothic stories featured historical elements, although they were not so concerned with historical authenticity; their main purpose was to ‘terrify the present’ and they were noted to have a ‘disrespectful approach to the past.’ After the example set by Scott, however, historical novels shifted to become a rational, realist form, emphasising process and progress.¹³

In examining the emergence of the historical novel, Lukács has suggested that before this medium became prevalent, people were not concerned with, or aware of history, and that two major historical events – the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars – as well as the emergence of nationalism around this period, began to

¹¹ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, University of Nebraska Press, 1983, 19.

¹² ‘*Waverley*’ is also noted by Mariadele Boccardi as being, ‘by general consensus, the first example of the genre’: Mariadele Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009, 5.

¹³ Jerome De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, Routledge, 2009, 12-16.

give people a sense of history and of the past.¹⁴

During the nineteenth century, the historical novel was not always positively received by critics and academics. The Italian poet and novelist, Alessandro Manzoni, wrote in an essay in 1828 (published 1850) that the factual and fictional elements of the historical novel were ‘irreconcilable’ and created a tension which required an effort on the behalf of the reader to overcome. The historian Thomas Macaulay in 1884 argued that those in the business of writing historical fiction were performing a role which should have been for historians to undertake instead.¹⁵

In the twentieth century, historians such as Herbert Butterfield and Ernest A. Baker would say that the historical novel was valid, and that it presented versions of history which were more accessible.¹⁶ Baker provided validation of the historical novel’s function by saying: ‘Historical fiction is not history, but it is often better than history’, that it ‘may easily teach more and carry a deeper impression than whole chapters of description and analysis’ and that it ‘will probably succeed in making a period live in the imagination when textbooks give us dry bones.’¹⁷ Boccardi notes that for the historical novel, its ‘complex relationship to the existing textual records of the past... and to the competing representation of that past in the discipline of historiography’ is in fact a defining characteristic of the historical novel¹⁸ (we will discuss the issue of defining the historical novel, shortly).

¹⁴ Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, 25.

¹⁵ De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 29-33.

¹⁶ De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 48.

¹⁷ Ernest A. Baker, *A Guide to Historical Fiction*, Argosy-Antiquarian, New York, 1968, viii.

Alessandro Manzoni similarly said, ‘The historical novelist is required to give “not just the bare bones of history”’. Alessandro Manzoni, *On the Historical Novel*, trans. Sandra Bermann, University of Nebraska Press, 1984, 67-68.

¹⁸ Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel*, 3.

In recent years, some writers have gone further, by pointing out that historic records, rather than being indisputable (for example, in comparison with the historical novel), are themselves versions of events whose accuracy is susceptible to historians' subjectivity and to source material which may be biased.¹⁹ Byatt says: 'Recent years have seen much discussion of the idea that history is fiction'²⁰ which suggests to us that the idea that only historians can present us with an accurate 'historical reality' is being increasingly questioned.²¹

Returning to the idea of the historical novel as being able to present more accessible versions of history (Baker and Butterfield), we see a more recent iteration of this view given by David Lodge, in *The Art of Fiction*:

How can a novelist of the late twentieth century compete with Charles Dickens, or Thomas Hardy, in the representation of nineteenth century men and women? The answer, of course, is that he can't. What he can do is bring a twentieth-century perspective to bear upon nineteenth-century behaviour, perhaps revealing things about the Victorians that they did not know themselves, or preferred to suppress, or simply took for granted.²²

The historical novel can therefore, with hindsight, illuminate aspects of the past which were not evident at the time. The author David Mitchell, writing in *The Telegraph*, says that historical fiction 'delivers a stereo narrative: from one speaker comes the treble of the novel's own plot while the other speaker plays the bass of history's plot.' And he refers to how historical fiction 'may illuminate the contemporary

¹⁹ David Cowart, *History and the Contemporary Novel*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, 14.

²⁰ A.S. Byatt, *On Histories and Stories, Selected Essays*, Chatto and Windus, London, 2000, 99.

²¹ For a more comprehensive examination of this idea see: Ann Curthoys and John Docker, *Is History Fiction?*, University of New South Wales Press, 2010.

²² David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*, Penguin Books, 1992, 132.

world in ways that straight history may not.²³

However, A.S. Byatt, in *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays* says that ‘the historical novel has been frowned on and disapproved of... In the 1950s the word ‘escapism’ was enough to dismiss it.’²⁴ This tells us that, despite all these endorsements of the intended function and ultimate outcome, there still persisted in the twentieth century a negative attitude to its validity.

JG Ballard, writing in *New Worlds SF* in 1966, says:

all retrospective fiction... is obsessed with the past, with the roots of behaviour and background, with the sins of omission and commission long-past, with all the distant antecedents of the present.²⁵

Here, Ballard was making the case for writing science fiction,²⁶ but what he is saying about historical fiction is that it in some ways seeks to ‘blame’ the past on the misfortunes or discontentment of the present. Boccardi also discusses the link between past and present, but in a less negative way, saying that ‘[the historical novel’s] subject is the process that causes the transition from one historical period or coherent set of beliefs to another and marks the connection between them.’²⁷

If, when considering historical fiction, we are prepared to accept the author’s motives, perspective and judgements regarding ‘revealing things’ as Lodge says above, there remains the issue of authenticity. It has been suggested that because the historical

²³ David Mitchell, *David Mitchell on Historical Fiction*, *The Telegraph*, Monday 04 July 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/7685510/David-Mitchell-on-Historical-Fiction.html> 04 July 2011.

²⁴ Byatt, *On Histories*, 9.

²⁵ J.G. Ballard, in *New Worlds SF*, Moorcock, Michael (ed.), October 1966, Roberts & Vinter Ltd. Retrieved 23-06-2011 from: www.jgballard.ca/non_fiction/jgb_notes_nowhere.html

²⁶ De Groot also points out the similarities between historical fiction and science fiction, since both involve ‘a conscious interaction with a clearly unfamiliar set of landscapes, technologies and circumstances.’: De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 4.

²⁷ Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel*, 11.

novel is sufficiently self-conscious of its own authenticity, and of the fact that it must ‘hoodwink’ the reader, that it often features some kind of (apologetic) explanatory note by the author.²⁸ This note (in the form of a prologue or epilogue) can serve as a recognition of the novel’s imperfections (perhaps in acknowledgement of the fact that the novel is a fictional representation of history) and may give the author’s reason for fictionalising the particular place in time.

The definition of what precisely constitutes a historical novel is still problematic. It is not defined or constricted by genre, with a wide range of historical novels also being examples of particular genre types (e.g. detective, horror, fantasy, romance etc.)²⁹ Its relation to timeframe, i.e. the difference between when it was written and the timeframe of the events it depicts, brings us closer to a definition. Fleishman, in *The English Historical Novel*, has limited this difference to ‘two generations’³⁰, while a more recent interpretation by Ruth Hoberman says that ‘Theoreticians of the genre... agree that the historical novel’s claim to generic identity rests on its treatment of a particular time period different from the writer’s own.’³¹ Hoberman’s definition certainly lends a greater degree of flexibility, implying that the only necessary criterion for a historical novel is that in its writing, a previous timeframe from that of the actual writing process is used.

So far, we have looked at the function of the historical novel as providing embellishment to the ‘bare bones’ of historical fact. However, as de Groot and others point out, another important interpretation of historical fiction has emerged: one in

²⁸ De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 5-7.

²⁹ De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 2.

³⁰ Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*, John Hopkins Press, 1971, 3-4.

³¹ Ruth Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism: The Ancient World in Twentieth Century Women’s Historical Fiction*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1997, 4-5.

which it provides 'alternative' versions of history.³² De Groot says that the historical novel has an important function in 'questioning the legitimacy of narrative and undermining authority'³³, meaning that it can question accepted versions of the past and provide independence of thought in what are taken to be official narratives of versions of the past.

Byatt says that an important reason for writing historical novels is 'the political desire to write the histories of the marginalised, the forgotten, the unrecorded.'³⁴ A particular illustration of this is found in the case of gay and lesbian historical fiction. Norman W. Jones says that 'Until a few decades ago, such [gay] people had generally remained hidden from history.'³⁵ Historian Nicholas Edsall notes that there are 'scant records of gay networks and communities, all surviving records of these come from hostile accounts.'³⁶ Another example is found in some Afro-American historical fiction, whose writers have a 'desire to understand and explain the American past as it has impacted and continues to impact black people', and whose depictions of the past can have a practical purpose (offering clues to survival in the present) as well as a therapeutic one (in that this fiction 'compels survivors... to face the truth').³⁷ The historical novel is also noted for its treatment of war, for example in its ability to demonstrate the horrors of war.³⁸ We can therefore see the unique ability of historical

³² The concept of 'alternative versions' of history will be explored in more detail in discussing Glenn Patterson's *The International*.

³³ De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 108.

³⁴ Byatt, *On Histories and Stories*, 10.

³⁵ Norman W. Jones, *Gay and Lesbian Historical Fiction: Sexual Mystery and Post Secular Narrative*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007, 2.

³⁶ Nicholas C. Edsall, *Toward Stonewall: Homosexuality and Society in the Modern Western World*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, 2003, 11-12.

³⁷ Keith Eldon Byerman, *Remembering the Past in Contemporary African American Fiction*, University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 9.

³⁸ De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 102.

fiction to demonstrate to us historical narratives which would either be lost, or otherwise not exist.

In the case of Irish historical novels, James M. Cahalan in *The Irish Historical Novel* points out to us the importance of the form in exploring Irish history and in defining a ‘mature, contemporary nationalism.’³⁹ While Cahalan’s book deals mostly with Irish (pre-partition) fiction, and with (Southern Irish) post-partition fiction, particularly in relation to significant events such as the Famine and the Irish Civil War, he makes the following point, which could be just as applicable to historical novels dealing with the Troubles.

Therefore, let us consider the ‘Irish historical novel’ as one dealing with the political events in modern Irish history prior to the author’s own experience – usually a major upheaval or revolution.⁴⁰

For the purposes of this study, I am interested in how writing Northern Irish historical fiction – based on my own experiences of writing a historical and a contemporary novel – is affected by the weight of historical hindsight, in particular the Troubles.

In writing a pre-Troubles and a post-Troubles (contemporary) novel, I was aware of the particular difference that history had on the writing process. In writing my contemporary novel, *Black Dog*, I felt free to ignore the Troubles, whereas when writing my pre-Troubles novel, *Turquoise Car*, I felt constrained by my knowledge of history and of the Troubles.

This experience is in keeping with a view put forward by Lukács: ‘The contemporary world is portrayed with unusual plasticity and truth-to-life... whence and

³⁹ De Groot also notes that Irish novelists ‘have often used historical fiction to examine nationalism’:
De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 145.

⁴⁰ James M. Cahalan, *Little Room: The Irish Historical Novel*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1983, xiii.

how it has developed have not yet become problems for the writer.⁴¹ This ‘plasticity’ refers to the uncertainty (and for the writer, flexibility) associated with the contemporary world, and the fact that we do not yet know how it will develop. This is in contrast to portrayals of the past, whose social norms and attitudes are known to us and within well defined and accepted bounds (albeit within the context of what we know from the historic or ‘accepted’ record).

I am interested in the idea of how, when retrospectively writing a novel, that is, writing it with hindsight – there is a need to show that the timeframe of reference has been fully understood, thoroughly researched, and filtered for relevance – in a way that the unselfconscious contemporaneous novel is perhaps pardoned for. Although this would be true for most historical fiction, it is worth nothing that for Northern Ireland, history has a particular bearing upon cultural forms. Since Northern Irish culture is deeply mythologised (bound to past reference points, for example 1690 – The Battle of the Boyne, 1916 – The Easter Rising), significant differences in historical narratives appear: to get at the truth (the facts), then we must apply a rigorous historical methodology.⁴²

A writer of historical literary fiction does not want to produce something that, *unwittingly*, takes its lead from, or becomes part of this mythology. The writer tries to take account of varied sources from newspaper articles, government reports, serious historical texts, first hand accounts. The writer may also choose to look at cultural portrayals from the period in question (which I shall go on to discuss, in the case of prose fiction). Ultimately then, a happy outcome for the writer is to have produced a fictional narrative which enhances with fine everyday details the primary historic record

⁴¹ Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, 19.

⁴² Richard Kirkland, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland since 1965: Moments of Danger*, Longman, Harlow, 1996, 5.

(the ‘bare bones’ as previously referred to); and yet, in going outside the bound of ordered historical facts, keeps itself aware of, yet dissociated from the mythos, which exists beyond.

For the retrospective novel, the more weighty the history – as in the case Northern Ireland from the 1960s to the present – the more self-conscious the retrospective novel becomes of its position in the fact-mythology continuum or fact-fiction dichotomy. I believe that the following description of the contemporary Irish novel has a particular relevance for Northern Irish fiction:

[it] occupies an especially complex cultural and intellectual space where there is a strong sense of both continuity and disruption. It is a space that is similar to ... the ‘in-between’ space or ‘timelag’ which those who have been previously marginalized or silenced enter before they find new identities.⁴³

This theme of representing ‘marginalization’ – previously cited as a powerful impulse to write historical fiction (Byatt) – is crucial to depictions of Northern Ireland, as I hope to show in the discussion following.

Northern Ireland in Fiction

It has been argued (for example by Pelaschiar) that there is a wariness of the term ‘Northern Irish literature’ – that it is more common to read of ‘Northern Irish writing’. The reasons for this wariness are given as: it is difficult to pin down an established literary tradition in Northern Ireland; Northern Irish works can be better considered as part of the greater Irish or Hiberno-English literary tradition.⁴⁴ Perhaps, though, there may be Northern Irish writers who would be uncomfortable with this classification of

⁴³ Linden Peach, *The Contemporary Irish Novel, Critical Readings*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2004, 1.

⁴⁴ Laura Pelaschiar, *Writing the North: the contemporary novel in Northern Ireland*, Edizioni Parnaso, Trieste, 1998, 9-10.

their work.

Northern Ireland, after all, has a duality of identity and nationality. Eamonn Hughes, introducing *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland* says:

Northern Ireland, we may say, is neither either nor or; its full definition is both. As Seamus Deane has said, it is 'Ulster's peculiar fate – to be neither Irish nor British, while also being both.'⁴⁵

It is as difficult, and potentially controversial, perhaps, to force a national identity on Northern Irish writing as it is to force one on Northern Ireland.

The weight of the historical record, as I will discuss later, means that it is difficult to consider Northern Irish writing without thinking of the Troubles – and so three timeframes present themselves in this context: *pre*-Troubles (?-1968), the Troubles (1968-1998) and *post*-Troubles (1998-present).⁴⁶

As for pre-Troubles work, Caroline Magennis notes that, just after Northern Ireland came into existence (1921), what we might call 'Northern Irish literature' entered a 'fallow period'.⁴⁷ John Wilson Foster notes that during this period, writers such as C.S. Lewis, Robert Lynd, Joyce Carey and Louis Macneice, 'went across the water as though back to the mother country'⁴⁸ Magennis is of the opinion that, with a few exceptions such as Forrest Reid and Michael McLaverty, 'It was not until Brian Moore's important novels of the 1950s that Northern Ireland began to produce any fiction of serious merit.' with notable examples of such fiction then emerging in the

⁴⁵ Eamonn Hughes (ed.), Introduction, *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland*, Open University Press, 1991, 3.

⁴⁶ The years are approximate: I have used the first riots in Derry/Londonderry (October 1968) to signify the start of the Troubles, the Good Friday Agreement (April 1998) to signify the end. *Pre*-Troubles is less clear: it could start at 1921, the year which saw partition of Ireland, or 1945, the end of the postwar period.

⁴⁷ Caroline Magennis, *Sons of Ulster, Masculinities in the Contemporary Northern Irish Novel*, Peter Lang AG, Berne, 2010, 15.

⁴⁸ John Wilson Foster, 'Culture and Colonization: A Northern Perspective' in *Irish Literature and Culture*, Michael Kenneally (ed.), Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1982, 159-160.

1950s and 1960s as shown by Brian Moore (e.g. *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955), *The Emperor of Ice Cream* (1965)) and Maurice Leitch (*The Liberty Lad* (1965), and *Poor Lazarus* (1969)).

For the period covering the Troubles, Magennis notes, important work has been produced by Bernard McLaverty (*Cal* (1983), *Grace Notes* (1997)), Glenn Patterson (*Burning Your Own* (1993)), Patrick McCabe (*The Butcher Boy*, ((1993)), Robert McLiam Wilson (*Ripley Bogle* (1989), *Eureka Street* (1996)), and Deirdre Madden (*One By One In The Darkness*, (1996)).⁴⁹

However, it has been noted that since the onset of the Troubles, Northern Irish fiction (that is, fiction set in Northern Ireland) has tended to consist mainly of thrillers and romances.⁵⁰ It has been stated that the dominant form of representation of Northern Ireland in this period was the thriller,⁵¹ with more than 400 thrillers produced in the 35 years between 1969 and 2004 (the nationality of the authors of these works is not stated).⁵² Others have suggested that prose-fiction (one presumes literary) has been a long-neglected form in Northern Ireland, with poetry and drama being the favoured means of cultural expression.⁵³

In recent years, a new generation of Northern Irish writers has emerged whose childhood experiences have informed their exploration of new ways of representing the

⁴⁹ Magennis, *Sons of Ulster*, 15.

⁵⁰ Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969: (de-)constructing the north*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2003, 7.

⁵¹ Kennedy-Andrews, *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles*, 41.

⁵² Aaron Kelly, *The Thriller and Northern Ireland since 1969, Utterly Resigned Terror*, Ashgate, 2005, 1.

⁵³ Richard Kirkland, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965: Moments of Danger*, 46.

conflict.⁵⁴ Thus, the works of writers such as Glenn Patterson (*The International*, (1999), *Number 5*, (2004)), Eoin McNamee (*The Blue Tango*, (2001), *Orchid Blue*, (2010)), and Anna Burns (*No Bones*, (2001)) has been critically well received.

With reference to Southern Irish literature (i.e. from the Republic), it has been said that: 'If time is the problematic of the novel in the Republic, space is in the Northern novel.'⁵⁵ The theme of space (or place) is something of particular relevance, which will be revisited during this study.

For the purposes of this study I am interested in the *pre*-Troubles period. I believe that contemporaneous writing of the *pre*- period invites particular scrutiny as we try to understand the causes of conflict in Northern Ireland.

However, in his introduction to *Northern Irish Literature 1956-1975: The Imprint of History*, Michael Parker reminds us that a knowledge of ensuing history gives us a (too) easy interpretation of contemporaneous texts:

Writing at the end of the twentieth century or at the beginning of the twenty-first century, historical and cultural analysts enjoy a distinct advantage over those whose policies and writings they examine in 'knowing' how the political and literary narratives panned out after 1969 or 1972 or 1981 or 1987.⁵⁶

Writing about Northern Ireland, *particularly* in retrospect, is heavily weighted with the influence of history. Laura Pelaschiar, in *Writing the North*, says:

Whenever a writer writes about Northern Ireland, not only is he giving shape to a literary vision of the North, but he is also,

⁵⁴ Eve Patten, 'Fiction in Conflict, Northern Ireland's Prodigal Novelists', in: *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction*, I. Bell (ed.), University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1995, 129.

Kennedy-Andrews, *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles*, 92.

⁵⁵ George O'Brien, 'Contemporary Prose in English', in: *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, Volume 2: 1890-2000, 436.

⁵⁶ Michael Parker, *Northern Irish Literature, 1956-1975, Volume 1*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, xvi.

albeit indirectly, unavoidably expressing a political standpoint.⁵⁷

So, how best to depict Northern Ireland?

In the Introduction, I discussed the issue of clichés in historical fiction: for example, the temptation that an author may feel, when depicting the 1960s, to place too much emphasis on readily apparent details: fashion quirks, marijuana, the Flower Power movement.

I believe that political and religious commonplaces that can become heavy-handed clichés of fiction are an important issue for Northern Irish writing: does Protestant character A actually *talk* to Catholic character B only to secretly wish for his downfall? Was everyone in Northern Ireland affected by, and did they have first-hand experience of unrest and violence? This question is something I will address later in this study, focussing on the characters of Michael and Tony in my novel, *Turquoise Car*.

The reality of life in Northern Ireland, even in the 1960s, is one which may be unfamiliar, or surprising, to non-natives. In his essay ‘Northern Ireland: a place apart’, George Boyce has this to say:

Patterns of behaviour emerged and were followed to enable neighbours to live as neighbours for some purposes, and as ‘strangers’ for other purposes. The subtle nature of the codes of Northern Irish social behaviour, the way in which one side recognised, acknowledged and then lived alongside the other, are part of the way of life of a divided region, but a region with a small, intimate and neighbourly atmosphere – a distinctly Ulster solution to a distinctly Ulster problem.⁵⁸

This ties in with my own experience of life in Northern Ireland. It is a concept which I have struggled with while writing *Turquoise Car*: how to satisfy a reader’s expectations of tension and conflict, whilst at the same time accurately depicting social

⁵⁷ Pelaschiar, *Writing the North*, 18.

⁵⁸ George Boyce, ‘Northern Ireland: a place apart?’ in: *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland*, Eamonn Hughes (ed.), Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1991, 16.

interactions; how to have such a story alive with events, and not ‘quiet’, featuring a cast of suppressed characters who never say what they think, at least not to each other.

On the other hand, I believe that it is tempting to place *too much* emphasis on religious and political differences when portraying Northern Ireland in the 1960s, though some treatment of these issues is surely expected. The balance between writing what is relevant and necessary, and what is superfluous and overdone requires careful consideration.

I hope, if the writing is focussed, confident enough, and has achieved the balance successfully, that the reader’s trust is gained. The reader’s preconceptions and expectations of a particular place in time become a secondary consideration, compared to author’s vision.

I will now consider texts which feature depictions of 1960s Northern Ireland, to try and understand how authors have dealt with such issues, and explore their possible motivations for doing so.

Four Key Novels

Maurice Leitch, *The Liberty Lad* (1965)

In *The Liberty Lad* (1965), the narrator, Frank Glass, is a school teacher from Kildargan, a fictional mill village in County Antrim. Frank finds himself at odds with his background – he is the one well educated member of his working-class family and strives to have a better existence than his parents’. His father works at a mill in Kildargan which is destined for closure.

Frank’s reflections on Northern Ireland – in particular his thoughts on Catholics – are unselfconscious in a way which could be viewed as being characteristic of contemporaneous fiction. Frank tells us his (a Protestant’s) view on Catholics:

I began to think about Catholics, not about Catholics I know because I don't really know any, but about them in general. Anything I found out about them has been second hand, because, living in a community like this, one where the proportions are seventy-five for us, twenty-five for them (an inflammable mixture) division starts early – separate housing estates, then separate schools, separate jobs, separate dances, separate pubs... a people with no past and no interest in the present because they have been frog-marched back to that past so often that they have long ago given up any claims to right now... I envy them, their calm, inner knowledge of what they are, who they are and where they come from, but not their degrading, daily struggle to keep dignity in a country dedicated to keeping *them* in their place.⁵⁹

What is meant by 'unselfconscious' here is an ability to present facts and opinions starkly – 'their degrading, daily struggle to keep dignity' – without, in comparison with retrospective writing, being constrained by a knowledge of ensuing events (the Troubles) and the sensitivities that this presents. Even saying, 'I began to think about Catholics, not about Catholics I know because I don't know any' is suggestive of a casual sectarianism.

Leitch tells us what it is we need to know about Northern Ireland at the time of writing, which is a time when Northern Ireland was largely unknown to a wider audience: that segregation existed, that it was possible to come from a small community and not know a single member of that community who belonged to the other religion. That there was injustice. The disclosure is contemporary, and free from the burden of hindsight of the Troubles, which may render such a disclosure as too crass. Instead these details seem powerfully apposite; we might not see them in the same way if this work were retrospective. It is interesting to note that *The International* (1999) does not feature such an open disclosure on the subject of religion in its retrospective depiction of 1960s Belfast.

⁵⁹ Maurice Leitch, *The Liberty Lad*, The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1985, 112.

In *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Literature*, Norman Vance says:

Even before the outbreak of the Ulster Troubles... Leitch had sensed and conveyed terminal decay, sour hatred and sour futility in his region.⁶⁰

But it is also worth noting that the passage above is not typical of the narration; religious segregation and conflict, while ever present, are seldom addressed directly like this.

Interestingly, Frank is close friends with a homosexual man, Terry, who introduces him to the gay underworld, and Frank finds himself towards the end of the story subject to the advances of a local Unionist politician. This politician is the man who can help Frank advance in his teaching career – Frank is to have an interview for promotion to headmaster – and yet is also the man who will decide Frank's father's fate, since he will decide on the mill's closure.

Some light can be shed on the function of sexuality in this narrative by the following passage in Parker's *Northern Irish Literature 1956-1975*:

Throughout the narrative, Frank's difficulties in negotiating a distinct position for himself are to the fore, as he struggles to extricate himself from the continuing pull of family and class loyalties and to define his sexual identity.⁶¹

What Parker says here gives us an indication of the main theme of the novel, which is a depiction of the difficulties a young Protestant man faces in defining his own identity against the constraints of his background and environs. It appears that sexuality is used to demonstrate Frank's struggle with his own identity, and perhaps by extension, the identity of Ulster's Protestant working class in the mid-1960s. The furtive nature of sexual identity in the book which we see in the closeted, married, middle-aged Unionist

⁶⁰ Norman Vance, 'Region, Realism and Reaction', in *The Cambridge companion to the Irish novel*, John Wilson Foster (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2006, 160.

⁶¹ Parker, *Northern Irish Literature*, Vol 1, 26.

politician who unsuccessfully tries to seduce Frank, could be viewed as symbolising the hidden corruption prevalent in local politics at that time.

In discussing the theme of hidden sexuality in the novel, Parker says:

In confronting the issue of repressed sexuality, which serves in part as a metaphor for a repressive politics, the text comments on 'procedures of exclusion' and prohibition beyond its ostensible borders.⁶²

In other words, the theme of repressed sexuality in the novel is showing us that the Protestant rural community of Kildangan is one in which the accepted (particularly traditional) political and social mores must be conformed with, otherwise the individual risks exclusion from that community.

The Liberty Lad features a depiction of a gay bar, which Frank refers to as 'Terry's bar' in Belfast, near the docks area.⁶³ Here we have a representation of the city and the vastly different opportunities it represents in relation to the countryside.

The theme of urban vs. rural is a well recognised,⁶⁴ recurrent one in Northern Irish literature. In discussing literature up to the outbreak of the Troubles, and in particular with reference to work by Michael McLaverty, which we will examine later, Elmer Kennedy Andrews writes that: 'it isn't politics, but the land – and separation from the land – which most profoundly determines character.'⁶⁵ This tells us that the pull of the city and resultant uprooting of rural lives was a key issue dealt with in pre-Troubles literature.

⁶² Parker, *Northern Irish Literature, Vol 1*, 24.

⁶³ Leitch, *Liberty Lad*, 151-164.

Jeff Dudgeon has called this 'probably the earliest description of a gay bar in Irish literature' – see p104 (below).

⁶⁴ John Wilson Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 23-29.

⁶⁵ Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, 'The novel and the Northern Troubles', in: *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Literature*, John Wilson Foster (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2006, 240.

Because the theme of urban and rural depictions in Northern Irish literature is a prevalent one, and features in many of the novels discussed in this study, it is worth examining in more detail. Seamus Deane, in *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790*, discusses at length ‘national character’, and gives us some insight into the reasons for the importance of relationship with the land as a dominant concept in Irish literature:

Even before the Famine, the various formulations of the Irish national character had emphasized the existence of a natural relationship between the people and the land that had been deformed or distorted by the violent expropriations of the seventeenth century and the penal legislation of the eighteenth.⁶⁶

Deane is telling us here that, historically, the traumatic effects of British colonisation were given important significance in how the Irish national character was defined, or encouraged to develop. Terence Brown tells us that later iterations of character, particularly in the 1920s, presented the image of Ireland ‘as a rural, almost pastoral nation’ and poets ‘celebrated a version of Irish pastoral’, thereby confirming a ‘belief that rural life constituted an essential element of an unchanging Irish identity.’⁶⁷ Prevalence of the belief, that, in the 1920s, ‘rural Ireland was real Ireland’ is also supported by Declan Kiberd. His analysis relates to the (almost sentimental) view held by city-dwellers of the rural landscape, particularly as they are ‘urbanized descendants’ of people who came originally from this landscape, and although the discussion is of Dublin and rural Ireland⁶⁸, we can see (and will see later, particularly in the novels of McLaverty) that it is also applicable to Belfast and Northern Ireland. This concept of city dwellers having romanticised, nostalgic views of their rural environs is an

⁶⁶ Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997, 54.

⁶⁷ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002*, Harper Perennial, 2004, 72.

⁶⁸ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, Vintage Books, London, 1996, 492.

important element of discussion in urban vs. rural Ireland in Northern Irish fiction. In Irish fiction in general, 'rural' and 'urban' can be seen as concepts which were not purely seen as descriptive of patterns of living, but which 'carried a heavy volume of associations: moral, cultural and political.' Partition only seemed to exacerbate this notion in the (Southern) Irish view, since Ireland's most urbanised part remained a part of the UK.⁶⁹ It has been suggested that Belfast, being both urban *and* industrial, could be regarded as 'doubly damned.'⁷⁰

Moving back to Brown's commentary, we see the importance of the rural idyll to the national psyche which was promoted after the Irish War of Independence. However, Brown also tells us that Irish writers, when turning their attention to rural Ireland, ignored the degree to which Irish rural life was involved in social change.⁷¹ By the 1960s and 1970s, writers realised that 'the new Irish reality was ambiguous, transitional, increasingly urban or suburban...', which was at odds with the worldview of the founding fathers of the Irish state,⁷² and with depictions of Irish life linked to the previously (rural) national character.

Eamonn Hughes, in his essay, 'Town of Shadows', which examines representations of Belfast in fiction, says that 'the culture of Ireland has had to catch up with the urban experience of the peoples of Ireland'⁷³ while Fintan O'Toole in his essay, 'Going West: The Country versus the City in Irish Fiction' says that, 'For the last hundred years, Irish culture and in particular Irish writing has been dominated by this

⁶⁹ Liam O'Dowd, 'Town and Country in Irish Ideology', *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Special Interdisciplinary Numbered, Dec. 1987, John Wilson Foster (ed.), 46.

⁷⁰ Neal Alexander, 'Strange City: Belfast Gothic', in: 'Urban Mindscapes of Europe', *European Studies*, 23 (2006), 114.

⁷¹ Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, 76.

⁷² Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, 299.

⁷³ Eamonn Hughes, 'Town of Shadows: Representations of Belfast in Recent Fiction', *Religion and Literature*, 28, 2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1996), 143.

dominance of the rural over the urban' and that Irish writing at the turn of the century was created in a metropolitan context, and used the ideal of rural Ireland to feed into the emerging political philosophy of the new Irish state.⁷⁴

It is interesting to note what O'Toole has to say about a more recent literary reaction to the predominance of idealised, rural depictions, which was not the emergence of urban novels, 'but a series of attacks on the synthetic notions of the country in the name of genuine rural experience.'⁷⁵ Leitch's *The Liberty Lad*, with its raw and unflattering depiction of rural Northern Ireland could be seen as one of these attacks on the rural idyll, with a particular aim of exposing the reality of life in a Northern Irish rural, unionist community.

The discussion of urban vs. rural Ireland is therefore one in which we look at how an idealised version of the Irish national character, centred in the rural, ordered landscape, and which dates from the founding of the Irish state, and even before, comes into conflict with the reality of an increasingly urbanised, more disordered and less predictable society as we move forward through the twentieth century.

The main theme of *The Liberty Lad*, however, is the struggle which the Protestant working class had with its own identity: the quotation above, in which the narrator says, 'I envy them [Catholics], their calm, inner knowledge of what they are, who they are and where they come from' is telling. The exposure of this uncertainty I believe is prescient of what has come to be regarded as a major factor in contributing to the development of conflict. In *The Troubles*, Tim Pat Coogan discusses the predicament of working-class Protestants in 1960s Northern Ireland:

But within the laager [of Unionism] there was a great gulf fixed

⁷⁴ Fintan O'Toole, 'Going West: the Country Versus the City in Irish Writing', *The Crane Bag*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1985, 111.

⁷⁵ O'Toole, 'Going West', 116.

between the working-class Protestant in, say, the Shankill Road district of Belfast, and the Anglican mill-owner, landlord, or textile baron who reigned on the upper reaches of the [Unionist] party.⁷⁶

And commentators have highlighted the gulf between the ‘Big House’⁷⁷ Unionists, for example the Prime Minister, Terence O’Neill, with his aristocratic ancestry, and working-class unionists (Protestants); and how Ian Paisley, being a self-styled representative of grass roots Ulster Unionism, was instrumental in the ousting of the more moderate O’Neill from his position as Prime Minister.⁷⁸

The ‘Big House’ is recognised as a recurrent motif in Irish literature,⁷⁹ where the house becomes the symbol of anxieties and uncertainties that governed the life of the Protestant Ascendancy.⁸⁰ It is relevant to this study to note that the concept of the ‘Big House’ has appeared in my own novels: for example in *Black Dog*, we see how Ben is intimidated by the size and splendour of both Jason’s family home in Belfast and his holiday home in Donegal. In *Turquoise Car*, we see Anne’s similar reaction to Carey’s house on the Antrim Road, while the novel, as a whole, could be viewed as Anne’s struggle to hold on to a bigger house than she was raised in.

This conflict of identity between the Protestant classes is portrayed in *The Liberty Lad* as follows:

‘large families packed into two-three, small, low, thick-walled,

⁷⁶ Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland’s ordeal, 1966-1996, and the search for peace*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, 41.

⁷⁷ ‘Big House’ – a reference to the grand or stately homes occupied by the aristocratic or upper classes.

⁷⁸ John Ranelagh, *A short history of Ireland*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, 276.

Coogan, *The Troubles*, 57.

⁷⁹ Andrew Parkin, ‘Shadows of Destruction: The Big House in Contemporary Irish Fiction’ in *Cultural Contexts and Literary Idioms in Contemporary Irish Literature*, Michael Kenneally (ed.), Barnes & Noble, Toronto, 1988, 306-327.

⁸⁰ Kersti Tarien Powell, *Irish fiction: an introduction*, Continuum International Publishing, 2004, 257.

dark rooms... They haven't changed since their ancestors arrived from Ayrshire and the other depressed Scottish shires three centuries ago... In the valley, living *on* the valley, people of the same stock, but not so elemental – farmers with Land-Rovers and a new bright red or blue Fordson Major every other year. And then *us*, neither one or the other – the industrials'⁸¹

At the end of the novel, when Frank's father has died, the funeral procession is passing through the Catholic side of the town. Frank remembers, and passes judgement on his father's words:

*Bloody micks! YOU never had to work beside them. You wait until they out-breed you, an' then your tune will change. Livin' off Family Allowances and the National Assistance. ACH! Hatred bred out of ignorance.*⁸²

However, Frank's disavowal of his father's 'Hatred bred out of ignorance' may be something that is unique to Frank among his community and his family. It is clear that Frank feels himself alienated:

Were all these people around me... were these *my* people?
Could I trace all my attitudes, feelings and physical appearance
back to them? I wanted to say 'yes', but I couldn't.⁸³

A review of Leitch's work from 1985 notes that Leitch's fiction 'represents a sustained attempt to understand and explain the Ulster Protestant consciousness,'⁸⁴ and notes therefore the importance of setting in *Liberty Lad*, since the village and its surrounding countryside remain the stronghold of traditional Ulster (Protestant) values.

The Liberty Lad, I feel, shows its contemporaneity, because of the details it portrays and regards as relevant. Contemporaneous writing does not have the same lofty oversight as retrospective writing; a reading of *The Liberty Lad* therefore provides an

⁸¹ Leitch, *The Liberty Lad*, 17.

⁸² Leitch, *The Liberty Lad*, 196.

⁸³ Leitch, *The Liberty Lad*, 200.

⁸⁴ John Hanratty, 'Getting to Know Ourselves: Maurice Leitch on Protestants', *Fortnight*, No. 223 (Jul 8 - Sep 8, 1985), 15.

insight into the embryonic problems which led to conflict in Northern Ireland, or at least those which are within the scope of the narrator's viewpoint.

Glenn Patterson, *The International* (1999)

Glenn Patterson's *The International* is also a first-person narrative: told by Danny Hamilton, looking back on his seventeen-year-old self, it is largely an account of Danny's and other characters' lives in Belfast in 1967. The life of the hotel and of the city is explored in detail.

It is almost *doubly*-retrospective. Written four decades after the events it depicts, Danny's first words are:

If I had known history was to be written that Sunday in the International Hotel I might have made an effort to get out of bed before teatime.⁸⁵

Perhaps such 'nested' retrospection lifts us further from the narrative, giving the reader a greater sense of objectivity.

Or, it could be a means of the narrator gaining the reader's trust: an assurance that the narrator is as aware of subsequent events as the reader is and an insistence for his story to be told as *he* sees it. In this way, it creates for the reader a particular space, a safe context within which to listen to the story. Taking this idea further, I would suggest that the establishing of retrospective narration in the opening lines allows the reader to relax in the knowledge that the author will not play tricks with dramatic irony, at least as far as the narrator's consciousness is concerned. Patterson himself says that the opening line has the function of acknowledging hindsight.⁸⁶

Published three decades after the events it portrays, *The International* is a look

⁸⁵ Glenn Patterson, *The International*, The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 2008, 1.

⁸⁶ Interview with Glenn Patterson, Author of *The International*, Appendix B, 132 (below).

back to pre-Troubles Belfast. In a note in the cited edition of the novel, Patterson has this to say:

I was intrigued by the gap between how events were viewed with hindsight and how they were experienced in the moment of unfolding.⁸⁷

The idea for the novel was, according to the author, the exploration of the months between two real events: the shooting in 1967 of Catholic barman Peter Ward (who some regard as the first victim of the Troubles) and the first meeting of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association in the International Hotel.

The narrator is passive in the context of the historic record; he is unconcerned with religion or politics. He says this about his religious background:

Andy and Edna, my father and mother... outstanding in only one respect: in this most God-obsessed of cities they had lost their religion. It was not that they were atheist, or even agnostic, at least not actively; one had been born Catholic, the other Protestant – in the absence of grandparents I was never quite sure which was which – but it was as though when they met their native faiths had somehow cancelled each other out.

No church marked my arrival into this world and I have left instructions that none is to mark my leaving.⁸⁸

There is an affirmation here – in the narrator’s own words – of belonging to a Belfast where religion was not of consequence or importance to everyone, and Patterson has himself stated that religion does not define who he is: ‘By birth, my religion is Protestant, but it has not defined who I am. I define myself by all kinds of other things.’⁸⁹ He has also said that he disagrees with the ‘two communities rhetoric’ which seeks to determine how Northern Irish people would worship (assuming they did

⁸⁷ Patterson, *The International*, ‘Glenn Patterson on writing *The International*’, 253.

⁸⁸ Patterson, *The International*, 27.

⁸⁹ Claire Burgess, An Interview with Glenn Patterson, *Nashville Review*, August 2010: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/english/nashvillereview/archives/1958>

worship) or how they would vote in elections, based on their (perceived) religious affiliation.⁹⁰

We may reasonably extend this affirmation more widely than to the narrator himself.

In her essay, 'The Backward Look: History and the New Irish Fiction', Eve Patten explores the concept of 'New Irish Fiction', a key characteristic of which is retrospection. Commenting on *The International*, Patten notes that it is ironic that, '...the political material of the novel is out of focus...' given that the timeframe is centred around the inaugural meeting of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. Instead, the focus is shifted 'from this "historic event" to the micronarratives in which it was embedded.'⁹¹

Patten is interested in these micronarratives present in *The International* which portray Belfast's inhabitants around the time of key historical events. This 'telescoping', the zooming in to the minutiae of characters' lives, serves to temper the dominance of hindsight, and adds another dimension to historical reality – the smaller details which make up people's everyday lives.

A point made by De Groot on the historical novel ties in with this concept: 'the historical novel can... mourn a lost history or attack the mainstream version of events',⁹² which is something we can say that *The International*, in its treatment of a particular period of Belfast's 'lost history' is trying to do.

On the subject of retrospection, Patten says:

The International is about the rupturing of 'history' by historical

⁹⁰ Interview with Glenn Patterson, Appendix B, 132 (below).

⁹¹ Eve Patten, 'The Backward Look: History and the New Irish Fiction', in: *The Ogham Stone: An Anthology of Contemporary Ireland*, Gerald Dawe, Michael Mulreany (eds.), The Institute of Public Administration, Dublin, 2001, 108.

⁹² De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 140.

reality, and the refusal of the past to be constrained by the teleological pull of the present.

Overall, Patten's essay expresses concern about the place and function of 'New Irish Fiction', and whether it presents caricatures and clichéd depictions of the past, although she does say 'The New Irish Fiction provides a cohesive, collection version of history', which would appear to be a positive impression. On the other hand, she finishes by saying that this fiction, of which *The International* is a part, may be more concerned with viewing history according to the particular socio-political concerns of the 1990s, and 'an engagement with history which is more journalistic than philosophical.' However, I believe that *The International* differs from the other works by the Irish authors Patten references here, which she feels to be an 'indictment of a previous generation and the identification of its abuses and failings' because *The International* has as its main purpose the illustration of 'the ambiguities and subjectivities that are, in effect, written out of contemporary versions of the past'. Or in Patterson's words, 'different versions'⁹³ of history.

Picking up on Patten's previous point, a key aim of *The International* is to insist that Northern Ireland, and Belfast, existed in their own right before the Troubles (and Patterson himself has said that 'the reason for the story' was that there hadn't been much written about [Belfast in] that particular period).⁹⁴ *The International* could be viewed as a reclamation of Belfast from the constraints of the best known historical events (as indeed, some have referred to the novel's 'marginalisation' of the Troubles,⁹⁵) and Patterson has been noted as the 'most determined' [of contemporary Northern Irish

⁹³ Interview with Glenn Patterson, Appendix B, 132.

⁹⁴ Patrick Hicks, *A Conversation with Glenn Patterson*, *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* Vol. 12, No. 2 (SAMHRADH / SUMMER 2008), 115.

⁹⁵ Kennedy-Andrews, *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles*, 111.

writers] to re-define Belfast in spite of fictional stereotypes.⁹⁶

It has also been argued that ‘...The International *ultimately constitutes a work of mourning*’⁹⁷ – that, in effect, it is in part a sorrowful look at what Belfast was on its way to being before the Troubles took hold. However I believe that whether this book is viewed as celebratory (in reclaiming Belfast, from a post-Troubles viewpoint) or mournful, or both, is a matter of opinion. My own view is that *The International* is nostalgic – that is to say, given the ensuing history, it creates a melancholy impression, while it is also hopeful, in showing us the vibrancy that Belfast once had, and could have again.

Nevertheless, *The International* can be seen as a reaction to the historical record; it may serve to subvert wide-ranging historical clichés regarding the nature of life in Northern Ireland before conflict.

The International, like *The Liberty Lad*, features a gay lead character; in this instance, the narrator, Danny. In her essay on *The International*, Anne Enright alludes to the sexuality of the narrator as serving a broader function in that it demonstrates the universality of life in Belfast – the common experience – before the Troubles were to subsume this:

The International insists that Belfast existed before the Troubles and that it was owned by the people who walked its streets before those streets were taken from them.

...So it is another heist to make your narrator gay – and easily, naturally gay; like a wildflower growing from the cracks in concrete; gay without anguish or blame. It is another insistence on things being what they are.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Pelaschiar, *Writing the North*, 104.

⁹⁷ John Brannigan, ‘Northern Irish Fiction’ in: *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, James F. English (ed.), Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2006, 155.

⁹⁸ Anne Enright, in: Patterson, *International*, Book Ends, ‘Anne Enright on reading *The International*’, 258.

Alternatively, it has been proposed that the sexual positioning of the narrator ‘allows [the author] Patterson to step outside of the Northern Irish mainstream and commentate.’⁹⁹ Patterson himself, though, has refused to place any symbolic significance on Danny’s sexuality:

[Interviewer]: Is Danny’s bisexuality a metaphor for his ambiguous religious and political affiliation?

Patterson: No, he just enjoys sex with men and women.¹⁰⁰

In my own interview with him, Patterson has also acknowledged, however, that Danny’s sexual orientation makes him slightly ‘outside’¹⁰¹ – a facet which has obvious implications for narrative viewpoint and neutrality.

The setting of the novel – the busy Belfast hotel, with all its comings and goings, the indiscretions and secret trysts of staff and customers, the drunken behaviour and banter to be expected in any bar – I believe, almost presents an exaggerated vitality, an overstated preoccupation of its characters with the ebb and flow of the everyday. It is a statement of ordinary people doing ordinary (and extraordinary) things before major events eclipse their lives, rendering their actions and identities subordinate to history.

As I mentioned earlier, there may be a temptation to place too much (or too little) emphasis on religious and political issues, and yet the reader of fiction which depicts this period expects some treatment of these issues. So, how does *The International* deal with the thorny issue of religion in its interplay between characters – the narrator having already told us that he and his family are areligious? This is dealt with late on in the novel:

‘What’s the deal anyway with you Prods?’ said Jamesie. ‘Is it a mortal sin or what to do a runner on a vicar?’

⁹⁹ Magennis, *Sons of Ulster*, 88.

¹⁰⁰ Marilyn Richtarik and Kevin Chappell, ‘An Interview with Glenn Patterson’, *Five Points*, Georgia State University: <http://www.fivepoints.gsu.edu/docs/interviewweb.pdf>

¹⁰¹ Interview with Glenn Patterson, Appendix B, 132 (below).

Prods? The word caught me like a sharp stick under the ribs. No one in the International had ever made such direct mention of religion to me. I cast a sidelong look at Jamesie to see did he realise what he had just said.

When the narrator, Danny challenges Jamesie:

Jamesie was trying not to hear me. I suppose I ought to have twigged then that he was annoyed with himself, but it wasn't something I saw every day.

...

'I forgot, we're none of us anything,' Jamesie said. 'We're International barmen.'¹⁰²

It is tempting to think that there is irony here: in real life, Peter Ward, the Catholic barman shot by the UVF in 1967, worked in The International hotel. However, as referred to earlier, from the very first line, *The International* feels honest and without irony. We trust the narrator. This dialogue seems to serve a broader purpose. It has a wistfulness: coming late on in the book as it does – and since we are by now immersed in the rich detail of Belfast and its inhabitants – it is almost an admission that ordinary people, regardless of their religious or political beliefs – 'I forgot, we're none of us anything... We're International barmen' – will be subsumed in the violence we have come to know. Patterson has said that a prime reason for writing *The International* was to look at the reaction (at the time) to Peter Ward's murder; murders such as these became a recognisable pattern of the Troubles, though at the time Peter Ward's killing couldn't be understood or recognised as such.¹⁰³

Magennis, in her book, *Sons of Ulster: Masculinities in the Contemporary Northern Irish Novel*, puts forward an observation which may help explain why the treatment of sectarianism, as mentioned above, comes late on in the book – i.e. it is indicative of encroaching menace as Belfast enters a transition period which will give

¹⁰² Patterson, *The International*, 196-197.

¹⁰³ Interview with Glenn Patterson, Appendix B, 132 (below).

rise to the birth of the Troubles:

The ways in which Danny defines himself, through his intelligence, his occupation, or his sexuality become less and less relevant as sectarian markers come into force.¹⁰⁴

Finally, the last sections of the book move on in time to deal (though not explicitly) with the Troubles: ‘Some years ago I was attending the funeral of Priscilla Coote, funerals having become a sort of habit with me then’ and on through to the loyalist ceasefire of 1994.¹⁰⁵ It has been suggested that in jumping to the other side of the Troubles, *International* renders the space between these two definitive points in time (1969 and 1994) as ‘monolithic and unspeakable’.¹⁰⁶ This may appear to the reader to be true, but personally, having written two novels set in Northern Ireland at different times, I could identify with an author who did not want to write, so to speak, ‘another novel about the Troubles’.

In any case, there is clearly more of the author’s (political) intent in the retrospectively written *The International* than there is in *The Liberty Lad*. And, it is worth pointing out that while history weighs down on the author who is writing in retrospect, it also bears down on the analysis of the resultant work.

The International, though retrospective, has less to do with ‘...the roots of behaviour and background, with the sins of omission and commission long-past...’ which Ballard referred to (see earlier, p11, Ref:25), or with being representative of this type of fiction, and more to do with providing a hindsight-tinged snapshot of pre-Troubles Belfast – the *exclusion* of hindsight. The fact that Patterson produced an earlier work set in 1960s Belfast – *Burning Your Own* (1988)¹⁰⁷ – which does feature largely

¹⁰⁴ Magennis, *Sons of Ulster*, 133.

¹⁰⁵ Patterson, *The International*, 241-246.

¹⁰⁶ Brannigan, ‘Northern Irish Fiction’, 156.

¹⁰⁷ Glenn Patterson, *Burning Your Own*, (1988), The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 2008.

what we would expect (bigotry leading to disaster), lends credence to the hypothesis that *International* was written to perform a specific function.¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, *The Liberty Lad*, whilst also being a snapshot of Northern Ireland in the 1960s, can be taken more at face value. Its themes are what the author judged at the time to be relevant – the identity of the working class (the majority working class, which happened to be Protestant), its future in industrially-declining Northern Ireland, and the morality of local politics. *The Liberty Lad* is concerned with the struggle of the individual and their class.

The International, however, is not concerned with the individual, but with *individuals*, not with a large-scale narrative, but with the personal narratives of its characters. Their own histories. It is concerned with place and with space – the space between how people experienced historic events at the time of their unfolding, and how the historic record has presented these events to us. It is a reclamation of *pre*-conflict Belfast and its people from history – a new approach in dealing with the past, and in reclaiming Belfast, or re-marking it. An article from 1992 notes the dilemma that contemporary Northern Irish writers have in not being tied to history while they ‘do not necessarily endorse a wholesale trashing of the past’¹⁰⁹, while an opinion piece in *Fortnight* (1994) dealing with urban planning in Belfast states:

The literature which sees the city, not as a ‘specimen’ or a locus of trouble or a backdrop for varieties of sentimental personal alienation, but as a place to live, *remains unpublished* or untaught in the schools and universities.¹¹⁰ (my emphasis)

Perhaps *The International* was a response to this complaint, although it did

¹⁰⁸ *Burning Your Own* will not be considered further in this discussion: set between July-August 1969, it is a portrait of a specific point of societal deflagration, written *during* the Troubles.

¹⁰⁹ Linda Leith, ‘Subverting the Sectarian Heritage: Recent Novels of Northern Ireland’, *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Dec. 1992), 88-106.

¹¹⁰ Damian Smyth, ‘Being Unkind to Belfast’, *Fortnight*, No. 325 (Feb 1994), 43.

reclaim *pre*-Troubles Belfast.

These two novels have the same aim: to tell us certain truths about Northern Ireland in the 1960s. Neither focuses on religious differences. *The Liberty Lad*, however, is darker: it seeks to expose the rot, the corruption present in 1960s rural Northern Ireland, whereas *The International* talks to us more of the city and its people.

The Liberty Lad despairs at the everyday, the mundane struggle which its narrator faces, whereas *The International* is a celebration of the everyday – the fact that, once upon a time in Belfast, people's lives *were* mundane. Lodge's words, mentioned earlier, on the author of historical fiction are meaningful here: 'What he can do is bring a twentieth-century perspective to bear upon nineteenth-century behaviour, perhaps revealing things about the Victorians that they did not know themselves.' By analogy, what *The International* is doing is bringing a post-Troubles perspective upon 1960s behaviour, revealing the (comparative) normality of life that Belfast people were unaware of.

The Liberty Lad operates on a more fictionalised level, because it is of its time – there are no names of politicians; the mill village of Kildargan does not exist. *The International* on the other hand, in retrospect, names people we have heard of, real streets and buildings and places.

For me, though, the key difference is that *The International*, through a supposedly impartial narration and a self-reflexive acknowledgement of retrospection – encourages us to suspend our knowledge of history. It acknowledges the historical setting of Belfast in 1967 and, although showing us the seeds of conflict (the first meeting of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association in the hotel, the murder of Peter Ward), I believe that such details are hidden by the dynamics of the surrounding narrative. Patterson says that

the essence of the book was to capture something that Eddie McAteer¹¹¹ alluded to in a speech on Northern Ireland at the time - 'A faint feeling of lightness in the air'¹¹² – (referring to a perception of gentle, tentative optimism that things in Northern Ireland may be about to change), and so we see the dilemma that Patterson had in balancing, with hindsight, the magnitude of significant historical events with the everyday details of living. *The Liberty Lad* has no such dilemma.

Deirdre Madden, *One By One In The Darkness* (1996)

Deirdre Madden's *One by One in the Darkness* tells the story of a week in the lives of three Catholic Northern Irish sisters – Cate, Sally and Helen Quinn. The main narrative is set in 1994 - just before the paramilitary ceasefire – and has a fractured timeline which is interspersed with scenes from their childhood in the rural Ulster of the 1960s and 1970s.

The book, through presenting a sweep of Northern Irish history is interesting in that it is *almost* pre- and *almost* post- Troubles. I should explain.

The earlier narrative thread deals with Cate, Sally and Helen's upbringing in a farmhouse in County Londonderry, with the time spent with their extended family and their time at school. Around this period (the late 1960s), the civil rights movement is formed and becomes active, something in which their father and uncles become involved.

This earlier thread sees the start of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and carries on (perhaps into the early 1970s) when their father is murdered by terrorists.

The later (or main) thread of the book has Cate, now a successful executive who

¹¹¹ Eddie McAteer was the leader of the Northern Ireland Nationalist Party; he made this comment in reference to perceived change in Northern Ireland in a speech given in Limerick in 1967.

¹¹² Interview with Glenn Patterson, Appendix B, 132 (below).

lives in London, coming home to tell her mother and her two sisters that she is pregnant. By this stage, Cate's youngest sister, Sally, is a schoolteacher at a local primary, while Helen is a lawyer in Belfast who among other things provides legal representation to people accused of paramilitary activity.

The book takes examines the developing opportunities and roles of women in society against ever-present gender constraints, while also illustrating the changing societal attitudes as evidenced by consequent generations of the same family. In addition, it juxtaposes the particular Northern Irish situation with these themes. Using the violence of the Troubles, the book asks important questions: how does a family survive fracture? How important is our childhood to our sense of self? How do Northern Irish people who have lived through the Troubles feel about the country they have been raised in?

One by One is interesting in that it effectively bridges the first two novels I have used for this study: it encompasses the timeframes of *Liberty Lad* and *International* as well as the period in which it and *International* were written. It is fundamentally different from *International*, however, in that it is a direct examination of the impacts of the Troubles, and the double time narrative forces us to view pre-Troubles Northern Ireland from the perspective of the ensuing violence.

In this way, as we read of the pre-Troubles period, we are struck by the particular ordinariness of events, for example – the younger sisters going to mass with their parents and their grandmother, lighting candles after the service and stopping to buy sweets on the way home, going on a boat trip on Lough Neagh with their uncle Peter, undergoing the dreaded Christmas visit to the fearsome Granny Kelly in Ballymena – as counterpoints to a larger, looming menace. We find ourselves searching for signs of tension, the historical seeds of conflict, as they are told from a child's perspective:

When they were in the car on the way home... Helen listened in to what the grown-ups were talking about.

‘Brian asked me to be sure and ask you if you want to go with him to the march on Saturday,’ Granny said.

‘What march is that?’

‘The civil rights march that’s to be in Coalisland. I thought he told you about it already.’¹¹³

And if the occurrence of such events is not enough, the author is not afraid to emphasise to the reader the importance of viewing the relative innocence of the girls’ childhood in the context of the larger political and societal nuances of Northern Ireland. In the following passage, the author has decided firmly to *tell* as opposed to *show*:

For the pattern of their lives was as predictable as the seasons. The regular round of necessity was broken by celebrations and feasts: Christmas, Easter, family birthdays.

...

And yet for all this they knew that their lives, so complete in themselves, were off centre in relation to the society beyond those few fields and houses. They recognised this most acutely every July, when they were often taken to the Antrim coast for the day, and as they went through Ballymena and Broughshane, they would see all the Union Jacks flying at the houses, and the red, white and blue bunting across the streets. They thought that the Orange arches which spanned the roads in the towns were ugly, and creepy, too, with their strange symbols: a ladder, a set square and compass, a five-pointed star. They knew that they weren’t supposed to be able to understand what these things meant; and they knew, too, without having to be told that the motto painted on the arches: ‘Welcome here, Brethren!’ didn’t include the Quinn family.¹¹⁴

One by One effectively condenses the historical record at some points in its narrative.

For example, much of the relevant political history of 1969 is set out in two pages¹¹⁵ – a point I found of particular interest, given that I spent so much longer depicting the same timeframe in *Turquoise Car*. The reason for this is obvious, however. I intended

Turquoise Car to be an exploration of the outbreak of civil unrest in Northern Ireland

¹¹³ Deirdre Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, Faber & Faber, London, 1997, 65.

¹¹⁴ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, 75.

¹¹⁵ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, 94-95.

(and more specifically the transition from peace to violence), whereas *One by One* is concerned with the broader historical overview. There is enough historical information in *One by One* to lend substance to and give explanation for the growing tensions of the society in which the Quinn sisters live, and the back-and-forth time structure of the novel implies hindsight, perhaps making such summaries more permissible. Again, the information is presented in such a way as to draw attention to the contrast with their everyday lives:

Things degenerated quickly over the following months, and came to a crisis that summer. For a time, the reports they saw on television were still at odds with the world around them. They watched images of policemen in Derry, in full riot gear, battle against people throwing stones and petrol bombs... They watched the black-and-white pictures while their parents fretted, and then they stepped out of the house again into the light of an August evening, where the swallows swooped and dipped in jagged flight around the back yard; where cattle ambled through the long grass; and where the honeysuckle bloomed by the green gate.¹¹⁶

It has been noted elsewhere, that a particular theme of *One by One* is that of the urban versus the rural, in that it ‘establishes a sort of primacy of country life and its culture over urban life’¹¹⁷ or that it categorises the urban vs the rural in terms of Northern Ireland and its sectarian tensions.¹¹⁸ It should be noted, though, that this viewpoint belongs more to the timespan of the Troubles, when Belfast is depicted as the violent city in contrast to the simple idyllic beauty of the countryside.

The urban versus the rural, as previously mentioned, is a common one in Northern Irish literature. And is just one of the themes present in *One by One*, in which women are, of course, the central characters. It is worth exploring the issue of women in

¹¹⁶ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, 95.

¹¹⁷ Pelaschiar, *Writing the North*, 105.

¹¹⁸ Brannigan, ‘Northern Irish Fiction’, 154.

relation to violence in this novel.

Women in Northern Ireland have founded (peaceful) protest groups over the years (the Peace People and Women Together in the 1970s¹¹⁹), and political groups (The Women's Coalition, founded in 1996). In post-Troubles, Northern Ireland, the proportion of women in traditionally male-dominated Northern Irish politics has increased significantly (there are 21 of 108 MLAs at the time of writing).¹²⁰

Nevertheless, a more typical representation of *anyone* in Northern Ireland in relation to the Troubles is that of observer, victim, or bystander, as opposed to activist, campaigner or politician.

It is this context that *One by One* deals with the portrayal of women; it is the story of how women in Northern Ireland coped with the conflict, and of how by and large, it was a conflict of men's doing, of brothers and sons and fathers as direct perpetrators and victims, and of how women were left to deal with the consequences. Thus *One by One*, in common with other examples of (Northern Irish) women's writing demonstrates the separation between the 'masculine' (political, violent) and the feminine (personal, feeling).¹²¹ In *One by One*, the men cause the trouble: the girls' uncle Peter is an alcoholic (although is politically inert); male soldiers appear at the family home; it is male terrorists who break in and shoot their father dead; and it is pictures of bigoted Orangemen which the girls see in the newspapers. By contrast, the women in the family provide stability, particularly for each other – such as Sally taking care of her mother after her husband's murder, or both Sally and Helen smoothing the way for Cate's

¹¹⁹ Further information on these movements can be found at:

1. Mairead Corrigan Maguire, *The Vision of Peace*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1999.
2. Robert Lee Millar, Rick Wilford and Freda Donoghue, *Women and Political Participation in Northern Ireland*, Avebury, 1996, 16.

¹²⁰ Members of the Legislative Assembly, elected in 2011: Statistics retrieved from Northern Ireland Assembly website: <http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/mlas/statistics.aspx> 14 Jan 2014.

¹²¹ Kennedy-Andrews, *(de-)constructing the North*, 225.

pregnancy news with their mother. The women in this novel show strength and solidarity (sometimes strained) – though what makes *One by One* so powerful is the insight granted into the personal and emotional cost of such stoicism.

Peach, writing in *The Contemporary Irish Novel*, says of women writers writing about Northern Ireland:

The most obvious point to make about the women who have chosen to write directly or indirectly about contemporary Northern Ireland is that they are concerned with the impact of the Troubles upon people's lives especially upon the lives of women and children.¹²²

A particular reason for this may be found in a view put forward by Valerie Morgan:

The Northern Ireland conflict between 1969 and 1994 resulted in almost 3200 deaths directly attributable to violence. Of those killed approximately 200 were women, a figure which suggests that women were much less involved in physical violence than men. However, the long-term impact and consequences of violence for individuals and families has probably weighed most heavily on women, especially in terms of bereavement and separation.¹²³

This is certainly valid in the case of *One by One* – an exploration of how the entirely female survivors in a family – mother and daughters – cope with the murder of their husband/father. Madden herself told me that, in writing *One by One*, she wished to put forward a particular viewpoint:

I felt that, at the time, there was a particular military, political representation prominent in fiction dealing with Northern Ireland. When I began writing *One by One* I was conscious of making a choice to bear witness to women's experiences of the Troubles.¹²⁴

¹²² Peach, *Contemporary Irish Novel*, 58.

¹²³ Valerie Morgan, 'Peacemakers? Peacekeepers? Women in Northern Ireland 1969-1995', *INCORE*, Londonderry, 1996: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/women/paper3.htm>

¹²⁴ Interview with Deirdre Madden, author of *One by One in the Darkness*, Appendix A, 129 (below).

Ingman's *Fiction by Irish Women* characterises the function of women's writing in relation to the Troubles as follows:

Women's writing, from both North and South of the border thus provides a therapeutic space where female protest is registered, against violence done in the name of politics...
... the three Quinn sisters in *One by One in the Darkness* find themselves unable to forgive those who perpetrate violence in the North.¹²⁵

Perhaps it is possible to suggest that Northern Irish women writers may be performing the function of quasi-passive narrators or recorders of the Troubles. This is something more than using writing as a space in which to express protest (as Ingman suggests), and it agrees with, though goes slightly beyond, the role of women writers as recording impacts of the conflict on women and children as Peach suggests.

Perhaps women writers are performing a role – as parties outside direct involvement in (or at least incitement of) conflict – namely, of observers and chroniclers of a particular historical narrative.

This concept – in which Northern Ireland conflict is limited to the male domain – is not true in all cases.

Begoña Aretxaga, in *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland* writes of her first encounter with a local woman in West Belfast who told her: 'Women are the backbone of the struggle; they are the ones carrying the war here and they are not receiving the recognition they deserve.'¹²⁶ This 'carrying the war' could relate to either passive means or more active (political or paramilitary) ones. It has been noted, that during the Troubles, women in Northern

¹²⁵ Heather Ingman, *Twentieth Century Fiction by Irish Women, Nation and Gender*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007, 183.

¹²⁶ Begoña Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1997, ix.

Ireland were expected to keep together social and family units.¹²⁷

Nevertheless, women did become active in Northern Ireland's violence and struggle. Aretxaga goes on to explore republican feminism, saying that '...the critical attitude of Republican feminists seems to run against the grain of the cherished stereotypes that so often have associated women with peace and men with war.'¹²⁸

A major upsurge in women's active involvement in the conflict arose with the reintroduction of internment in 1971, when women 'took to the streets and marched, boycotted, protested, gave political speeches, barricaded, rioted and resisted curfews.'¹²⁹ Internment for women began in December 1972, and within six months, 236 women were imprisoned, all of them Republican.¹³⁰ Some of these prisoners in Armagh, who took part in protests while they were incarcerated became known as the 'Armagh Women',¹³¹ while prominent activists such as Mairead Farrell – the IRA militant who was killed in Gibraltar in 1988 – rejected the concept of 'Mother Ireland', a sentimental depiction of woman as mother and passive victim.¹³² Farrell's words are quoted in a West Belfast mural: 'I've always believed we had a legitimate right to take up arms and defend our country and ourselves against British occupation.'¹³³

¹²⁷ Maria Power, 'A Republican who wants to further women's rights: Women, Provisional Republicanism, Feminism and Conflict in Northern Ireland 1972-1978', in: *Irish Women at War: The Twentieth Century*, Gillian McIntosh and Diane Urquhart (eds.), Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 2010, 153.

¹²⁸ Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*, 4.

¹²⁹ Mary McAuliffe and Laura Hale, 'Blood on the Walls: Gender, History and Writing the Armagh Women', in: *Irish Women at War: The Twentieth Century*, Gillian McIntosh and Diane Urquhart (eds.), Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 2010, 172.

¹³⁰ Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*, 76.

¹³¹ Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*, 122.

¹³² McAuliffe and Hale, 'Blood on the Walls', 189.

Megan Sullivan, *Women in Northern Ireland: Cultural Studies and Material Conditions*, University of Florida Press, 1999, 104.

¹³³ Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*, 47.

It is noted that women's active participation in the conflict was on the Catholic/Republican side as opposed to the Protestant/Unionist side.¹³⁴ Discussing gender constructions found in sectarian identities and symbols, Mary K Meyer says:

The Protestant/unionist/loyalist identity draws heavily on masculine/warrior symbols with virtually no room for feminine symbols, this reflecting the staunchly patriarchal values of unionism, its preoccupation with allegiance to the British state, and its exclusion of women from political leadership. The Catholic/nationalist/republican identity draws on masculine symbols but also makes room for powerful feminine symbols, thus reflecting (creating?) more space for women to participate in the nationalist struggle.¹³⁵

Meyer's commentary here shows us how the symbology of these two communities illustrates fundamental differences in those communities' attitudes towards women and the role they may play in ideology and myth, or in the conflict itself. The issue of women's rights and gender equality in 1960s Northern Ireland is something which I have paid attention to in writing my own novel, *Turquoise Car*, which I will discuss later in this study.

Unlike in Patterson's *International*, where the narrator is decidedly areligious (where his parents' religions 'had cancelled each other out'¹³⁶), the Quinn family in *One by One* is firmly Catholic. This, along with their relatively isolated, rural existence meant that '...their lives were off centre in relation to the society beyond those few fields and houses.'¹³⁷ *International*, as previously discussed, tries to rescue pre-Troubles Belfast from the ensuing Troubles, whereas *One by One* views pre-Troubles Northern Ireland through the lens of the ensuing conflict. These two opposing agendas (of how

¹³⁴ Power, 'A Republican who wants to further women's rights', 154.

¹³⁵ Mary K Meyer, 'Ulster's Red Hand: Gender, identity and sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland', in: *Women, States and Nationalism: At Home in the Nation*, Sita Ranchod Nilsson and Mary Ann Tetreault (eds), Routledge, 2004, 119.

¹³⁶ Patterson, *The International*, 27.

¹³⁷ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, 75.

pre-Troubles Northern Ireland is presented) is perhaps a consequence of when the novels were published.

One by One was published in 1996, and although this was to be two years before the Good Friday Agreement, the time of writing (summer 1993 - July 1995) was a transition period which saw the IRA ceasefire of 1994.¹³⁸ The end of the Troubles was arguably in sight. The story of the Quinn family from the 1960s to the 1990s in *One by One* shows us the normality of pre-Troubles family life, before the murder of the girls' father. In the later timeline, the approaching birth of Cate's child provokes tension, and compromise and acceptance is needed on the part of the older generation (Cate's mother). In this way, the Quinn family's story is symbolic of Northern Ireland's history. Its depiction of 1960s Northern Ireland is therefore based in the historical narrative. Take, for example, the following description of a civil rights march in Derry, which draws particular attention to the historical record both through foreshadowing, and through direct reference:

When the civil rights march from Belfast to Derry took place some two weeks later, it was Emily who insisted that the whole family go to cheer them on. They had to stand and wait for a long time in the raw air; and when at last the students did appear, led by a tired-looking man shouting into a loud hailer, the children felt a sharp mixture of fear and excitement, which was new to them, but which they were to experience many times in the coming years. Helen's father bent down and whispered in her ear, 'You're looking at history.'¹³⁹

We have seen how the earlier narrative thread – in the sister's childhood – foreshadows reference to what is to come. The later narrative thread (in which the sisters are grown up) looks *back* to the Troubles and to their father's murder. As such, *One by One* presents a continuum of time and history and events, in which narrative reference points

¹³⁸ Parker, *Northern Irish Literature, Volume 2*, 176.

¹³⁹ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, 80.

– whatever their timeframe – are defined by their relationship to the Troubles and to the murder of the girls’ father. This creates a claustrophobic weariness in the novel: the characters – past and present – inhabit an enclosed space in which both the past and the present (or future) are bound to an intermediate, dominant chronological reference point.

It has been noted of Madden’s work, that, ‘her fictions are also characterized by constant shifts in focalization, perspective and chronology, which destabilize the narrative...’¹⁴⁰ while in *One by One* the fractured timeline has a very particular consequence, in that it shows how reconstructing the narrative of the past reinforces the splintering of the present.¹⁴¹ Madden says that: ‘The way in which the past is remembered here and encroaches on the present shows internalisation; it is about carrying a burden.’¹⁴²

An example of the consciousness of history in the later narrative is presented in the following scene:

‘This is terrible,’ he said. ‘I thought the idea was that I came here to cheer you up. Tell you what, there’s a documentary on TV tonight for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the start of the Troubles. We’ll have a look at that; that’ll lift our hearts.’

And the thing was, that it did: they watched with something between grief and hilarity the old black-and-white footage of marches and riots.¹⁴³

Although Patterson starting writing *The International* in early 1996,¹⁴⁴ it was published

¹⁴⁰ Michael Parker, ‘Shadows on a Glass: Self-Reflexivity in the Fiction of Deirdre Madden’, *Irish University Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1, (Spring Summer 2000), 82-102.

¹⁴¹ Geraldine Higgins, ‘A Place to Bring Anger and Grief: Deirdre Madden’s Northern Irish Novels’, *Writing Ulster*, No. 6, Northern Narratives (1999), 158.

¹⁴² Interview with Deirdre Madden, Appendix A, 129 (below).

¹⁴³ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, 59.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Glenn Patterson, Appendix B, 132 (below).

in 1999, a year *after* the Good Friday agreement. Patterson's stated intention was not to 'reclaim Belfast' but to examine how people responded to the death of Peter Ward; however, it is worth considering the narrative of *The International* in the context of Northern Ireland emerging into a new era. We could presume that when peace follows conflict, there will, of necessity, be a period of (societal) healing, and so when '*The International* insists that Belfast existed before the Troubles'¹⁴⁵, it is a first step in affirming that Belfast – a city known the world over for its violence – could again exist as it once did, and have an identity other than that accorded to it by the Troubles. It is also worth noting that *International* is a serious book, in contrast to a number of comic post-conflict novels of the same period, which has been noted elsewhere.¹⁴⁶

In the context of discussing these two works as historical novels (although *One by One in the Darkness* could be viewed as being only *partly* a historical novel) Byatt's comment, discussed earlier (see p.13) is pertinent: 'the political desire to write the histories of the marginalised, the forgotten, the unrecorded'.¹⁴⁷ *The International*, in examining the death of Peter Ward, seeks to write the history of the 'forgotten', while *One by One*, in its ambition to 'bear witness to women's experiences of the Troubles',¹⁴⁸ seeks to give voice to the marginalised.

In comparison with *Liberty Lad*, it seems easy to group *International* and *One by One* together as hindsight-based, agenda-driven works, whose depictions of pre-Troubles Northern Ireland are primarily used to explore Northern Ireland's ensuing

¹⁴⁵ Anne Enright, in: Patterson, *The International*, Book Ends, 'Anne Enright on reading *The International*', 258.

¹⁴⁶ Stephanie Schwerter, 'Peacefire: Belfast between Reality and Fiction', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Fall, 2007), 19-27.

Parker, *Northern Irish Literature, Volume 2*, 176.

¹⁴⁷ Byatt, *On Histories and Stories*, 10.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Deirdre Madden, Appendix A, 129 (below).

history and current situation. *Liberty Lad*, as discussed earlier, since it is free from the burden of knowing what is to come, is able to be viewed more or less on its own terms, without us having to analyze or second-guess the author's reasons for including certain depictions and themes.

Janet McNeill, *The Maiden Dinosaur* (1964)

The last book I will consider which deals with the 1960s period is *The Maiden Dinosaur* by Janet McNeill. It details the anxieties and neuroses of a group of Protestant middle-class people in their forties and fifties, and is set in Belfast.

The protagonist, Sarah Vincent, is an unmarried, somewhat dowdy (her pupils refer to her as 'Daddy Vincent') schoolmistress. She lives in an apartment in her former childhood home, Thronehill, a grand house in an affluent suburb on Belfast's Antrim Road, the house having been converted to apartments after her parents' death.

Sarah's closest emotional attachment – in what might these days be termed a co-dependent relationship – is with the glamorous and flirtatious Helen (also a resident of Thronehill) who was a childhood friend and schoolgirl crush. Essentially, the book details for us a turning point in Sarah's life when, having reached fifty(ish) years of age, she acknowledges her own unhappiness and the reasons for it, casts off the somewhat parasitic Helen, and finally allows herself the chance of finding romantic happiness with George, the recently widowed husband of one of her friends.

The overwhelming sense of *Maiden Dinosaur* is one of malaise and discontent. It has the feel of narrating the last days of a dying British empire, figured symbolically in Thronehill's new status as a series of apartments, or in the pitiable state of its gardens:

At one point, Sarah closed her eyes, hungry for ghosts, for the lawn striped in two shades of green from Mr Boyd's precise and frequent attentions, for the smack of croquet balls, for the sight of Ellen in black with starched trimmings carrying a well

appointed tea tray.¹⁴⁹

Also lending its weight to the notion of the end of empire is the theme of barrenness which runs through the book – whether this is in reference to Sarah’s childlessness, Helen’s only child having been killed, or Joyce’s and Maurice’s ridiculous pregnancy: ‘but it won’t be a child of passion, as the saying is. Just the result of habit and accident... A man that age must feel a bit of a fool, especially when they’ve been married so long.’¹⁵⁰

Indeed, *Maiden Dinosaur* was the last book McNeill published before she left Belfast forever.¹⁵¹ As such, it could be viewed as a parting comment on a country on the verge of change.

But, in fact, there is nothing particularly (Northern) Irish about the feel of *Maiden Dinosaur*. There are no colloquialisms present in the narrative or in the characters’ speech, and apart from references to Belfast Zoo and Belfast Lough, and one or two references to particular idiosyncrasies of Northern Irish society, it would be easy to imagine the story being set in a city somewhere in England. However, this might have been as a consequence of McNeill’s wish to be more widely read: it has been noted that McNeill: ‘eliminated from her work anything that might have badged it as merely provincial. To reach an English audience, she closed her highly sensitive ear for Ulster speech.’¹⁵² A review of the novel from 1984 in *Fortnight*, notes that ‘[The Maiden Dinosaur] is set not so much in the city of Belfast as in a beleaguered enclave thereof.’¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Janet McNeill, *The Maiden Dinosaur*, Arlen House, Dublin, The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1984, 125.

¹⁵⁰ McNeill, *The Maiden Dinosaur*, 38.

¹⁵¹ John Cronin, ‘“Beasts in the Province”’: The Fiction of Janet McNeill’, in: *Irish Studies in Brazil*, Munira H. Mutran and Laura P.Z. Izarra (eds.), Editora Humanitas, Sao Paulo, 138.

¹⁵² Cronin, “Beasts in the Province”, 142.

¹⁵³ John Cronin, Lonley Souls, Sectarian Torment, *Fortnight*, 209 (Nov. 1984), Belfast, 22.

Interestingly, Belfast zoo is often mentioned alongside the Lough, (for example, the view of the Lough from the zoo which is on Cavehill); the juxtaposition of these two features, one suggesting entrapment and the other suggesting freedom and open space, serving to illustrate the psychic predicament of the book's characters, who all appear trapped in one way or another (by marriage, social convention) although they appear to have freedom (money, power, career success).

Nevertheless, John Wilson Foster says that '*The Maiden Dinosaur* (1964) is the best novel to come out of Northern Ireland after Moore's *Judith Hearne*', and he identifies the importance of McNeill's writing in illustrating the malaise of the Protestant middle classes.¹⁵⁴ This malaise manifests in the constrained relations between the characters, for whom outward respectability and strength is more important than intimacy and authenticity.

For example, when Sarah and Maurice (her friend Joyce's husband) have an impromptu party in Sarah's apartment, all goes well as they drink wine and regale each other with quotations. However, when the mood shifts as Sarah seeks some honest reassurance from Maurice, he thinks: 'The inspiration of the party had trickled away and was being replaced by an unpleasant sincerity.'¹⁵⁵

Or, when Sarah and George have tea at the zoo, George, who is worried about his mentally ill wife, Kitty, begins to tell Sarah what he first found attractive about Kitty. Sarah tells us: 'He had never talked this way before. There was no way of stopping him.'¹⁵⁶

The men in *Maiden Dinosaur* are all emasculated (at least in Sarah's portrayal of them). Thus, Kitty says to Sarah of her husband: 'George cleans this room... Sometimes

¹⁵⁴ Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction*, 228.

¹⁵⁵ McNeill, *The Maiden Dinosaur*, 144.

¹⁵⁶ McNeill, *The Maiden Dinosaur*, 155.

he wears an apron, you should see him'.¹⁵⁷ We see how Addie takes care of her husband, Gerald when he comes home drunk: '[she] brooded over him, her man, her child.'¹⁵⁸

However, although the men may be portrayed as weak, this does not mean that the women have power: key to Sarah's predicament is the fact that although she is a respected teacher and published poet, she is nevertheless an outlier among her married female friends in what is essentially a man's world.

The 'Troubles' are mentioned in the first half of the book, and it is of particular interest to note that the reference here is to the violence surrounding the partition of Ireland in 1921-1922.

[Addie]: "We've only been born and stayed alive for fifty years and been through two World Wars and the Troubles and seen our country split in two. How much do you remember about the Troubles, Sarah?"

"Coming home from school we had to lie down in the tram because of the shooting, I remember that."¹⁵⁹

Also of interest is the reference to seeing '*our country* split in two' (my emphasis): this is suggestive of the pre-partition colonial mindset, when Ireland was part of the British Empire.

As previously mentioned, however, reading through this novel could make one wonder about the choice to set it in Belfast or Northern Ireland at all. There are no references to Orange parades on the Twelfth of July, suggesting that the characters never witnessed them (highly unlikely) or that McNeill did not think that they were an important part of the story. (Note, however, that McNeill's earlier works do have a more

¹⁵⁷ McNeill, *The Maiden Dinosaur*, 86.

¹⁵⁸ McNeill, *The Maiden Dinosaur*, 62.

¹⁵⁹ McNeill, *The Maiden Dinosaur*, 96.

local flavour.¹⁶⁰)

A reference to Orangeism does come near the very end of the book at Kitty's funeral:

For most of them, brought up in Provincial religious homes, faith as they grew older had become an individual solitary relationship, shy, ingrown, a protest against the public emphasis on their Protestantism, against too loud Orange drums and the hysteria of spawning Mission Halls.¹⁶¹

Foster has said that McNeill is Ulster's only existential writer,¹⁶² and indeed the dilemmas faced by the characters in *Maiden Dinosaur* are essentially existential in nature. Without the poverty or powerlessness experienced by the Glass family in *Liberty Lad*, there is a sense of discontent provoked by boredom. The crisis felt by characters in *Maiden Dinosaur* is deeply personal, and is not related to class (in respect to others) or to religion, or to finances or employment prospects; when these things are not problematic, then other issues such as childlessness or romantic loss are given prominence.

The role of women in society has a greater focus than is evident in Madden's *One by One in the Darkness*, because the women in Madden's book are discriminated against as a subset of a repressed (religious) minority, whereas the discrimination against the women in *Maiden Dinosaur* takes place in the absence of any other obvious social disadvantages or discrimination. Addie talks at one point about her frustration at being just 'a provincial lady' and yet there is 'the emancipation of women going on all around us.'¹⁶³ Ann Owens Weekes, in her essay 'Women Novelists', comments on a scene in *Maiden Dinosaur* in which, following the publication of a volume of her

¹⁶⁰ Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction*, 229.

¹⁶¹ McNeill, *The Maiden Dinosaur*, 175.

¹⁶² Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction*, 236.

¹⁶³ McNeill, *The Maiden Dinosaur*, 177.

poetry, Sarah, during an interview, is asked if her background (implying class and gender) has been a restrictive element in her work. Addie, Sarah's friend, interrupts, scornfully telling the interviewer that their (middle-class, female) existence is perfectly valid. 'In doing so,' Owens Weekes tells us, 'Addie explores as prejudice the implication that middle-class existence deprives women of meaningful emotional, intellectual and social experience, and as ignorance the dismissal of women's writing.'¹⁶⁴

Owens Weekes analysis suggests to us that *Maiden Dinosaur* is concerned with examining a wider societal issue – the validation and acceptance of women's role in society, outside preconceived norms (in this case, the woman in question being an academic). There is doubt expressed by the interviewer as to whether Sarah's life experience is valid, or valid enough to inform her work. This is, in some ways, an exploration of how society deals with women who perform functions outside the 'traditional role', which many women in Northern Ireland adopted as 'their only sanctioned identity.'¹⁶⁵ However, the key difference in the treatment of women's issues in *Maiden Dinosaur* and *One by One* is that, in the absence of the Troubles, McNeill's novel has space to explore women's issues in their own right and not in the context of the politics and violence which dominate Madden's.

Unlike in Patterson's *The International*, there is the opposite of an exaggerated sense of the vitality of the everyday; instead, *The Maiden Dinosaur* presents us with characters who strain to keep everyday life as uneventful as possible, and who are scared and disgusted by genuine emotions. The realisation of lost potential inherent in this mode of living can be catastrophic, as evidenced by the glamorous Helen's suicide

¹⁶⁴ Ann Owens Weekes, 'Women Novelists, 1930s - 1960s', in: *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, John Wilson Foster (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2006, 203.

¹⁶⁵ Elisabeth Porter, 'Political Representation of Women in Northern Ireland', *Politics*, Vol 18(1), 1998, 25-32.

attempt near the end of the book.

In summary, *The Maiden Dinosaur* is a portrait of the angst experienced by middle-class Protestants (and in particular, by middle-class Protestant women) in Northern Ireland, which has no particular Northern Irish atmosphere. This is telling, when we consider the lower-class Protestant inability to identify with ‘Big House Unionists’ which we see in *Liberty Lad*.¹⁶⁶ The struggles which McNeill’s characters face are a world away from those of Leitch’s Kildargan. As Addie says, when Sarah asks her on one occasion what is wrong:

“Just the weather. I don’t know. Sometimes on summer evenings
I get plain melancholy for no special reason.”¹⁶⁷

The Maiden Dinosaur, like Leitch’s *The Liberty Lad*, is a contemporaneous depiction of 1960s Northern Ireland. Free from the burden of knowing what is to come, it is able to effectively ignore those things (sectarian tension, discrimination) which we now see as the seeds of conflict.

Fiction depicting the pre-1960s period in Northern Ireland

My discussion so far has focussed on depictions of pre-1968 Northern Ireland and an examination of which fiction can be seen as presenting a more ‘primary’ view of Northern Ireland at that time – that is to say, whether contemporaneous fiction can be viewed as more of a pseudo-primary source as compared with retrospective (historical) fiction. There is an important factor not yet discussed: although fiction written *pre-1968* is free from the burden of hindsight with respect to the Troubles, it carries its own historical burden, that is to say, it is conscious of its own preceding history.

To gain a greater understanding of the historical burden carried by *The Liberty*

¹⁶⁶ Coogan, *The Troubles*, 41.

¹⁶⁷ McNeill, *The Maiden Dinosaur*, 128.

Lad, I will now examine depictions of Northern Ireland in the pre-1960s period. I have chosen to study books written by two of Northern Ireland's best known and most successful writers – Brian Moore and Michael McLaverty, as well as Joseph Tomelty, who was primarily a playwright and wrote two novels set in the 1930s. These three writers are Catholic. I therefore chose, as a subsequent addition, a book by Protestant author, Sam Hannah Bell.

In *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955) by Brian Moore, we have a portrayal of the personal struggles of a single woman in her forties: her deepening despair – having sacrificed much of her adult life caring for an elderly aunt – at being unable to find a romantic partner, her struggles with her Catholic faith, and her battle with alcohol addiction. It is a harrowing story and is unflinching in its portrayal of Northern Ireland (in particular, Belfast) as a drab, bigoted and dismal place. We find unflattering portrayals of the city, particularly with reference to the consequent alienation of the novel's Catholic characters. The city centre is presented as follows:

They stood together on the street corner and surveyed the dead Ulster Sunday. The shops were shut, the city had set its dour Presbyterian face in an attitude of Sabbath righteousness. There was no place to go, nothing to do.¹⁶⁸

Perhaps here, Moore is attempting to portray the alienation felt by Belfast's Catholic residents. In case we were in any doubt, however:

the staring white ugliness of City Hall.
There under the great dome of the building, ringed around by forgotten memorials, bordered by the garrison neatness of a Garden of Remembrance, everything that Belfast was came into focus. The newsvendors calling out the great events of the world in flat, uninterested, Ulster voices; the drab facades of the buildings grouped around the Square, proclaiming the virtues of trade, hard dealing and Presbyterian righteousness. The order, the neatness, the floodlit cenotaph, a white respectable phallus

¹⁶⁸ Brian Moore, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, Harper Perennial, London, 2007, 76.

planted in sinking Irish bog. The Protestant dearth of gaiety, the Protestant surfeit of order, the dour Ulster burghers walking proudly among these monuments to their mediocrity.¹⁶⁹

While in *Liberty Lad* the rural landscape is drab and oppressive, here it is the capital city with its ‘drab facades’ in ‘sinking Irish bog’, and more importantly its ‘dour’ inhabitants with their ‘dearth of gaiety’. *Liberty Lad* also mentions Scottish (Protestant) settlers.¹⁷⁰

We are privy to many viewpoints of the (Catholic) characters throughout the narrative of *Judith Hearne*. There are numerous examples of bigoted thinking. For example, a thought from the eponymous Miss Hearne: ‘You might know, being a Protestant, she wouldn’t have one ounce of Christian charity in her.’¹⁷¹ This gives us an example of preconceived, biased views in relation to Protestants.

Or there is the following, from Mr Madden (in a scene set in a cinema):

The items. First the Queen. A few claps. More. The house applauding, louder and louder. Miss Hearne and Mr Madden sat with their hands in their laps. No handclaps for her, a foreign queen. Let them give back the Six Counties and then we’ll clap. Irish people, a disgrace, applauding like that. But Protestants, what can you expect, Scots Protestants, black-hearted all.¹⁷²

This excerpt shows us the resentment felt by this Catholic character in relation to Protestants’ loyalty to the Queen and the British government. In *Judith Hearne*, therefore, there is clearly no reluctance on Moore’s part to portray the failings of Belfast and the sectarian views of its inhabitants. . This is not surprising. Discussing the Belfast novels of Brian Moore, Jo O’Donoghue tells us:

Indeed, of his own experience of living in Belfast, Moore has

¹⁶⁹ Moore, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, 103.

¹⁷⁰ Leitch, *The Liberty Lad*, 17.

¹⁷¹ Moore, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, 37.

¹⁷² Moore, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, 99.

said: “I found it a very repressive place to live,” and “we all lived in a Catholic ghetto at that time.” (RTE 1987).¹⁷³

As is demonstrated in particular by Miss Hearne’s spectacular breakdown at the end of the novel, due in major part to a crisis of faith, the Catholic residents of Moore’s Belfast are as trapped and disadvantaged by constraints (religious, societal, economic) as are the Protestant residents of Leitch’s Kildargan. Although *Judith Hearne* is told from the point of view of Catholic characters, they are presented as being just as bigoted as the Protestants they are so quick to judge and complain about.

Previously, we saw how schoolteacher Frank Glass in *Liberty Lad* viewed the Catholic minority, thinking: ‘I envy them, their calm, inner knowledge of what they are, who they are and where they come from, but not their degrading, daily struggle to keep dignity in a country dedicated to keeping them in their place.’¹⁷⁴ This is reinforced by O’Donoghue’s analysis of the Catholic characters in *Judith Hearne*:

In... Judith Hearne... can be seen the defensiveness of a beleaguered minority that is governed simultaneously by the reality of its political impotence and by the illusion of its religious superiority.¹⁷⁵

The most important factor the two communities portrayed in both *Judith Hearne* and *Liberty Lad* have in common is thus their working-class identity, yet far from this being a unifier, it is something which exacerbates the internal crisis of identity which is – for different reasons – apparent in both communities.

We can identify an important difference in Patterson’s *The International*, in its depiction of Belfast, with its aforementioned reclamation of pre-Troubles Belfast. Thus,

¹⁷³ Jo O’Donoghue, ‘A pox on both their houses: Post-Colonial Conflict in the Belfast Novels of Brian Moore’, in: *Cross/Cultures 22, “And the Birds Began to Sing”: Religion and Literature in Post-Colonial Cultures*, Jamie S. Scott (ed.), Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam – Atlanta GA, 1996, 7.

¹⁷⁴ Leitch, *The Liberty Lad*, 112.

¹⁷⁵ O’Donoghue, ‘A Pox on Both Their Houses’, 6.

Patterson is less concerned with depicting Belfast as bleak, bigoted and rain-sodden (even if it was undeniably so). The story of *International* takes place almost entirely within the confines of a luxurious hotel in which the guests are glamorous, the furnishings sumptuous, all backdrops to a fast-paced narrative which dispels bleakness with a richness of detail.

Another of Moore's novels, *The Emperor of Ice Cream* (1965) by Maurice Leitch is set in wartime (early 1940s) Belfast, and has more in common with *Judith Hearne* than *The International* in its depiction of a miserable, narrow-minded city. The novel tells the story of Gavin Burke, an awkward seventeen year old who joins the Air Raid Precautions Force. Sectarian references are so frequent throughout that the city, as Leitch sees it, appears to be almost as much at war with itself as it does with Germany. Catholic characters regard Protestant colleagues or neighbours as 'the scum of the Orange lodges', 'Orange gets', 'He was probably... the cold Protestant sort who considers Catholics somehow vulgar and Southern Irishmen untrustworthy peasants.'¹⁷⁶ However, there is also irony apparent in these views: "'Us Catholics must stick together. There's a terrible lot of people on this post is bigoted as hell. Do you follow me?'"¹⁷⁷

And so it is apparent that Leitch, as in his later work *The Liberty Lad* believed that religious tensions are an important feature of the everyday in 1940s Belfast.

Consider this portrayal of a character from the Falls Road area of the city:

He lived with his tubercular wife and four children in the Falls Road, a fiercely Catholic, fiercely nationalist, working-class district. What most of his Falls Road neighbours felt about this war could be summed up in the fact that they considered it a point of honor to leave a light shining in their upstairs windows

¹⁷⁶ Leitch, *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1977, 8.

Leitch, *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, 44.

Leitch, *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, 26.

¹⁷⁷ Leitch, *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, 83.

at night in case any German bombers might come over the city. Your Man, a former member of the I.R.A., agreed with the slogan that England's adversity is Ireland's opportunity, but he no longer had great hopes of the I.R.A. as a force to overthrow the British. He put his money on Hitler. When Hitler won the war, Ireland would be whole again, thirty-two counties, free and clear.¹⁷⁸

This anti-British sentiment among the Catholic Northern Irish is a source of tension between Gavin and his father; as Gavin witnesses the destruction wreaked by bombing of the city he wonders: 'Was his father still applauding Hitler's deeds?'¹⁷⁹

Therefore, in *Emperor of Ice Cream*, the long-running inter-societal conflict of Northern Ireland is relegated to a lesser importance in the face of greater, more relevant and immediate crises. This is something that Gavin's father comes to realise at the end of the book.

Roger Blaney, in *Presbyterians and the Irish Language*, surveys early (inter-war) novels which portray Catholics – particularly those of Tomelty, McLaverty and Moore – in Belfast, saying that 'the early novels of Brian Moore are probably the best treatment' of the theme of middle-class Catholics' lives in Belfast, in contrast to the depictions of lower-class Catholics in the works of Tomelty and McLaverty,¹⁸⁰ which we will examine later.

Red Is The Port Light (1948), by Joseph Tomelty, tells the story of Frank Durnan, a merchant seaman, and a lonely, guilt-ridden character who – relatively late in life – has a chance at romantic happiness. It is set in a fictional village on the east coast of County Down. The novel deals well with Durnan's psychological struggles: his guilt concerning a previous accident at sea; his burgeoning relationship with a widow; and

¹⁷⁸ Leitch, *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, 44.

¹⁷⁹ Leitch, *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, 169.

¹⁸⁰ Roger Blaney, *Presbyterians and the Irish Language*, Ulster Historical Foundation, 1996, 16.

his grief as he finds, gradually, that she is insane (which ends with his murdering her). However, the narrative suffers from a lack of detail in some respects – most notably in visual detail.

Interestingly, there is scarce mention of religious conflict in the novel, though there is plenty of religion, in terms of obligations. What *Port Light* has in common with *Judith Hearne* is a depiction of the fear of religion and in particular of religious figures. In one scene, Durnan meets the priest at the parochial house to discuss his marital intentions:

The room smelt of turpentine and bees'-wax, and there was a great stillness in it. It seemed to Durnan a room apart from the rest of the house, almost a large confession box. Even the chair Durnan was sitting in was so arranged that it faced the one at the head of the table; and the table itself showed where the Canon's elbows rested as he listened. There was a deadness about the walls, a shut-in-ness, that frightened him a little. In this room, Durnan knew, the Canon met sin, face to face. Here there were no dark corners as in the Church confessionals, where you could whisper your sins unseen. This was where the Canon brazened things out with you. Where seducer met seduced, and raper met the raped. And the shut-in-feeling made it worse. Even the windows with their frosted panes reflected only the dark shadows of the ivy leaves, making them look like skeletons.¹⁸¹

Tomelty shows us here the anxiety Durnan feels about this meeting - from the unease experienced while waiting in the dark, claustrophobic neatness of this room in the parochial house, to the dread felt in anticipation of meeting the priest himself, outside the relative safety and anonymity of the confession box.

Tensions between the two religious communities in Northern Ireland are not evident in this novel, although there is some discussion from the characters about religious conversion. In common with *Judith Hearne*, as can be seen from the excerpt above, there is evidence of the foreboding disquiet provoked by religion. *Port Light* is

¹⁸¹ Joseph Tomelty, *Red Is The Port Light*, Lagan Press, 1997, 118.

therefore a character-driven novel in which the geopolitical setting of Northern Ireland is not the primary focus. Instead, it centres on a man's struggles with guilt, religious faith, sense of duty and identity. Others have noted that the novel has a theme of sexlessness (through, among other things, Durnan's unconsummated marriage),¹⁸² and that the novel is Tomelty's portrayal of a subregion in Northern Ireland: '...the world of seafarers and small farmers where he was born', a 'bleak melodrama' which is 'alleviated by the humane portrait of an elderly retired seafaring couple, one a Catholic, one a Protestant, unobtrusively devoted to each other'.¹⁸³ The fact that this couple are 'unobtrusively' devoted is key in telling us that *Port Light* is unconcerned with sectarianism.

And yet Tomelty's next work, *The Apprentice* (1953), features sectarianism from the very outset.

Blaney says that, in its depiction of Catholic characters' lives, *The Apprentice* is 'more optimistic than McLaverty's work',¹⁸⁴ (which we will examine later), because the characters have found a way to survive in the city.

However, it would not be true at all to say that its depiction of 1930s Belfast is in any way cosy. *The Apprentice* is the story of orphan Frankie Price, who is raised by his cruel and violent aunt. Frankie leaves school at fourteen, and takes up a position as an apprentice house painter. Over the course of the book (five years), Frankie takes his first steps into adulthood, weighted down as he is by his abusive upbringing. The Belfast which Frankie lives in is full of religious tension:

He walked up the street slowly. He stopped to look at the inscriptions on the gable of Greer's wall. 'UP THE REPUBLIC DAMN YOUR CONCESSIONS ENGLAND WE WANT OUR

¹⁸² Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction*, 50.

¹⁸³ Vance, 'Region, Realism and Reaction', 161.

¹⁸⁴ Blaney, *Presbyterians*, 13.

COUNTRY.’ He did not know who wanted the country, or why. All he knew about the Republic was that it had a green, white and orange flag, and that if the police found one in your house they could put you in jail for having it.¹⁸⁵

One wonders at this point whether the primary difference between sectarian portrayals in these two novels by Tomelty is that one (*Port Light*) has a rural setting, whereas the other is centred in the streets of the grimy city, with its attendant poverty, strife and class divisions. The Belfast of *The Apprentice* is crammed with different groups and is firmly demarcated:

He lived on the Shankill Road, where all the people were Protestants. The boy used to be frightened to go near his house; there was writing on a gable which made him run past it. ‘To hell with the Pope’ was printed in big letters.¹⁸⁶

and

‘Have you ever thought about this city you’re living in, Frankie. Of the ghettos in it? The Protestants are stuck in one district; the Catholics in another, the Jews somewhere else...’¹⁸⁷

So, we can see in *The Apprentice* that Belfast’s geopolitical setting is vital. It is a raw, unflattering portrayal and perhaps one of the characters in *The Apprentice* gives us a clue as to what Tomelty might have thought of the situation: ‘I despair of this country, Frankie. Fifty years of atheism is what Ireland needs, just fifty years of it... You’ll find your world will change, Frankie, it must change.’¹⁸⁸

It is important to note that this is Tomelty’s hindsight-biased view of 1930s Belfast – a backwards look from the 1950s. Tomelty’s depiction here appears to be one borne of exasperation with religion and bigotry – where the church is powerful and inspires awe, fear and guilt; and where everyone knows (and makes it their business to

¹⁸⁵ Joseph Tomelty, *The Apprentice*, The Blackstaff Press, 1983, 10.

¹⁸⁶ Tomelty, *The Apprentice*, 16.

¹⁸⁷ Tomelty, *The Apprentice*, 18.

¹⁸⁸ Tomelty, *The Apprentice*, 136.

know) everyone else's religion. Employment opportunities are dictated by one's religious background. The most sympathetic characters – Simon and Molly – are the ones who are scornful of religion, and the kindness and charity they show is in contrast to the cruelty of Frankie's God-fearing aunt. There is an element of religious allegory present in these 'good' characters, as if they alone in this most God-fearing of cities are the ones who embody the true meaning of Christianity. Thus, Frankie's older friend Simon is the Good Samaritan, while Molly, a fallen woman (unmarried mother), is Mary Magdalene.

In *The Apprentice*, Tomelty tells us that, for whatever reason – through sectarianism and its disastrous effect in dividing communities or hampering a young man's job prospects, or through the (Catholic) Church and the debilitating guilt and fear it inflicts on individuals – there is one thing above all others wrong with Belfast: religion. As Foster says:

Tomelty's young protagonist spends the novel trying to flee his self-consciousness, his aunt, the neighbourhood busybodies, and sectarianism. Behind these images and states of bondage stands the Church, ever-ready to stifle and contain.¹⁸⁹

Northern Ireland in the 1950s (when *The Apprentice* was written) wasn't a place with any less bigotry than the 1930s, when the novel was set. The major event which took place in the intervening years was the second world war, during which Belfast was bombed. Economic conditions would no doubt have improved to an extent. I am left with the feeling that *The Apprentice* is showing us how little had changed in those years in terms of sectarian tensions and the negative effects these had in particular on the working classes.

As previously mentioned, the discussion of the differences between Tomelty's two novels is an interesting one since it raises the question of whether sectarian portrayals of

¹⁸⁹ Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction*, 118.

this period are influenced by the choice of either urban or rural setting.

We will look next at two novels by Michael McLaverty. Like Tomelty, McLaverty was a country-born Catholic, who had moved to the city.¹⁹⁰ Vance says (in comparison with Tomelty's work) that: 'There is less melodrama and a more developed sympathy for the sometimes difficult lives of Northern Catholics in McLaverty's fiction.'¹⁹¹ In looking at these two novels by McLaverty, we will try to determine whether fictional portrayals of rural Northern Ireland were free from sectarian themes, while narratives dealing with urban life (specifically of that in Belfast) were mired in religious hatred.

Call My Brother Back (1939), by Michael McLaverty would appear to support this theory. It is the story of the MacNeill family, who live happily and peacefully on Rathlin Island until they move to Belfast after the death of the father, Daniel MacNeill. Rathlin Island presents a (somewhat cold, salty and windswept) rural ideal – a traditional community in which there is no in-fighting, where the boys roam and play on the grassland. Wild swans swim in mountain lakes, gulls and puffins wheel over shoals of herring fry. In Belfast, the landscape is urban, as we would expect (though the nearby Belfast hills provide rural respite); streets are busy with trams and cars; pigeons and canaries are kept in sheds or cages while rabbits and ferrets are in caged boxes.

Sectarianism does feature in *Call my Brother Back* and to an increasing extent as we progress through the narrative.

Sitting with the paper on his knees Colm saw the twisted life of the city: the fightings at football matches between Catholics and Protestants; the paintings on the gable-ends of King William on a white horse: REMEMBER 1690 ... NO POPE HERE. And in the Catholic quarters, the green-white-and-gold flag of Ireland painted on the walls with UP THE REPUBLIC. It was a strange city, he thought, to be living two lives, whereas on Rathlin Catholics and Protestants mixed and talked and danced

¹⁹⁰ Vance, 'Region, Realism and Reaction', 162.

¹⁹¹ Vance, 'Region, Realism and Reaction', 161.

together.¹⁹²

However, discussion of sectarianism in this novel is complicated by the timeframe it depicts: the novel begins in 1918 and progresses to the early 1920s, when the Northern Irish state came into being, an event which in any case would have brought sectarian tensions to the fore. Therefore it is as much a story of rural uprooting as it is an illustrative historical piece and in illustrating the formation of Northern Ireland, a substantial treatment of sectarianism is required. In relation to portrayals of communities in Belfast, Begoña Aretxega notes ‘the local closeness recreated in the novels of Michael McLaverty’¹⁹³, and this ‘local closeness’ is something which we see more of in McLaverty’s second novel, *Lost Fields*, (1941).

Lost Fields gives us again a portrayal of Northern Ireland – rural and urban – this time in the 1930s, and has no sectarian tension at all. *Lost Fields* has as its main themes: poverty (of the working classes), religion (religious obligation, not conflict), and the sacrifice of rural existence for the employment opportunities afforded by living in the city.

In this respect, as a snapshot of the working-class struggles of its time, what *Lost Fields* shows may well have been true of any British industrial city and its environs. The lurking presence of church and religion (and the characters’ fearful respect of these) is a common enough theme in Northern Irish literature, and does not mark *Lost Fields* out as exceptional in this respect.

McLaverty’s novels have been noted as portraying the tension between the rural and urban segments of Northern Irish society. Foster says that ‘This almost mysterious decline of the land and the seductive growth of Belfast – between which the characters

¹⁹² Michael McLaverty, *Call My Brother Back*, The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 2003, 123-124.

¹⁹³ Aretxega, *Shattering Silence*, 41.

are suspended – is a basic background equation in McLaverty’s fiction’,¹⁹⁴ while Vance says: ‘The age old tension between country and city is a recurring theme in [McLaverty’s] quiet, authorially unobtrusive fiction.’¹⁹⁵ Further, the sectarian implications of this population movement (rural to urban) have been explored in McLaverty’s writings:

This clash of cultures was perhaps best expressed in the writings of Michael McLaverty whose novels *Call My Brother Back* (1939) and *Lost Fields* (1941) dealt with the dislocation of rural families in Belfast...

The towns and cities offered a greater variety of work and a higher standard of living to those with skills but also reduced people’s dependence on one another and made sectarian segregation more likely.¹⁹⁶

Such sectarian segregation, however, though evident in one of McLaverty’s novels, is not evident in the other. The Griffin family in the 1930s of *Lost Fields* is Catholic, and so lives in a Catholic district in Belfast, yet the only reference to religious differences comes in the penultimate page of the book, when Mrs Griffin says in a letter to her daughter-in-law that, ‘Mary has a nice kind of mistress in Ballymena. She is not one of our sort.’¹⁹⁷ The choice of Ballymena is relevant, here, since Ballymena has a well-founded reputation in Northern Ireland as being a heartland of Protestant – particularly Presbyterian – religion. Nevertheless, the reference in *Lost Fields*, coming where it does, is almost an afterthought.

Finally, an important distinction between the different roles of the Catholic church in relation to the characters in McLaverty’s and Moore’s city-dwelling Catholics is provided by Blaney, who points out that the church sustains the lower-class characters

¹⁹⁴ Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction*, 39.

¹⁹⁵ Vance, ‘Region, Realism and Reaction’, 162.

¹⁹⁶ Peter Martin, ‘Social Policy and Social Change since 1914’, in: *Ulster since 1600: Politics, Economy and Society*, Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, 308-309.

¹⁹⁷ Michael McLaverty, *Lost Fields*, The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 2004, 210.

of McLaverty's fiction, while the city itself and particularly its industry represent the imposing, restricting forces. In Moore's work, on the other hand, the middle-class characters are trapped by the church.¹⁹⁸ A parallel can be drawn here with the preceding discussion of *The Maiden Dinosaur*, in which middle-class issues (albeit of Protestant characters) are more existential in nature.

December Bride (1951), by Sam Hanna Bell provides an interesting reference point in this study, since it is written by a Protestant author and, unlike the previous pre-1960s works examined, depicts a Protestant community. It tells the story of Sarah Gomartin, a servant girl on Rathard farmstead, in a rural Presbyterian farming community in County Down some time in the early twentieth century. Sarah falls pregnant to one of the two Echlin brothers, Hamilton and Frank, who run the farm; since she cannot tell who the father is, she refuses to marry either, against the advice of the church minister, and to the scorn and condescension of her neighbours.

She gives birth to a son, and some years later to a daughter, and along with the two Echlin brothers, this pseudo-family lives at Rathard, successfully running the farm and even expanding it to take in neighbouring lands.

Sarah is fully aware that she has invoked outrage and wrath among her neighbours, and so only leaves the farm in exceptional circumstances. This is a situation with which she seems content; however, when she does encounter neighbours and their disapproving glances or silences, she feels angry.

Sarah's greatest indignation at how others judge her, however, is reserved for Bridie Dineen, a Catholic woman, who, while she never confronts Sarah, nevertheless appears silent and sullen in Sarah's presence:

[Sarah] thought bitterly of the Dineen woman, hating her for her pharisaical pride in her lawful wedlock, despising her for her

¹⁹⁸ Blaney, *Presbyterians*, 16.

poverty, detesting her for her papishness.¹⁹⁹

We see echoes here of Protestant resentment at a perceived smug, self-assuredness possessed by Catholics, reminiscent of Frank Glass's words: 'I envy them [Catholics], their calm, inner knowledge of what they are, who they are and where they come from',²⁰⁰ and the perceived 'illusion of [the Catholic population's] religious superiority' present in *Judith Hearne*.²⁰¹

Aside from this, there is not what we would call sectarianism in the rural setting of *December Bride*. The Dineen family is known to be Catholic, but there does not appear to be any hostility towards them from the other main characters in the book. There is certainly religious segregation, but it appears to exist as part of a well-defined and well-developed societal structure. Sarah's hostility, however, grows to the point where she schemes to have the Dineen family thrown out of their house (the Echlins have by this stage taken over the land on which the Dineen family are tenants).

It has been pointed out that, in contrast with idealistic depictions of rural Ireland, some writers, including Sam Hanna Bell in *December Bride*, 'have provided less than idyllic interpretations of rural life' (though in relation to ownership and possession of land).²⁰² However, the rural life depicted in *December Bride* is more ordered and less dangerous than the city, as we will see.

In common with preceding works studied here, and in particular with *Call My Brother Back*, the urban versus rural schism is given a particular sectarian slant in *December Bride*. Whereas the farming community in *December Bride* is largely homogenous in terms of religion, and centred in the rural idyll, Belfast is by contrast

¹⁹⁹ Sam Hanna Bell, *December Bride*, The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 2005, 134.

²⁰⁰ Leitch, *The Liberty Lad*, 112.

²⁰¹ O'Donoghue, 'A Pox on Both Their Houses', 6.

²⁰² Patrick J. Duffy, 'Writing Ireland' in: *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, Brian Graham (ed.), Routledge, 1997, 69.

presented as dirty, noisy, busy, immoral and sectarian.

The first representation of the city is when Sarah and the older Echlin brother, Hamilton, go to Belfast for supplies. At this stage, Sarah has had sexual relations only with the younger of the two brothers, Frank. Sarah is initially bewildered and frightened by the city, in particular by the brazen appreciative looks of men who pass her (shipyard workers and manual labourers). However, she quickly overcomes her sense of being affronted as a feeling of pride, and ultimately of power, begins to grow. On their way home, Sarah and Hamilton stop at a coach house for drinks with an acquaintance of Hamilton's, and she gets drunk. On the road again, feeling sick and scared, she leans close to Hamilton for comfort, and it is here that we see their affair begin. While this first encounter with the city might show its corrupting potential, it more certainly shows Sarah's vulnerability on leaving her familiar environs.

Petie Sampson's encounter with the city has a much worse outcome. Petie is an old man who lives on his own after his wife's death, save for the companionship of his beloved Irish setter, Kipper. One day he sets off, with Kipper in tow, to sell cattle at the livestock market in Belfast with the two Ogle brothers: 'They were Catholics, which might have deterred Petie in his younger and more obstreperous days.'²⁰³ After the livestock are sold, the three men and the dog go to an alehouse, where Petie, who is unused to alcohol, is encouraged by the Ogles to drink. One of the brothers starts singing a republican song, which causes the three of them to be ejected. Subsequently, Petie is separated from them in the frenetic bustle of the city and catches a tram, with Kipper (although Petie has no clue where he is going), to an unknown district. He finds a pub in which to eat, though while there he ends up drinking more. At this second pub, there is more singing, this time with an Irish guardsman and his cronies, and Petie asks

²⁰³ Hanna Bell, *December Bride*, 226.

the guardsman to sing an Orange song. One of the cronies cautions Petie that: 'it was a mad dangerous thing to call for a party song before you knew the colour of your pub'.²⁰⁴ In the midst of this, the dog is ejected from the pub, but Petie is too drunk to notice. When Petie leaves the pub, an old woman attacks him with a bottle, calling him 'ye ould Orange bastard!'²⁰⁵ Disoriented and lost, Petie is helped onto a bus by the soldier, and, by chance, is recognised by the bus driver. Petie is almost half way home to County Down when he realises, heartbroken, that he has left the dog behind in the city and that he will probably never see it again. Petie steps off the bus into a storm of cold, wet wind and instead of going to his cottage, he staggers to the graveyard, his last act in life being to collapse on to his wife's freshly dug grave.

Petie Sampson's story is illustrative of the dangers of the city for innocent country folk. The fact that two young Catholic men have cajoled an old, vulnerable Protestant man into drinking (more than he had, thus far in his life, we are told) speaks to us of the perceived dangers of straying beyond the safe bounds of one's own community. Petie's story is also a metaphor for how the modern industrialised urban world subsumes and destroys the unprepared and insular rural one.

Vance says that Bell was: 'Politically a man of the left, less comfortable... with the plantation of Ulster and then the growth of aggressively Protestant industrial and commercial Belfast from the late eighteenth century',²⁰⁶ which fits with Bell's depiction of Belfast as being dangerous, dirty and unstable in comparison with the relative order, safety and familiarity of the County Down countryside. In Petie's tragic story, we see that the city, with 'its dazzle, complexity and din, defeats to the point of death'²⁰⁷ an old

²⁰⁴ Hanna Bell, *December Bride*, 234.

²⁰⁵ Hanna Bell, *December Bride*, 235.

²⁰⁶ Vance, 'Region, Realism and Reaction', 160.

²⁰⁷ Hughes, 'Town of Shadows', 144.

countryman whose innocent, rural existence has left him entirely defenceless in the face of such chaos.

Coming back to the issue of religious depictions, we see that what *December Bride* has in common with *Call My Brother Back* is the theme that religious segregation, although certainly present in the countryside, is ordered and accepted and causes no problems, while it is in the cramped streets, houses and bars of Belfast that it develops into dangerous sectarian hatred.

However, what is interesting about Tomelty's *Port Light* and McLaverty's *Lost Fields*, unlike the other works discussed here, is that the authors, like McNeill in *The Maiden Dinosaur*, have chosen *not* to depict sectarian conflict. The urban (Belfast) setting may have an influence, and is more likely to lead to inclusion of sectarianism, but it is not the deciding factor.

Summary of Literature Review

In considering these books in terms of historical narrative, Leitch's *The Liberty Lad* impresses as being a particularly prescient work. Hindsight has shown that the themes Leitch chose to include as important in the depiction of Frank Glass's everyday life – corruption in local government, poverty, Protestant working-class identity – are among those which we now consider to be decisive factors in the development of conflict in Northern Ireland.

The International is, of course, retrospective. Written with knowledge of the Troubles, its primary aim does not appear to me to be to accurately illustrate history; rather it is performing a function in post-conflict societal resolution. It was published in 1999, a year after the Troubles had arguably ended (the Good Friday agreement was signed in 1998). Inasmuch as it is one of the first backward looks at how the conflict

started, it is very much of its time. Its depiction of the everyday is exaggerated and although there are the seeds of conflict present (the first meeting of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, for example), these signals are diminished in relation to the stronger dynamics of the glamorous hotel setting in the narrative. Patterson himself says that: ‘I wouldn’t claim that *The International* was historically neutral.’²⁰⁸ But at the same time his answers to the interview questions suggest that he does not believe fictional narratives are valuable as supplements to the historic record, but rather that they can have a ‘corrective’ function, whereby they demonstrate alternative versions of history.

There is some agreement on this point from Madden, author of *One by One in the Darkness*, about this possible function of fictional narratives in relation to the historic record:

Fiction can give us a sense of what it was like to live at a particular time, can record memories and explore different ideas about things that happened in the past.²⁰⁹

In any case, *One by One in the Darkness* is an overview of the historic record, and its representations of pre-Troubles Northern Ireland are skewed (intentionally) inasmuch as it never allows us, as readers, to view depictions of the everyday as anything other than counterpoints to looming violence and instability. As well as this, it presents Northern Ireland’s past and future as being bound to the Troubles.

The Maiden Dinosaur presents a contemporaneous snapshot of the angsts of Protestant middle class women, which, while no doubt accurate, says nothing about Northern Ireland in particular. What makes *The Maiden Dinosaur* interesting is that McNeill, in her ambition to reach a wider (English) audience, felt able to exclude

²⁰⁸ Interview with Glenn Patterson, Appendix B, 132 (below).

²⁰⁹ Interview with Deirdre Madden, Appendix A, 129 (below).

particular details of Northern Irish life in the 1960s – in particular the religious tension and sectarianism present in the city. Viewed alongside *The Liberty Lad*, it provides us with a valuable insight into an important issue in pre-Troubles Northern Ireland – the divergence of the world views of the Protestant middle and lower classes.

Regarding the books surveyed which cover the pre-1960s period, we find that religious tensions are present in some works (*The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, *Call My Brother Back*, *December Bride* and *The Apprentice*) and in these cases sectarianism is invariably bound to the city, in contrast to a more peaceful, idealised countryside. What marks the later *Liberty Lad* out in this respect is that it is a depiction of bigotry and sectarianism in a semi-rural setting. In the rest of these earlier works, we do not see depictions of religious tension, whether this is in the countryside (*Red is the Port Light*) or in the city (*Lost Fields*) – this is, of course, also true of *The Maiden Dinosaur*.

A key consideration which has emerged in the main study of these works is the choice by authors as to how they depict everyday life in what was pre-Troubles Northern Ireland. It appears that authors writing in the 1960s or before could choose whether or not to feature religious tension in a way which is not possible for authors writing with hindsight. The two authors I have interviewed have divergent views on this: Patterson’s answer to the question: ‘What do you think are the challenges of writing pre-Troubles Northern Ireland free from the influence of the ensuing history?’ is:

It’s impossible. You can’t write anything without the benefit or hindrance of where we are now and where we exist in relation to history.²¹⁰

In contrast, to the same question, Madden answers that:

²¹⁰ Interview with Glenn Patterson, Appendix B, 132 (below).

[It] depends on the angle you wish to take. Are you writing about pre-Troubles to make some point about the Troubles? Or are you just writing a story which happens to be set in Northern Ireland before 1969 but is about something else entirely: a love story, or a murder or the life of a family or whatever? Often one tends to set work in the place where one grew up and which one knows well, and if that was pre 1969 (or indeed post 1969) Northern Ireland might be beside the point if one was really writing about something else.²¹¹

My survey of retrospective literature leads me to agree with Patterson's answer. Madden's view, although not explicitly in disagreement with Patterson's, appears to be a more qualified one, based on the writer's intention and the novel's context. This divergence of views, illustrated by these two answers represents the main dilemma I faced in writing *Turquoise Car*.

The research I have undertaken leads me to believe that writing 1960s (or pre-Troubles) Northern Ireland retrospectively, has been, and will be for some years to come a self-conscious exercise, which is as much (or more) concerned with its own place in relation to the historical record, as it is with lending accuracy and authenticity to this particular place in time. The intrinsic value of retrospective Northern Irish literature in depicting pre-Troubles Northern Ireland is therefore more tied to Patterson's suggestion of providing alternative accounts of history.

What I have said about these novels in the literature review, and in particular the issue of hindsight bias in relation to the Troubles, is valid also for the two novels I have written. I will now therefore turn to consider how the effects of historical processes on fiction influence the writing process itself – briefly in my post-Troubles novel, *Black Dog*, and in more detail in my pre-Troubles novel, *Turquoise Car*.

²¹¹ Interview with Deirdre Madden, Appendix A, 129 (below).

Historical Context and the Creative Process

Black Dog

I wrote the first draft of *Black Dog* between July 2009 and June 2010. It is a modern (2009) depiction of life for a group of twenty-somethings in Belfast. In *Black Dog*, we have the story of the protagonist's (Ben Reilly's) affections for, or obsessions with, his best friend, Jason Black.

A dominant theme in the novel is the tension inherent in the narrator's place in a grouping of a higher social standing than his own. Ben comes from a council estate in Newtownabbey (a suburb in Belfast) whereas the others in the group, including Jason, come from affluent middle-class areas of Belfast.

In writing this contemporary novel, I felt confident in my choice to exclude religion from this novel, and indeed religion is not a major theme in *Black Dog*. The religion of the characters is never stated. I was conscious of making an effort to deny the Troubles any kind of significance. It was, I believe, an accurate description of how some of my generation have come to view Northern Ireland's history.

Yet, this is perhaps not what a reader expects. If there is some truth to what Pelaschiar says that, when a writer is writing about Northern Ireland, that they are '*indirectly, unavoidably expressing a political standpoint*'²¹² then perhaps the exclusion of the Troubles in *Black Dog* makes them notable, or makes my point – that there's more to Northern Ireland than the Troubles – obvious.

It is worth noting here Deirdre Madden's answer to my question about writing pre-Troubles Northern Ireland. Whereas Madden expressed the view that the main themes in the story may take precedence to what we know of history, so that 'Northern

²¹² Pelaschiar, *Writing the North*, 18.

Ireland might be beside the point²¹³, I must admit that I only felt confident to take this view in writing a novel within the timeframe of my own personal experience (*Black Dog*) as opposed to writing an historic novel (*Turquoise Car*).

Because the Troubles are excluded from this novel, *Black Dog* is temporally tied to the Troubles, inasmuch as it would be firmly classified as a post-Troubles story. Now that I look back on the book, I think it has some things in common with *The International* in that it is perhaps too pointed in its avoidance of any mention of religion – that, in effect, it tries to sanitise its portrayal of contemporary Northern Ireland. I wonder now if I might have been naive in excluding any mention of the characters' religions, or in not showing more of the Protestant ethos of Newtownabbey (where Ben grew up), because these things are still a fact of life in Northern Ireland. I find a strong parallel here with Janet McNeill's *The Maiden Dinosaur*, where the concerns of the characters in *Black Dog* are largely existential in nature. Since they have come from stable, affluent backgrounds, it is doubtful that Jason, Richard, Rachel and Clare have had much experience with the Troubles or with sectarianism. I believe that this is a valid portrayal of middle-class life in Northern Ireland. Ben, however, comes from a council estate in greater Belfast, but he only gives us clues as to the sectarian nature of the place where he grew up:

It was quiet there. In the summer you could hear distant bands marching in the long evenings; in the winter it was bleak and miserable. At tea times smoke billowed down from chimneys into the street before gusts of wind swept it away, flags on silver lampposts flapping, the taut string holding them ping-pong rhythmically.²¹⁴

In common with many of the preceding novels mentioned in this study, *Black Dog* is concerned with class. In this case, however, the class portrayal is more representative

²¹³ Interview with Deirdre Madden, Appendix A, 129 (below).

²¹⁴ *Black Dog*, 56.

of modern-day society, in that Ben, although raised in a working-class family, has become decidedly middle class, an opportunity afforded by education. This ability to transcend one's class origins is something which would not have been as possible in the time periods in which the preceding novels are set, if indeed it were possible at all. For comparison, in my second novel (see Women's Rights section), we see Anne's struggle to transcend her working-class background, and Marie's inability, or even lack of desire, to do so. Nevertheless, a source of tension in *Black Dog*, lies in the fact that Ben is painfully self-conscious of the more modest social standing of his upbringing, compared with any of those of his (university) friends.

A significant portion of the book is set in Donegal (in the Irish Republic): Jason's family have a holiday home there – a situation which represents a particular reality among certain affluent Northern Irish people today.

But the political significance of the border doesn't feature: it is accorded the same significance as religion in the book.

The characters in *Black Dog* don't go to church, and a conversation near the beginning shows their religious attitudes:

'I was watching a programme about God last night,' Richard said. 'Very interesting. They had a professor on talking about how science fits in with God.'

'Or how God fits in with science,' Clare said.

'It's all nonsense,' Jason sighed.

'What is?' I asked. 'God or science?'

...

Clare was running her finger around the rim of her wine glass. 'Well I think people place too much emphasis on whether or not there's a God. What about just respecting each other? Respecting the planet?'

'Hear, hear.' Jason raised his glass.²¹⁵

When two of the characters, Richard and Rachel, have a religious conversion later in the book, Ben comments:

²¹⁵ *Black Dog*, 34.

‘I just don’t get the whole Church thing, you know? Just the wee things, you know, the rampant hypocrisy, the continually judging others, the smug superiority, you know, just the wee things like that.’²¹⁶

So religion, whether in relation to matters of faith or to sectarian conflict, doesn’t appear to have any importance for Ben – though the denial seems to be more an active effort than a passive instinct.

I am then faced with the question: Why write a novel about Northern Ireland (or Belfast) which eschews Northern Ireland’s history and even some of its present? I can only conclude that it must be for the same reasons that people base novels in Edinburgh, Manchester or Birmingham: a familiarity with place and a desire to depict that particular space in the writer’s life. I can draw a comparison here with Tomelty’s *Red is the Port Light* and McLaverty’s *Lost Fields* – portrayals of Northern Ireland, which, as previously argued, do not feature any mention of sectarianism or bigotry. And again, Madden’s view that it is possible to set a novel in Northern Ireland, in which ‘Northern Ireland might be beside the point’²¹⁷ has relevance here.

And yet there are a few nods to history in *Black Dog*. For example, the following exchange occurs at one point in the novel, when Ben and Steve are walking around Belfast city centre:

Remember the bomb scares, he [Steve] said, remember how you couldn’t get near the city centre with the checkpoints, remember people wouldn’t come in at night, it’s mad, people are so fucked up.

‘I don’t care,’ I said. ‘I don’t care about most things.’²¹⁸

The dialogue, I think, demonstrates how a younger generation has come to view the actions of the past as irrelevant and incomprehensible. It also shows how this

²¹⁶ *Black Dog*, 239.

²¹⁷ Interview with Deirdre Madden, Appendix A, 129 (below).

²¹⁸ *Black Dog*, 190.

generation may actively deny the Troubles any relevance.

At another point, when Ben is on his own in the city centre, he reflects on a new facet of Belfast – Troubles tourism:²¹⁹

All those times I used to lie on Jason’s lawn in Portnoo, looking at the stars above me. All the times I just lay there pondering all the worlds there could be, thinking how insignificant this one was.

And what about all the tourists here, ever since peace broke out? They stand on top of tour buses in shitty weather, or they take a tour in a black taxi. They go to the parts of the city to see for themselves the legacy of the people here, the ones who never looked at stars, or even if they did, even if they stopped for a moment to briefly acknowledge the beauty above them, said it was only proof of a God who believed in their cause. World famous, these people, the things they did.²²⁰

I intended that this would show Ben’s hostility to history: in this case it was something which was irrelevant to his personal dilemmas (although there is also a reading possible which tells of the commodification of history).

It is this refusal to let history dominate the narrative which gives *Black Dog* more in common with Patterson’s *The International* than I had first realised. Both are trying to disentangle Belfast (and, perhaps, Northern Ireland) from its turbulent history, but from different ends of the *pre-post* Troubles continuum. *The Maiden Dinosaur*, as already mentioned, is also comparable in this respect, although, being written before the Troubles, its author chose to exclude Belfast’s particular history at that point.

I won’t discuss *Black Dog* further in this study, except to acknowledge another – and, as it turned out, important – concept which appeared in the novel. This occurs

²¹⁹ For more on ‘Troubles Tourism’ see:

1. Molly Hurley Dépret, “‘Troubles Tourism’: Debating History and Voyeurism in Belfast, Northern Ireland”, in: *The Business of Tourism: Place, Faith and History*, Philip Scranton and Janet F. Davidson (eds.), University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, 137-162.
2. Maria Teresa Simone-Charteris, Stephen W. Boyd, and Amy Burns, ‘The Contribution of Dark Tourism to Place Identity in Northern Ireland’, in: *Dark Tourism and Place Identity*, Leanne White and Elspeth Frew (eds.), Routledge, 2013, 60–78.

²²⁰ *Black Dog*, 180.

relatively early in the narrative and comes amidst a detailing of Ben's relationship with his mother:

She used to sometimes talk about religion – ‘*the other side*’, ‘*the other lot*’ - and tried impatiently to tell me how it was different back then, how once upon a time everyone got along just fine, and all of a sudden then they didn't. I didn't want to hear it. I would sigh and get up and leave the room. She knew I wouldn't listen.²²¹

It was this concept of ‘how once upon a time everyone got along just fine, and all of a sudden they didn't’²²² which was to lead to my second novel.

Turquoise Car

Unlike Ben in *Black Dog*, I began to experience a deep curiosity as to how society in Northern Ireland could have made the transition from peace to conflict. I had grown up knowing the Troubles as normal, and had never questioned them. During my childhood, the local news carried daily reports of violence. There was never a question in my mind about what had led to the Troubles, only some second-hand (most likely biased), and over-simplified views of what had gone wrong in Northern Ireland. But the idea of Northern Ireland *before* the violence of the Troubles period began to fascinate me, because it was something I hadn't experienced, and the events of 1968-69 were, I decided, worth exploring. I had an idea of writing a short story, based on these events, which could possibly be expanded into something longer.

The seed of the short story was something I'd often heard, but had never paid

²²¹ *Black Dog*, 58.

²²² An analogy can be drawn here with Boccardi's commentary in *The Contemporary British Historical Novel* on the purpose of the historical novel in general, when she says that, ‘its subject is the process that causes the transition from one historical period or coherent set of beliefs to another and marks the connection between them.’ See: Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel*, 11.

attention to: my mother's experience of living in 'the wrong place at the wrong time', and how she'd had to flee her home in Belfast in 1969. My mother had a car at this time, a turquoise Austin A60, and I thought that it symbolised something – despite the niggling suspicion I had that a car like this was almost a cliché of the 1960s. Perhaps the car symbolises a splash of Hollywood style in Belfast's drab streets. There's something undoubtedly feminine about it. Perhaps it's a symbol of decadence in what was a working-class world. Or maybe it represents the success of a young, independent woman in what was undeniably a male-dominated society: she might be paying the car off on Hire Purchase, but it's her name on the tax book. But, I suppose, the car symbolises for me the dreams of this young woman, and how, for a brief period in the late 1960s, it seemed to her that everything was possible.

When I embarked on *Turquoise Car* (even when it was a short story), I immediately realised that historical hindsight, which the narrator of *Black Dog* was able breezily to eschew, had a particular gravity. Researching historical commentary as well as factual accounts, for example Sabine Wichert's *Northern Ireland since 1945*,²²³ and Deutsch and Magowan's *Chronology of Events*, Bew and Gillespie's *Northern Ireland, A Chronology of the Troubles* as well as the government-commissioned Cameron Report and Scarman Report provided valuable historical context for my creative endeavours.²²⁴

²²³ Sabine Wichert, *Northern Ireland Since 1945*, Longman, London, 1991.

²²⁴ Richard Deutsch and Vivien Magowan, *Northern Ireland 1968-1973 Chronology of Events Volume I 1968-1971*, The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1973.

Paul Bew and Gordon Gillespie, *Northern Ireland, A Chronology of the Troubles*, Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1999.

Disturbances in Northern Ireland: Report of the Commission Appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland, [Cameron Report], (Cmnd. 532), (12 September 1969), Belfast: HMSO.

Violence and Civil Disturbances in Northern Ireland in 1969, [Scarman Report], (Cmnd. 566), (6 April 1972), Belfast: HMSO.

Arming myself with historical facts solved only part of the creative dilemma. Of course, I knew it would be possible to have characters react to (significant historical) events as they took place throughout the narrative; however, a certain amount of information is required to frame the events as they occur. To talk about Northern Ireland in 1968 or 69, it is necessary to frame the narrative with some political context – and yet I wanted my characters to have only a limited interest in local politics and current affairs. *Turquoise Car* was intended to be the story of how the outbreak of civil unrest affected *ordinary* people; it was not going to feature characters who went off to join the Civil Rights movement, or who would attend Unionist rallies.

Thus, *Turquoise Car* became the story of Anne McKee, a twenty-eight-year-old widow who owns a boarding house on Belfast's Crumlin Road. Her two main lodgers, Michael and Tony, come from a small village in rural Northern Ireland, and they work in the city – Michael as a trainee engineer in a textile factory, and Tony as an apprentice electrician. Anne's best friend, Marie, still lives in Ardoyne with her mother, Bridie, in a two-up, two-down terrace house near where Anne grew up. At the start of the novel, an equilibrium, of sorts, is established: Anne finds that her business, the boarding house, is running well, and that, together with the waitressing work she does in the Midland Hotel, she can live comfortably. When she meets a handsome, charming, older man, Carey, she is aware that she faces the choice of disrupting the easy contentment that she now feels with her life. As the story progresses, Anne's relationship with Carey disrupts the harmony in the boarding house, and all the while signs of what we have come to know as the Troubles are beginning to appear in the streets around where she lives, until ultimately, she is forced to leave the house and face the dilemma of going back to Ardoyne (her working-class roots) or to Carey, where she could have the middle-class existence she has always wanted, but in return for sacrificing her independence.

The plot may be one thing, but of course, the technical aspects of writing historical fiction such as this – the things which require research and long hours in the library – are to make sure that elements of place and time, in this case, of Belfast in 1968-69 are accurate. I will therefore examine *Turquoise Car* and in doing so make reference to some of the previous works of Northern Irish literature featured in this study.

Firstly, I will examine the significance of the setting in the plot of the novel and its relationship to the characters' motivations. I will then examine social issues and attitudes present in Belfast and Northern Ireland in the late 1960s. Because *Turquoise Car* is the story of a woman's struggle in the 1960s, my primary focus will be on women's rights in Northern Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s. Gay rights will also be examined in detail, since they relate to Tony's story, and because the history of gay rights in Northern Ireland presents some interesting parallels and contrasts to women's rights in the period in question.

Setting

Although I had a very specific location in mind for *Turquoise Car* (based on real-life events), I chose to fictionalise the location of the boarding house to a degree: I changed the name of the street next to the boarding house to Hope Street (Belfast's actual Hope Street is off Sandy Row, nearer the city centre). The location of some streets cited in the historical record had to be researched since they no longer exist: the landscape of the Crumlin Road has changed drastically since 1969. What will become the main flashpoint in the novel is mentioned in the very first chapter – where Hooker Street and Disraeli Street face each other across the Crumlin Road. Today, Hooker Street is gone, while Disraeli Street exists on the other side of a high brick wall, sealed off from the

main road.

The idea of place and of dividing-lines on the landscape – both urban and rural – is key to the novel. It is something which is highlighted right at the start of the book as Anne walks home along the Crumlin Road, noting Catholic and Protestant streets. In the second chapter, Michael remembers when he first became aware that the border with the Republic abutted the farm.

In *Turquoise Car* we see a particular episode in the ebb and flow of Belfast's religious spatial polarization – a redrawing of population borders – when 'Ethnic exclusivity in housing and work was periodically reinforced.'²²⁵ The Crumlin Road itself (and the boarding house) appear paradoxically, on reflection, to be constant points of reference, even though they are locations in flux, at the centre of turmoil: Anne's house is the one constant location throughout the course of the novel, and her particular story ends when she leaves it; a parallel might be drawn here with another book by Glenn Patterson, *Number 5*, in which the house of the title bears witness to a succession of inhabitants, albeit over the course of a much longer period (from the 1950s to 2000s) of Belfast's history.²²⁶

Edna Longley in *The Writer in Belfast* says that Belfast: 'confronts the writer with a spiritual, political and social complexity that is capable of testing the imagination to the limits.'²²⁷ Aretxega notes that: 'Belfast is a city whose conflicted history is inscribed in its physical layout, its internal distribution, its landscape, the names of its streets, and the image stamped on its facades.'²²⁸

²²⁵ Bryan, Dominic, 'Belfast: Urban Space, "Policing" and Sectarian Polarization', 254.

²²⁶ Glenn Patterson, *Number 5*, Hamish Hamilton, 2003.

²²⁷ Edna Longley, 'The Writer and Belfast', in *The Irish Writer and the City*, Harmon, Maurice (ed.), Colin Smythe, Gerrards Cross, 1984, 69.

²²⁸ Aretxega, *Shattering Silence*, 27.

Much of this is applicable to Northern Ireland as a whole, though Belfast condenses the essence of the country's ethos, tensions and problems. When we write from a historical viewpoint, Belfast presents greater opportunities than other places in Northern Ireland, because of the ready availability of information on historical events. The Troubles may have started in Derry, or even in Dungiven, or Dungannon, but it was when they spread to Belfast that the greatest rupture in the fabric of society took place. Here was a city: 'that for a very long time retained at its core Protestant and Presbyterian identities which were alien to the Catholic minority coming from the surrounding countryside. Belfast was not just an urban centre for the latter group, but also a Protestant stronghold.'²²⁹

Pelaschiar continues:

Consequently, Belfast is perceived and represented in very different ways by its Catholic and Protestant inhabitants. Protestants consider it as their own creation, both in what is good and in what is bad about it; the tie they have to it is often tinged with pride in the achievements of its founding fathers, who are their ancestors, men who 'invented' and created the city through hard work, labour, patience and endurance, reclaiming land from the sea and from the bog, building industries and shipyards, creating civilization and progress where there was nothing but unproductive land. The relationship that Catholics have with Belfast, on the other hand is complicated by these very origins, by the Protestant ethos that generated it and which made it for a long time Ireland's only major industrial centre, a world from which they were long excluded.²³⁰

In other words, the attitudes which Belfast's inhabitants have to the city they live in are informed by their religion. The Protestant attitude to Belfast is one of pride in effort (particularly of forefathers) and a sense of achievement in making the city an important and successful British industrial centre. The Catholic attitude to the city, on

²²⁹ Laura Pelaschiar, 'Transforming Belfast: The Evolving Role of the City in Northern Irish Fiction', in 'The City in Northern Irish Fiction', *Irish University Review*, Spring 2000, 117.

²³⁰ Pelaschiar, 'Transforming Belfast', 118.

the other hand, is tainted by a feeling of exclusion from the very industry which the Protestants are so proud of.

Belfast therefore presents a potentially rich setting in which to place a novel, if we are in the business of portraying and examining the sectarian aspects of the city. In this respect, from the point of view of writing a novel with hindsight, it is hard, perhaps impossible, to dissociate Belfast from history, since its history is particularly eventful. We have previously seen how Patterson's novel *International* attempted this - and it is interesting to note in this instance how art in effect becomes, alongside the two political movements here, a third agent staking its claim on the city's streets.

Of course, Belfast is the most featured location in *Turquoise Car*. From Anne's home on the Crumlin Road, to Ardoyne, with its cramped streets, to Carey's house in affluent Ben Madigan with its high views over the city below. Near the end of the first part of the book, Anne, Tony and Michael go to the hills above Belfast, where they stand looking at the city below them; I suppose I was thinking of the characters taking in a last view of the city before everything was to change (they go back to the house where they see on TV the civil rights protest being forcibly broken up by the police – arguably, the start of the Troubles). Whatever the reason, *Turquoise Car* would seem to be in good company. As Glenn Patterson says:

Maybe it's because we're hemmed in by hills, or maybe it's just that we're never done trying to get the measure of ourselves, but it's remarkable how many Belfast novels include a view across the city.²³¹

This point is also picked up by Eamonn Hughes, in his essay 'Town of Shadows: Representations of Belfast in Recent Fiction'. He says that, 'Recent Belfast fiction has a

²³¹ Glen Patterson, 'Glenn Patterson's top 10 Belfast books', *The Guardian*, Wednesday 28 March 2012.

tendency to include at key moments panoramas of the city.’²³²

We come to see how place is crucial to the characters in *Turquoise Car*. Anne, in Chapter 1, ‘wondered if it was such a good idea living so close to home, to memories.’ She appears so thankful to have left Ardoyne because it means that she has escaped the working-class poverty of her parents’ existence, but she worries increasingly that she has bought a house in the wrong place.

On the other hand, Marie, who has never had any ambitions and has had to get married because she is pregnant, finds herself living in the next street to the one she grew up in, having never tried to escape Ardoyne. However, she does reflect, towards the end of the novel, upon the increasing trouble in Ardoyne, and what she will do if things get too bad:

Marie put a hand to her stomach. I would never, she thought, *never* allow a son of mine to get mixed up in anything like that. If it was me, she thought, then God help anyone who ever called to *my* door. I’d sooner move, and I wouldn’t care. If things get bad, I’ll move out of this place, out of Ardoyne or even out of Belfast.²³³

We have Michael, who is sent away from the farming countryside he loves, and tries to make his way in the city, before finally admitting to himself that he can’t.

Belfast wasn’t for him – he wasn’t a city boy. He’d never thought that you could feel so alone with so many thousands of people around you.²³⁴

Tony, on the other hand, views the country town (Riverfort) he has grown up in as backward and stagnant:

And now the town was just a gathering of shops and houses in the middle of fields, the mill silent and its green choked mill race. A pond with no purpose but for watching ducks go by and a sluice that a ghost wouldn’t haunt, that the Devil wouldn’t piss

²³² Hughes, ‘Town of Shadows’, 144.

²³³ *Turquoise Car*, 315.

²³⁴ *Turquoise Car*, 191.

in.²³⁵

Tony left the country as soon as he was able and each time he returns feels emotionally torn between the love he feels for the people there and his feeling of being a stranger. In the end, Tony leaves Belfast; feeling no affiliation with the place, and not willing to return home to Riverfort, he travels further – to London – in search of happiness and freedom.

Carey, we see, lives in an expensive suburb in Belfast, though goes to work on the Boucher Road – a premises enclosed by barbed wire and high walls, which is meant here to signify the position of the privileged Protestant middle classes in Northern Ireland: ‘You’d have thought they were operating in hostile territory and needed to defend themselves.’²³⁶ Carey goes to stay at an old farmhouse in Donegal over the Twelfth of July holidays. While there, he reflects on how his ex-wife’s family regarded him (coming from Northern Ireland) as practically a foreigner. He has ambivalent feelings about this cross-border getaway, and yet he appreciates the anonymity it allows him.

Every one of the characters is therefore struggling with *place*, whether this relates to a facet of their sense of identity (geographic place in the past), or whether it relates to where they now find themselves and how this is affecting their lives (geographic place in the present). It is suggestive of the wider territorial tensions in Northern Ireland or perhaps telling of my own sense of these. Since place – our sense of belonging somewhere – is commonly fundamental to identity, we could say that the characters in *Turquoise Car* represent different aspects of a society, whose constituents (according to class, sex, sexuality and above all nationality and religion) are in a state of flux. They all

²³⁵ *Turquoise Car*, 113.

²³⁶ *Turquoise Car*, 249.

at some stage find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Another place-related theme which the novel has in common with some of the works previously discussed is that of the urban versus the rural. We see this in Tony's and Michael's stories, with both leaving their rural hometown, but only one returning. Thus, *Turquoise Car* has this theme in common with other Northern Irish works of fiction such as in the novels of Michael McLaverty and Deirdre Madden.

I see *Turquoise Car* ultimately as treating place as a key element of plot: it is there in the characters' wishes about where they would like to be, or where they have escaped from; and it is the story of dividing lines across landscapes and streets, of how they may be moved and re-drawn, or guarded; of interfaces where tension erupts, and of what happens to people when they find themselves caught on the wrong side.

Time

The timeline of *Turquoise Car* is, in general, linear; there is no fracturing of the narrative occurring by temporal shifts as was the case in Madden's *One by One*, and there is no present-day (post-Troubles) final narration as in *International*. A linear timeline in a work of historical fiction such as this (where we are aware of the ensuing history) lends a sense of inevitability, as we observe the characters play out the everyday details of their lives against an ever darkening backdrop. The backdrop changes largely because of external events, changing the place the characters inhabit. The stage encroaches upon the action being played out on it. In this case, the everyday practices of life become more and more affected until the point at which societal breakdown occurs.

A key part of what I believed important to make *Turquoise Car* feel authentic, was to depict details of everyday life, attitudes and behaviours as being 'of their time'.

Naturally, there is a burden of history, as I have previously discussed, which could interfere with how I chose to represent things.

I will examine the timeframe of the novel by looking at the major social conventions and attitudes which I found (through research) to be prevalent at the time. Some of these – such as women’s rights and gay rights will have been common to other parts of the UK or even further afield. Some of these have a very particular Northern Irish slant, such as the interactions between the two religions. But the proper context for any of these things is against a backdrop of what was happening politically in Northern Ireland at the time. A necessity to represent the political backdrop which would lead to the Troubles became apparent to me and I was faced with a dilemma – how to give the reader enough background information in an accessible way, without lecturing to them, and while still keeping the overall tone light?

Enter Bridie.

I always pictured a character like Bridie as being central to *Turquoise Car* – she was the first character I imagined inhabiting Anne’s world. Bridie is strong, unafraid to speak her mind (often swearing as she does so), and to me, epitomises a certain kind of working-class spirit – the tough, outspoken matriarch. That Bridie is also intelligent and politically aware made sense to me, and so it appeared that Bridie could have a choric function in the narrative. Bridie would tell it like it is.

Political narrative: Bridie

‘Now.’ Bridie shifted in her seat, as if to make more room for Anne. She held up the folded newspaper she’d been reading, on the front page of which Anne could see half of Northern Ireland’s Prime Minister’s face, the end of his nose covered by Bridie’s thumb.

‘He’s a great man,’ Bridie said, ‘that Terence O’Neill. Isn’t he awful charismatic?’ Bridie’s big chest was rising and falling

substantially, as she gazed dreamily past Anne at the fireplace.

Anne had never been interested in politics or religion, though it was a topic which was hard to avoid in this house. Bridie had mentioned before to Anne about where Anne's house was on the Crumlin Road, and how Anne must have been the only Catholic for half a mile in any direction. And this had made Anne bristle. She'd found herself being short with Bridie, and even after she'd left to go home and for days afterwards, feeling annoyed with her.

Perhaps, Anne had thought later, it was because she knew that it was most likely true. But still: it didn't matter to her. Things like that mattered to Bridie, who, Anne noticed, kept herself alarmingly well informed about political developments in Northern Ireland. Often, when Anne would call to their house, she'd come upon Bridie sitting with her big glasses on, the *Tele* crumpled awkwardly before her. It gave Anne the impression of stumbling upon a large and ferocious librarian, and one with a particularly foul mouth.²³⁷

This early scene is important because it establishes the expositional function of Bridie Leonard – Anne's friend, Marie's mother. Anne thinking that '... [politics] was a topic which was hard to avoid in this house...', is prescient of a tension which will develop between the two women: Anne's unwillingness to accept the realities of the current crises, and Bridie's insistence that she should.

One of my aims in writing *Turquoise Car* is to show how the outbreak of the Troubles might affect a group of people who are not particularly interested in politics, and whose knowledge of which would come mostly from the media. Certainly, this is my own experience of politics in Northern Ireland, and I believe that this is representative of a larger cross section of the community. *Turquoise Car* is intended to show how *ordinary* people react and cope with events which in hindsight are viewed as historic and pivotal. None of the characters in *Turquoise Car* become actively involved in political events; none of them attends political rallies or takes part in street riots. Arguably, the only overt victim of the conflict is Anne, who is forced to leave her home.

²³⁷ *Turquoise Car*, 10.

But the political context is obviously important for *Turquoise Car*, and Bridie provides some insight into what is happening. Bridie also provides a comic turn, a part of her character I feel is as important as her intelligence and insight. We see this in her very first scene, when her daughter, Marie, brings cups of tea in to her mother and Anne:

Bridie took a sip out of hers and immediately screwed her face up. ‘Jesus!’ she said. ‘Did you not make a fresh pot?’

Marie shook her head.

‘*Fuck!* It’s like stew. Why don’t ye slice up a wee onion for it?’

Anne couldn’t help smiling, as Marie left them to go into the kitchen to get her own cup. God, but Bridie could curse - Anne could almost picture the big woman sitting here on her own, practising. Then she thought for a moment about all the women in the street assembled in a row of seats at some swearing competition, taking turns to get up at a podium and say ‘fuck’. Marks for forcing the ‘f’ and crunching the ‘k’. An awed silence settling over the room as Bridie’s turn came, when she’d show everyone how it was done.

Bridie’s voice cut through Anne’s daydream: ‘What’s so funny?’

‘What? Nothing.’²³⁸

As the narrative progresses, Anne’s visits to Bridie will tell Anne (and the reader) what is currently happening in Northern Ireland, from the campaign of support for the Prime Minister, Terence O’Neill, following his famous televised ‘Ulster stands at the crossroads’ appeal to the people of Northern Ireland – ‘He’s bloody right we’re at a fuckin crossroads... and the crossroads was built when they divid this island in two!’²³⁹ – to the Civil Rights march from Belfast to Derry in January 1969 – ‘Quare weather for the civil rights to be out marchin and here’s you runnin round in your figure like Susie in the summertime.’²⁴⁰

²³⁸ *Turquoise Car*, 11.

²³⁹ *Turquoise Car*, 97.

²⁴⁰ *Turquoise Car*, 134.

I am unsure where Bridie stands on the *show-tell* continuum. Certainly, she is telling us about events which are happening, but this is not inconsistent with how I believe her character would and should behave.

David Lodge, in *The Art of Fiction*, says that, ‘The purest form of showing is the quoted speech of characters, in which language exactly mirrors the event... whereas the purest form of telling is authorial summary, which can accelerate the tempo of a narrative, hurrying us through events which would be uninteresting or *too* interesting’.²⁴¹ In Bridie’s case, her dialogue is often not ‘showing’ what is happening within scenes, but it is focused on what is happening outside scenes (i.e. in Northern Ireland politics). I did not intend *Turquoise Car* to be a detailed examination of political events in Northern Ireland from 1968-69, but rather, how these events affected ordinary people. I did not want Bridie’s ‘telling’ to be ‘hurrying us through events’ which Lodge refers to, but rather, fulfilling an original aim of writing the novel, which was not to create a detailed examination of Northern Ireland during 1968-69, but to look at how these events affected ordinary people. Bridie’s dialogue has an expository function, which, I hope, is in keeping with her character’s interest in politics.

We come to see the beginnings of Bridie’s involvement in community activism, when she has other Ardoyne women round to her house, in order to discuss and organise a response to the escalating security situation.²⁴² As Theresa O’Keefe has pointed out in relation to Northern Ireland community activism such as this: ‘For many women, this was their first experience as political activists engaging in roles outside the home and the workforce.’²⁴³ This engagement of women in activism and its relation to the

²⁴¹ Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*, 122.

²⁴² *Turquoise Car*, 312-315.

²⁴³ Theresa O’Keefe, *Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 121.

feminist movement is discussed in the Women's Rights section of this study. Bridie's role here is in contrast to the traditional 'Mother Ireland' depiction of Irish women as primarily mothers and wives whose only response to conflict was a passive, supportive one (highlighted earlier in the discussion of *One by One in the Darkness* – pp.47-48).

Bridie, as Anne reflects at one point, is an intelligent woman, who has an active mind and keeps herself well informed. At times, Bridie can be eloquent. I feel that there is no doubt that in a different era and a different society, and given educational chances, Bridie could have been a successful businesswoman, or politician – as she at one point proclaims: 'I should have been a politician. There'd be no ould back doors with Bridie Leonard.... I coulda done things right. There'd be no ould back doors with me, now. What you see's what you get with Bridie Leonard as true as God.'²⁴⁴

Given this, it is not hard to imagine that Bridie's life is boring and uneventful – and that she has no outlet for her intelligence and passion. This is why Bridie, at times, appears to enjoy the trouble which is erupting around them. The issue of gender could be important here: in discussing *One by One in the Darkness* (Madden), I mentioned an opinion of Valerie Morgan's that the experience of women in Northern Ireland's conflict was primarily as passive victims (i.e. not directly involved in violence).²⁴⁵ However, Morgan also warns against any blanket-categorisation of women in Northern Ireland as being opposed to physical violence in pursuit of political gain. I believe that Bridie represents one of these exceptions – I have no trouble in picturing Bridie becoming actively involved in (or more likely even organising) one of the so-called 'hen patrols', in which nationalist women established a system of surveillance against the British

²⁴⁴ *Turquoise Car*, 171.

²⁴⁵ Valerie Morgan, 'Peacemakers? Peacekeepers? Women in Northern Ireland 1969-1995'.

army who were patrolling the streets at nights or raising alarms by banging bin lids.²⁴⁶ Her daughter, Marie, as we see later in the story, is the opposite (thinking that she will move herself and her child out of Ardoyne or even Belfast, if the trouble worsens significantly). Bridie and Marie thus demonstrate the two facets of nationalist women's roles in relation to the conflict (passive versus active), as was seen during the earlier discussion of *One by One in the Darkness*.

In any case, as far as political narrative goes, I hope that Bridie's insight and outspokenness provide a good balance to Anne's denial of what is going on around them. Bridie has no qualms about pointing out the truths of the times they find themselves living in, despite Anne's efforts to ignore it all.

Subtle codes: Michael and Tony

Michael Henderson and Tony McAvoy are two young men (eighteen and twenty years old respectively) who come from the same small village, Riverfort, in County Tyrone. Aside from the differences in their personalities (with, for example, Michael being quieter and more gauche than Tony), Michael is a Protestant and Tony is a Roman Catholic. The interplay between Michael and Tony with respect to their religions is probably the thing I found most difficult in writing *Turquoise Car*.

In the beginning, Tony is attracted to Michael, and hopes that the feelings might be reciprocated. He mistakes Michael's quietness and reluctance to talk about girls as indicative of a sexual preference. However, as Tony comes to realise that Michael doesn't have feelings for him, what we are left with is the sometimes uncomfortable relationship between two young men, from the same village, who don't have much in

²⁴⁶ Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*, 67.

Lynda Edgerton, 'Public Protest, Domestic Acquiescence: Women in Northern Ireland', in: *Caught Up in Conflict: Women's Responses to Political Strife*, Macmillan, 1986, 65.

common. There may be an expectation then, that since they are both working class, and from different religious backgrounds, that there should be a degree of sectarian conflict between them.

In writing any kind of fiction, we are often told that tension is the key, and so any opportunity to introduce or explore tension should be taken. However, in this case, I had to balance what I felt was the reader's expectations with what I felt would be more realistic: this 'realism' is based both on my own experience, and from talking to people of my parents' generation who were in their teens and twenties during the 1960s.

I would refer at this point to a previous reference to Boyce, who talked about particular 'patterns of behaviour' and 'the subtle nature of codes of Northern Irish behaviour',²⁴⁷ in attempting to describe how a large number of people in Northern Irish society were privately able to hold beliefs (extending even to bigotry), yet outwardly show no antagonism towards their neighbours or colleagues of a different religious persuasion.

With Anne, and certain other Catholic characters in the book (Tony, Marie), I tried to recreate something which I felt for them was authentic: a mild bigotry towards Protestants, based on simple views (the bald facts of discrimination) leading to a stoic resentment.

At one point in *Turquoise Car*, Michael (who is Protestant) and Tony (who is Catholic) reflect – privately – on what they have just seen on a TV news report - the violent dispersal of a Civil Rights march:

Michael (on Catholics):

They thought of themselves as Irish – even though Northern Ireland wasn't part of Ireland - though they were quick enough to take the Queen's money. People said that they had so many children because their priests and bishops told them to. When there was enough of them, they'd be able to take over – that was

²⁴⁷ Boyce, 'Northern Ireland: a place apart?', 16.

the plan.

Tony (on Protestants):

It was about keeping your head down when they marched on the Twelfth, for it was their way of showing who owned the place, who ran it. They'd never let you forget it.²⁴⁸

I had felt that in this part of the story it was important to demonstrate to the reader just what the differences were between the two communities, what it was that made people the 'strangers' that Boyce refers to in the quotation above.

I decided to 'tell' as opposed to 'show' because I felt that there was only so much of Boyce's 'subtle nature of the codes of Northern Irish social behaviour' which could be shown, without stating to the reader the reason for these codes.

That the characters in this scene, Michael (Protestant) and Tony (Catholic) did not discuss what they had seen, I felt was correct. There is a silent bitterness which each of the two feels; furthermore, the (bigoted) views of each are taken for granted by the other, and so there is no need to, or no point in discussing the issue.

I feel that this account from Susan McKay's *Northern Protestants* helps to illustrate the kind of mindsets I was trying to portray:

A friend of mine went to Burntollet civil rights march in 1969. She was a student, from Dungiven, not far from Burntollet. When the march was ambushed at the bridge she ran into the river. She saw a man she knew, a neighbour, lashing into another student with a nail-studded stick. A couple of weeks later she was hitching home from college in Belfast. Her neighbour pulled up in his van, as friendly as could be, and he brought her to her door, where she thanked him. Burntollet was not mentioned – nor would it have been even if neither of them had been there. Good neighbourliness in the North depends largely on a taboo on speaking of politics in 'mixed company'.²⁴⁹

It's possible that, given different characters living in the same boarding house,

²⁴⁸ *Turquoise Car*, 151.

²⁴⁹ Susan McKay, *Northern Protestants - An Unsettled People*, The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 2005, 361.

conflict might have erupted; however, this is not in keeping with Michael and Tony – who are, after all, two young men who are not particularly sure of themselves. They both have larger issues in their lives to try to resolve: Michael’s family difficulties, his craving for respect and his unrequited love for Anne; and Tony’s difficulties with his sexuality.

If there were two different characters living in Anne’s boarding house who were, say, less self-aware and self-conscious, and who were more reckless (perhaps especially with alcohol) then it is possible that direct conflict might have resulted.

But I hope that in not taking the obvious, easier option – in not having Michael and Tony fight about religion for the sake of drama – I have in some way remained authentic, and remained free of the pull of Northern Ireland’s ensuing history, just as these two characters were.

Civil rights and civil wrongs: Tony

The high-profile arrest in 1953 of John Gielgud for sexual importuning in public toilets, along with a series of other similarly famous cases, led to the convening of a session of the English Parliament in 1954 ‘to discuss the “problem” of homosexuality in England. This topic would evolve into what came to be known as The Wolfenden Report, which was published in 1957.²⁵⁰ The recommendations of the report would eventually see the introduction of the Sexual Offences Act 1967, although this applied to England and Wales only, as is discussed below. In 1968-69, homosexuality was still illegal in Northern Ireland and this was something which was a particular problem for one of the main characters in *Turquoise Car* – Tony.

The first time I put Tony’s name on the page I knew he was gay; it was as simple

²⁵⁰ Jamie M. Carr, *Queer Times: Christopher Isherwood’s Modernity*, Taylor and Francis/Routledge, London, 2006, 97.

as that. It has more to do with my interest in portraying gay characters than it does with placing a gay character in the narrative for the purposes of drawing parallels between the civil rights movement of the late 1960s and the synchronistic gay rights movement in the UK and USA.

Nevertheless, as I wrote the novel, these parallels became apparent to me.

When Tony thinks about the resentment he feels at the political situation in Northern Ireland, we are sometimes able to think that he is expressing something in relation to how he feels at being ‘different’ because of his sexuality.

He couldn’t help but identify himself with the people fleeing and being charged by the police and hit with batons. It was what happened when you stood up for yourself and proclaimed that you were proud of who you were, when you were supposed to know your place.²⁵¹

We see that Tony is a closeted homosexual who meets strangers in public toilets for sex. I considered that this behaviour would have been plausible for the time and setting (accounts from the 1970s, at least, still point to closeted lifestyles, psychological intervention therapies etc²⁵²). At one point, Tony is stopped by the police as he is coming out of Botanic Gardens one evening, and having asked his name (which is obviously a Catholic name),

The policeman laughed and then continued, his voice now with a menacing edge. ‘What would take *your sort* down here on your own this late at night, Tony?’²⁵³

Having evaded arrest by running away, Tony takes a moment to think about the situation he has just faced:

And he thought now about the words the policeman had used:

²⁵¹ *Turquoise Car*, 151.

²⁵² Paul Burston, *Queen’s Country: A Tour around the Gay Ghettos, Queer Spots and Camp Sights of Britain*, Chapter Six: ‘Sex, Lies, Religion: Belfast’, Abacus, London, 1999.

²⁵³ *Turquoise Car*, 187.

did they mean something obvious or something more ominous?
*Your sort.*²⁵⁴

Tony therefore makes the connection between being addressed pejoratively as belonging to one of either or both minority groups – Catholic and homosexual.

The Stonewall riots, a series of violent confrontations between police and members of the homosexual/transgender community in New York took place in June, 1969, placing them within the timeframe of *Turquoise Car*. I searched the *Belfast Telegraph* archives for any reference to this story and could not find any evidence.

Details of the simultaneous gay rights / civil rights issues from this period are found in an account from a republican paramilitary, Brendí McClenaghan:

While quite a few well-aimed sticks, stones and high heels were being thrown in the direction of police from the Stonewall bar in June 1969, I, like many from my home area (Ardoyne, in the city of Belfast), was witnessing similar scenes... At that time I wasn't aware of the Stonewall riots, nor for that matter of my own sexuality.²⁵⁵

Jeff Dudgeon,²⁵⁶ in his essay 'Mapping 100 Years of Belfast Gay Life' notes that there were gay cruising areas in Belfast in the early twentieth century (including public parks and toilets – details of these obtained from Roger Casement's diaries from 1903-1911). Dudgeon states that from this period up until the Second World War, there were recognised 'haunts' such as the GNR station at Great Victoria Street, as well as Dubarry's bar in Belfast's docks area. Dudgeon's essay also cites the first gay bar as being in Rosemary Street of the city centre, 'as portrayed in Maurice Leitch's fine 1965 novel *The Liberty Lad* (probably the earliest description of a gay bar in Irish

²⁵⁴ *Turquoise Car*, 189.

²⁵⁵ Brendí McClenaghan, 'Letter from a Gay Republican: H-Block 5', in: *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland*, Idé O'Carroll and Eoin Collins (eds.) Cassell, London, 1995, 122-130.

²⁵⁶ Jeff (or Jeffrey) Dudgeon MBE is a Northern Ireland gay rights campaigner, whose case, *Dudgeon v the United Kingdom* is mentioned below.

literature).²⁵⁷

Dudgeon gives an account of how limited gay life in Belfast was in the 1960s:

In Belfast, in the mid-1960s... I was living in a small city of half a million with a single gay bar, which shut down at 10 p.m. It had a clientele of perhaps fifty gay men – and two lesbians.²⁵⁸

A pamphlet published in 1974 (and therefore five years after the events depicted in *Turquoise Car*) by the Belfast Gay Liberation Society (GLS), illustrates the discrimination faced by gay people in Northern Ireland: ‘If someone becomes known as homosexual he may loose [sic] his job... or face eviction from a landlord.’²⁵⁹ The pamphlet also sets out the perceived attitude at that time of two of the main churches’ stances adopted in dealing with homosexuality in Northern Ireland: ‘The Roman Catholic Church is the most medieval in Europe’ and, ‘The approach of the Free Presbyterian Church is spiritual support and treatment as for alcoholism.’ It also states that ‘Many gays are married, many have understanding wives’²⁶⁰ which tells us how some gay men in Northern Ireland may have coped with their sexuality, while still outwardly conforming to social norms. The pamphlet contains, finally, a Press Notice in relation to a letter which GLS sent to the 77 members of Northern Ireland’s Legislative Assembly, to which 63 did not respond. Of the 14 who did, seven provided only an acknowledgement, and only three wrote back in sympathetic, supportive terms. One member of the Loyalist coalition even went as far as to say that the criminalisation of homosexuality was one of the ‘very few subjects on which I agree with the Eire

²⁵⁷ Jeff Dudgeon, ‘Mapping 100 Years Of Belfast Gay Life’, *The Vacuum*, Issue 11: ‘Underground’. <http://www.thevacuum.org.uk/issues/issues0120/issue11/is11arthunyea.html> retrieved 9th Jan 2014.

²⁵⁸ Jeffrey Dudgeon, ‘Friends: When Are They Necessary?’ in: *On the Meaning of Friendship Between Gay Men*, Andrew R. Gottlieb (ed.), Routledge, London, 2008, 138-139.

²⁵⁹ Peter Hughes, ‘The Aims of the Gay Liberation Society’, in: *Gay Forum: Seven Essays on Homosexuality*, Gay Liberation Society, Belfast, 1974, 4-5.

²⁶⁰ Fitzwilliam Chambers, ‘Gays and Immortality’, in: *Gay Forum: Seven Essays*, 12.

system.’ It is also noted that only two Ministers from the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) responded, neither in supportive terms, and that none of the party’s backbenchers had, despite ‘the SDLP’s avowed commitment to civil rights and to reform.’²⁶¹ By 1977, one member of the SDLP’s Executive had accepted that gay rights shared the same validity as human rights.²⁶² This Press Release gives us an insight into the political attitudes toward gay rights in Northern Ireland in the 1970s, which was, in general, one of refusal to acknowledge that the situation needed to change.

A pamphlet published by the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association in 1981 aims to inform gay men of their legal position in relation to homosexual offences, and sets out the maximum penalties associated with proscribed activities.²⁶³ The Cara Friend Group – a telephone helpline service for gay men and lesbians – was established in 1974 and was faced with ‘direct refusals’ from Northern Irish newspapers to accept its advertisements. Nevertheless, approximately 800 people were using the service each year in the 1970s. A quarter of these were married or had been married, and 90% of callers were male.²⁶⁴

The Sexual Offences Act 1967, which decriminalised homosexual practices between consenting adults in private, applied only to England and Wales. It wouldn’t be until 1981, that the European Court of Human Rights would rule in the case *Dudgeon v the United Kingdom*, that the continued criminalisation of such practices, as above, in Northern Ireland, was a breach of Article 8 of the European Convention of

²⁶¹ ‘PRESS NOTICE’ in: *Gay Forum: Seven Essays*, 16.

²⁶² Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, Profile Books, 2009, 478.

²⁶³ G. Burns, ‘The Law and Gays in N.I.’, Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association, Gay Star Pamphlet No. 1., 1981.

²⁶⁴ Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, 476.

Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.²⁶⁵ This ruling was to lead to the Homosexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order coming into force. It is worth noting, however, that the European Commission of Human Rights (1954-1988) was in previous times (1950s) noted for having a ‘negative, almost hostile, attitude toward homosexuality’.²⁶⁶

It is difficult to say whether Northern Ireland in 1968-69 was what we would now call ‘homophobic’: it wouldn’t be until the early 1970s that the term ‘homophobia’ was coined.²⁶⁷ We can reasonably say that homosexuality was seen as an affront to (Northern) Irish society, given prevailing attitudes present today, as well as from pieces of historical evidence. The ‘Dublin Castle Scandal’ of 1884 had the homosexuality of British officials held up as an example of British immorality by Irish Nationalists (a poisonous colonial behaviour),²⁶⁸ while the alleged homosexual proclivities of Irish Nationalist Roger Casement (as evidenced by the infamous ‘Black Diaries’) were used by the British as a damning indictment of character at his trial on treason charges.²⁶⁹ In Northern Ireland, both religious affiliations would have seen homosexuality as a danger to moral and family values.

Although homophobia would have been present beforehand, it would have become more prevalent with the emergence of the gay rights movement in Northern

²⁶⁵ Micheal T McLoughlin, ‘Crystal or Glass?: A Review of Dudgeon v. United Kingdom on the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Decision’, *E LAW, Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law*, Volume 3, Number 4 (December 1996): <http://www.murdoch.edu.au/elaw/issues/v3n4/mclough.html>

²⁶⁶ Evert van der Veen, Aart Hendriks and Astrid Mattijssen, ‘Lesbian and Gay Rights in Europe: Homosexuality and the Law’, in: *Social Perspectives in Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Reader*, Peter M. Nardi and Beth E. Schneider (eds.), Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon, 2006, 498.

²⁶⁷ Marian Duggan, *Queering Conflict: Examining Lesbian and Gay Experiences of Homophobia in Northern Ireland*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2012, 17.

²⁶⁸ Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, Routledge, London, 2003, 186.

²⁶⁹ Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, 190.

Ireland (GLM - Gay Liberation Movement), again in the early 1970s.²⁷⁰

It is notable that both sides of the political-religious divide were anti-homosexual: thus, no Northern Irish political party supported the extension of the 1967 Act while it remained in force only for England and Wales;²⁷¹ and Ian Paisley even garnered support from parts of the Catholic church for his ‘Save Ulster from Sodomy’ campaign,²⁷² which was a response to the potential decriminalisation of homosexual offences brought about as a result of the Dudgeon case.²⁷³

An interview with a gay man during the Troubles reveals that, in contrast with feminism, for which politics, religion and conflict would prove to be divisive issues, there was no such problem with the (albeit small) gay community: ‘The gay community was mixed. There were so few of us, we couldn’t afford to be divided by religion.’²⁷⁴

Dudgeon, in his foreword to *Scandal: Infamous Gay Controversies of the Twentieth Century* says, of gay life in Belfast during the early period of the Troubles (1970s):

Luckily our potential tormentors were too busy destroying one another to care, giving us an exclusive run of the city centre at night. Old timers said there had been nothing like it in Belfast for over thirty years, not since the blackout coincided with the arrival of American troops in the days prior to D-Day in 1944.²⁷⁵

Two things are interesting here: the first is that in the period between the mid-1940s and the 1970s, gay life in Belfast was quiet or certainly much less visible;

²⁷⁰ Duggan, *Queering Conflict*, 17.

²⁷¹ Duggan, *Queering Conflict*, 57.

²⁷² Duggan, *Queering Conflict*, 53.

²⁷³ Kieran Rose, *Diverse Communities: The Evolution of Lesbian and Gay Politics in Ireland*, Cork University Press, 1994, 38.

²⁷⁴ Rosemary Sales, *Women Divided: Gender, Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland*, Routledge, 1997, 131: ‘Interview with Trevor’.

²⁷⁵ Jeffrey Dudgeon, ‘Foreword’, in: *Scandal: Infamous Gay Controversies of the Twentieth Century*, Marc E. Vargo (ed.), Harrington Press, 2003, ix.

the second point of note is that the Troubles, because they rendered the city centre a no-go area, actually provided a space for gay culture to flourish in Belfast. Dudgeon has commented elsewhere on gay life in the city centre in the 1970s, when ‘Quite literally, the gay bar at the time, the Chariot Rooms, was about the only place open at night’, and how, as a result of this, soldiers from army duck patrols sometimes ventured in to dance.²⁷⁶

Brendí McClenaghan says in his account, referred to previously, that within republicanism, the position regarding gays was ‘pretty dismal’, and that it wouldn’t be until 1980 that the leading republican party Sinn Féin would adopt a position in relation to lesbians and gays.²⁷⁷ Therefore we see a difference between the adoption by the mainstream republican movement of gay rights compared with women’s rights (see later).

It is interesting to note references to homosexual culture which are found in a number of the previous novels in this study: *The Liberty Lad*; *The International*; and *The Emperor of Ice Cream*. In *The International*, the bisexuality of its narrator, Danny, is used to emphasise a passive narrative voice,²⁷⁸ while in *Liberty Lad* and *Emperor of Ice Cream* homosexuality is used to illustrate the protagonist’s gaucheness or lack of wisdom. In *The Liberty Lad*, Frank’s gay friend also demonstrates a level of freedom which Frank, bounded by convention, just doesn’t have. However, given certain criticism of this aspect in *Emperor of Ice Cream*, where the ‘Protestant homosexual bohemian coterie...remain Catholic stereotypes of Protestant free-thinking artiness’²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ Dudgeon, ‘Friends’, 140.

²⁷⁷ Brendí McClenaghan, ‘Letter from a Gay Republican’, 123.

²⁷⁸ Magennis, *Sons of Ulster*, 88.

²⁷⁹ Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction*, 125.

we can wonder if some vestiges of post-colonial prejudice²⁸⁰ are present in this work.

Ultimately, in *The Liberty Lad* the secret homosexual sub-culture, and its connection to political corruption, adds to the feeling of a society in which identities are unresolved and uncertain, most specifically, that of the Protestant working class.

An interview with Maurice Leitch reveals that Northern Irish people were upset with the homosexual sub-culture depicted in *The Liberty Lad*. Leitch says that people ‘thought it was untrue: they felt that I was doing this deliberately to create sales for my books.’²⁸¹ This attitude suggests to us that Northern Irish people were either unable or unwilling to believe that people could live, and indeed were living, homosexual lifestyles in their country.

In *Turquoise Car*, Tony ends up leaving Belfast for London - as many gay men in Northern Ireland would have done²⁸² – to go and live with his cousin. Primarily, this is because of a notion that there might be more sexual freedom in London (and because of an alluring male voice on the telephone which the ever-vulnerable Tony falls for); however, the *timing* of his departure is dictated by the political situation, and the worsening trouble on Belfast’s streets.

As for the question of civil rights, it is ironic – though understandable – that the Civil Rights campaign of the late 1960s in Northern Ireland did not address *all* civil rights. Thus, gay rights were not addressed, and would continue to be neglected for years to come. As we shall see, this was also the case with women’s rights.

²⁸⁰ Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, 186.

²⁸¹ Julia Carson, ‘Interviews: Maurice Leitch’, in: *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer*, Julia Carson (ed.), Routledge, London, 1990, 100-101.

²⁸² Sales, *Women Divided*, 131: ‘Interview with Trevor’.

Women's rights: Anne, Marie and Bridie

From the outset of writing *Turquoise Car*, I knew that a key element of the story was going to be primarily that of a single woman's struggle in an overtly sexist, male-dominated society. Viewing *Turquoise Car* as, in part, a take on what society was like in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s, I was anxious to include what would have been authentic attitudes in relation to sexism.

'Northern Ireland,' Rosemary Sales tells us, 'was founded on the exclusion of women as well as Catholics from citizenship.'²⁸³ A detailed account of the discrimination which women in Northern Ireland faced in the 1960s and 1970s is given by Monica McWilliams, in her essay, 'Women in Northern Ireland: An Overview' . McWilliams says that, 'It is undoubtedly the case that both Church and State have combined together in ensuring that the prime role of women is as mothers and housewives.'²⁸⁴ The Church, McWilliams says, 'helped to institutionalise some of the most extreme forms of patriarchy' in relation to investment, employment, exclusion of women in the workplace and the removal of childcare facilities.²⁸⁵ Sales also comments on the role of the churches in promoting 'conservative views on social issues, particularly in relation to the family and sexuality.'²⁸⁶ Marriage-bars relating to the civil service, teaching, banking and other professions were not abolished until the late 1960s and this meant that in 1971 only 29% of married women in Northern Ireland were economically active.²⁸⁷ Catholic women dominated the workforce of traditional sectors (particularly the textile industry), and women's paid income was vital to many families,

²⁸³ Sales, *Women Divided*, 4.

²⁸⁴ Monica McWilliams, 'Women in Northern Ireland: An Overview', in: *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland: 1960-1990*, Oxford University Press, Milton Keynes, 1993, 81.

²⁸⁵ McWilliams, 'Women in Northern Ireland', 86.

²⁸⁶ Sales, *Women Divided*, 5.

²⁸⁷ McWilliams, 'Women in Northern Ireland', 87.

despite the assumption (often false) that men were the main breadwinners.²⁸⁸

A 1975 report on discrimination against women in Northern Ireland notes that:

Special attention should be paid to the areas of discrimination that exist in Northern Ireland that do not exist in Britain, e.g. divorce, abortion, in employment and the anti-discrimination legislation around which a campaign should be launched.²⁸⁹

It is particularly interesting to note that the main thrust of this report was that discrepancies between the Northern Irish and British *legal* systems should be addressed: thus, we can see how, as was the case with gay rights, women's rights had also been neglected in law. McWilliams, notes that 'Divorce in Northern Ireland on the grounds of irreconcilability was eventually made legal in 1978 – ten years after the rest of Britain.'²⁹⁰ which, as we have seen, parallels the later introduction of legislation in Northern Ireland regarding homosexual offences in comparison with the rest of the UK.

Conflict between the two communities in Northern Ireland dominated discussion of civil rights from the 1960s to the 1980s, and political allegiances and standpoints in relation to Northern Ireland's problems meant that the feminist movement faced some particular challenges.

Therefore, while a radical feminist movement was born in Britain in 1970 (and some years earlier in the Irish Republic), women in Northern Ireland felt unable to address gender issues politically²⁹¹, and issues of nationalism would complicate

²⁸⁸ Sales, *Women Divided*, 109.

²⁸⁹ Lynda Edgerton, *A Report on Legal, Social and Economic Discrimination against Women in Northern Ireland*, The Welfare Committee, Students Union, Queen's University of Belfast, 1975, 14.

²⁹⁰ McWilliams, 'Women in Northern Ireland', 82.

²⁹¹ Carmel Roulston, 'Gender, Nation, Class: The Politics of Difference in Northern Ireland', *Scottish Affairs*, No. 18, Winter 1997: http://www.scottishaffairs.org/backiss/pdfs/sa18/sa18_Roulston.pdf

attempts to establish women's rights groups.²⁹²

It has been noted that: 'At a time when feminism was beginning to flourish in many places throughout the world, the most active women's organising in the North was taking place in working-class, republican areas in response to state violence.'²⁹³ (Note, however, that we do see evidence that women were taking active roles in community issues (specifically, the housing action committees) from the mid-1960s).²⁹⁴ Thus, women were actively involved in patrolling nationalist areas, as previously mentioned, while it was women who broke the Falls Road Curfew of July 1970,²⁹⁵ when 3000 women marched and the blockade was broken.²⁹⁶ In later years, examples of female community action were to be found in Protestant/unionist areas of East Belfast.²⁹⁷

The commingling of feminism with nationalist aims was to create tension between those republican feminists who saw no conflict between these two ideals (Farrell,²⁹⁸ Devlin²⁹⁹) and those who believed that feminists should refuse to take part in any male-dominated nationalist movement, or deny Unionist women the chance to participate.³⁰⁰

As well as excluding Unionist women from what was the main feminist

²⁹² Grainne McCoy, 'Women, Community and Politics in Northern Ireland', in: Roulston, Carmel and Davies, Celia (eds.), *Gender, Democracy and Inclusion in Northern Ireland*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000, 13.

²⁹³ O'Keefe, *Feminist Identity Development and Activism*, 161-162.

²⁹⁴ Monica McWilliams, 'Women and Political Activism in Northern Ireland, 1960-93', in: *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, Angela Bourke (ed.), NYU Press, 2002, 374-377.

²⁹⁵ Eileen Evason, *Against the Grain: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Northern Ireland*, Attic Press, Dublin, 1991, 48.

²⁹⁶ Lynda Edgerton, 'Public Protest', 64.

²⁹⁷ Lynda Edgerton, 'Public Protest', 67.

²⁹⁸ Power, 'A republican who wants to further women's rights', 158.

²⁹⁹ O'Keefe, *Feminist Identity Development and Activism*, 163.

³⁰⁰ O'Keefe, *Feminist Identity Development and Activism*, 162.

movement in Northern Ireland, republican feminism has been viewed as marginalising its members 'who do have common cause with mainstream feminists in terms of domestic violence, health, contraception and reproductive rights, for instance, yet feel unwelcome participating in such a movement given the unsympathetic attitude towards their struggle.'³⁰¹

Protestant or Unionist women faced their own challenges from the Church:

In the case of the Protestant Church, the veneration of Mary as a mother figure is anathema to the teachings of Free Presbyterianism. The patriarchal nature of Protestantism leaves out the imagery of women and in turn women become invisible.

...its more Calvinist theology calls upon [women] to be obedient and subservient, again emphasising their prime role as homemakers.³⁰²

(A parallel can be drawn here with Meyer's analysis (see p.48) of the symbolism of Northern Ireland's two communities, and the way in which Catholic/nationalist/republican murals can sometimes feature powerful feminine figures, while Protestant/unionist/loyalist murals do not.³⁰³)

Protestant women in the 1970s also felt less able to challenge the State, which they were worried was under threat from the efforts of the nationalist movement.³⁰⁴

Nevertheless, women's groups were founded in Northern Ireland, the first of which was the Lower Ormeau Women's Group (LOWG) in 1972, followed by the Queen's University Belfast Women's Liberation Group (QUBWLG) (1973) and the Coleraine Women's Group (CWG) (1974).³⁰⁵ The LOWG would last only for a year, while the QUBWLG would be key in the formation of the Northern Ireland Women's

³⁰¹ O'Keefe, *Feminist Identity Development and Activism*, 164.

³⁰² McWilliams, 'Women in Northern Ireland', 86.

³⁰³ Meyer, 'Ulster's Red Hand', 119.

³⁰⁴ Evason, *Against the Grain*, 11.

³⁰⁵ Evason, *Against the Grain*, 16-17.

Rights Group. The CWG would become instrumental in challenging legislative deficiencies in Northern Ireland and its key focus issues were: abortion; battery and rape; and in the arrangement of financial support for divorced and separated women (Northern Ireland's divorce legislation dated from 1937, and, since women's non-financial contribution to marriage was not recognised, they could be evicted from marital homes.³⁰⁶)

Northern Ireland in the 1960s was therefore a male-dominated society, in which women faced discrimination on many fronts, and in which the most active female participation in state issues would be as a response to state violence after the Troubles began. Although this militant behaviour could not be viewed as furthering the aims of feminism *per se*, it nevertheless gave women a space in which to perform a different role, particularly since, as Elisabeth Porter writes, 'Many Irish women cling onto their traditional role as their only sanctioned identity.'³⁰⁷

As highlighted above, it would not be until the 1970s that feminist movements and women's groups would appear, and these would face their own problems because of the differing aims of republicanism and unionism (although Evason also stated that: 'In most countries the women's movement is fragmented and characterised by sharp debates and divisions.'³⁰⁸) In the meantime, women like Anne, Marie and Bridie in *Turquoise Car* would face their own challenges in relation to the low status afforded to women in Northern Irish society in the late 1960s.

At the start of *Turquoise Car*, we see Anne selling her dead husband's car - trading it in for a new one, for her *own* car. Something which wouldn't cause any thought or comment today was something I believed (upon hearing from an older

³⁰⁶ Evason, *Against the Grain*, 18.

³⁰⁷ Porter, 'Political representation of women', 25-32.

³⁰⁸ Evason, *Against the Grain*, 46.

generation of women) would not be without its difficulties for Anne. Thus, we see the car salesman treating her with a wary courtesy (and addressing her as Mrs McKee) before asking her for personal information as he fills in paperwork.

Widowed, two years ago: she saw him take a quick glance at her ring finger when she said that, before setting his stare back on her. She could see the nagging thought – why she was there without her husband - almost resolve itself in his expression and settle into something like a knowing smirk, before he turned his attention once more to the paperwork.

When he'd finished his questions, he leaned back in his seat, his hands behind his head. 'Well, that's the boring part over.'³⁰⁹

It is not something that *particularly* seems to bother Anne; it would appear to be irksome, but not worth protesting against or making too much fuss over. In other words, it is something that she expects to encounter in her everyday life.

In the first chapter from Marie's point of view, we are told of her first experience of menstruation:

And when, that day she was sent home from school by Mrs Keenan with instructions to talk to her mother, Bridie had told Marie not to worry. It was her body trying to clean itself. It happened to every woman. It means *you're* a woman now, her mother had told her.

It was a strange thing to think all those years ago, but it was Marie's first inkling that women had a harder time of it than men, for after all, it was a bad thing that was happening to her and to every woman. 'Trying to clean itself' meant that she was dirty, somehow. When it happened to Anne, Anne's mother had even taken her to the chapel so they could say a rosary together.³¹⁰

We can see here that Marie, even younger, knew that 'women had a harder time of it than men' but this is something she bears with stoicism. In fact, it appears that Marie, starved of love and attention from an overbearing and dismissive mother, has been using

³⁰⁹ *Turquoise Car*, 5.

³¹⁰ *Turquoise Car*, 126.

her sexuality to gain men's attention, although the sex that follows is not something she particularly enjoys. Marie thinks about the sexual freedom that the Pill could grant her, but acknowledges that this is something too shameful for a single woman to ask a doctor for. Writing even in 1993, Monica McWilliams says that 'the availability of contraception depends a great deal on one's social class and place of residence.'³¹¹

In any case, Marie's sexual liaisons are something she comes to regret, as we see when she makes her New Year's resolution for 1969 (never to make another late night call to Terry Scullion). Ironically, both Anne and Marie regret their own sexual indiscretions (Anne's with the hotel manager), and while Anne admires Marie's apparent carefree attitude, Marie is jealous of Anne's purity.

For the three principal female characters in *Turquoise Car* – Anne, Marie and Bridie - there has been no opportunity to better their standing through education. As I have mentioned, Bridie appears to be a woman who possesses great intelligence, and who, given some opportunity, could have made more of her life. Marie doesn't appear to have had any interest in education, and it is likely that Bridie has never encouraged her in this respect. Anne is a particular case in point: she showed promise at school, and yet her father made her leave as soon as she was able (at fourteen years old) so she would be working in one of the linen mills and bringing home a wage.

Part of Anne's story is therefore the denial of rights to women, and how this can lead to class stagnation. This lends poignancy to Anne's struggle to better herself through enterprise and hard work, and is why she resents people saying she is lucky (although she is fearful of the part that luck may have played in her life).

At one point, Anne, Bridie and Marie discuss Bernadette Devlin (Devlin is at this point widely tipped to become an MP). Bridie uses the situation as an opportunity to

³¹¹ McWilliams, 'Women in Northern Ireland', 88.

berate her daughter, Marie: ‘The youngest female MP ever, wait till you see. What do you think of that? What were you doin at her age?’ Anne, on the other hand, appears to be jealous, thinking (of Devlin’s appearance): ‘if that was me, I’d have at least done something with my hair. There’s no excuse for not making an effort, especially when you’re being filmed for God’s sake – cause or no cause.’³¹²

Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey would turn out to be a key figure in the Northern Irish conflict. In her book *The Price of My Soul*, Devlin-McAliskey states that before 1968, her previously held dissatisfaction with the state, which manifested in republican, anti-partition views gave way to those of socialism – ‘The problem in NI, I decided, was not partition’.³¹³ In August 1968, she set off to join the Civil Rights March from Derry to Belfast, was involved in the ensuing violence,³¹⁴ and jailed for affray.³¹⁵ She was instrumental in the birth of the People’s Democracy movement in Queen’s University in 1968,³¹⁶ and subsequently she would reunite her socialist ideals with those of republicanism: ‘Now I was joining my new-found socialism to my old belief in a United Ireland. Only in a thirty-two county Ireland could socialism even begin to work.’³¹⁷

As a ‘feminist and revolutionary socialist’,³¹⁸ Devlin’s socialist principles applied to both Protestants and Catholics alike, and her view was therefore that the problem with Ireland was not Protestants, but the Northern Irish State, which happened to be a

³¹² *Turquoise Car*, 171.

³¹³ Bernadette Devlin, *The Price of My Soul*, Pan Books, London, 1969, 89.

³¹⁴ Devlin, *The Price of My Soul*, 91.

³¹⁵ Feargal Cochrane, *Northern Ireland: The Reluctant Peace*, Yale University Press, 2013, 42.

³¹⁶ Devlin, *The Price of My Soul*, 101.

³¹⁷ Devlin, *The Price of My Soul*, 119.

³¹⁸ Cochrane, *Northern Ireland: The Reluctant Peace*, 42.

Unionist run institution. Her maiden speech³¹⁹ has references to ‘peasants’, ‘landlords, ‘haves and have-nots’, and Devlin – whether appealing to a sense of socialist solidarity or trying to further the validity of her political beliefs – also pointed out that ‘the number of non-Catholics [in the Derry-Belfast Civil Rights March] was greater than the number of Catholics.’³²⁰

Devlin – believing that there was no incompatibility between feminist and republican ideals – came into conflict with other feminists, who, for example, would not stand at prison gates to register protest at the treatment of female (republican) prisoners.³²¹ Devlin, though having since retired from Northern Ireland politics, continues to be active as a community worker in Tyrone.³²²

There is no comment from the three women in this scene on how the election of Devlin could be a coup for women’s rights, and it has been noted that individual women who became associated with the Civil Rights movement were an exception.³²³ I did not think that women’s rights would have been a conscious issue for the three women concerned in this scene (although Bridie does comment on Devlin’s age); it wouldn’t have been possible at this stage to take Devlin’s election as any sign of attitudes changing in relation to sexism (or the entry of women into Northern Ireland politics) given the unique and highly tense circumstances which framed the election and, as stated above, because of the peculiarities of Northern Irish civil rights in the 1960s.

³¹⁹ Devlin’s maiden speech is said to have been heard on the radio by a young (future President) Bill Clinton, while he was at Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. The ‘electrifying’ speech is reported to have inspired Clinton’s later commitment to the Northern Ireland Peace Process: Cochrane, *The Reluctant Peace*, 42.

³²⁰ Bernadette Devlin MP, Maiden Speech to the House of Commons 22 April 1969: Centre for Women and Democracy: <http://www.cfd.org.uk/uploads/Devlin%20Speech.pdf> (reproduced courtesy of Hansard) retrieved 14-Jan-2014.

³²¹ O’Keefe, *Feminist Identity and Activism*, 163.

³²² Cochrane, *Northern Ireland: The Reluctant Peace*, 43.

³²³ Edgerton, ‘Public Protest’, 66.

Marie has never had any aspirations and while, unlike Anne, she hasn't been specifically held back from continuing her education, her mother, Bridie has damaged her self-esteem – ‘*Take the pole out of your hole, love.*’ ‘*Never forget the bowl you were baked in.*’ – to the extent that Marie has learnt not to be ambitious. Bridie, it appears, does not think that her daughter should strive to be anything more than working class.

Turquoise Car features many instances of behaviour in which women are treated as inferior. There is Carey's flirtation with his secretary, Dympna:

‘There's nothing that passes *me* by,’ he said. His eyes moved to her cleavage and to her face again and he could see it had reddened, slightly. He smiled and she returned the gesture. He flicked his cigarette into the ashtray and then stood up.

‘Lovely morning, isn't it?’ he said.

She nodded.

‘You wouldn't make me a wee coffee, pet?’

She stood up immediately. ‘Of course,’ she said. ‘I'll bring it down to you.’³²⁴

Some of Carey's views on women are abhorrent (that women are there only to be flirted with, and that lying to and manipulating women is fine), though I do not see these views being so much to do with the timeframe of the story as they are the product of someone like Carey, who lacks empathy and emotional self-awareness. They could also be representative of sexist attitudes in general which would have been more typical in the 1960s than they are today.

Taken in conjunction with the preceding discussion on Tony (and the parallel drawn there between discrimination towards gay people and Catholics), we can draw a further parallel with discrimination on the basis of sexism.

Therefore, Northern Ireland in the late 1960s is presented in *Turquoise Car* as being a patriarchal society in which discrimination against anyone who is not part of the perceived majority is a way of life. In the end, though, it is the story of the conflict

³²⁴ *Turquoise Car*, 250.

which arises when one of these minorities rebels.

Victim of the Troubles: Anne

The protagonist of *Turquoise Car*, Anne McKee, is in some ways an embodiment of the philosophical concept of presentism gone wrong: Anne's continual – and it could be said, admirable – attempts to live in the present (by refusing to acknowledge how dangerous her future may become) show that she is in denial. But perhaps this is the only way that we could, or should, expect her to behave in the face of obvious and mounting threats: it is her way of coping. We can see, however, late on in the novel that she clashes with Bridie because of her refusal to acknowledge how dangerous Belfast, and in particular, the Crumlin Road is becoming.

She is a widow at the age of twenty-eight and by luck, and struggle, she has her own house on Belfast's Crumlin Road. At the start of the novel, she is able to buy her own car, though this transaction is tainted by the fact that she has to trade in her dead husband's own car.

The house she has bought too, has been partly financed by the payout on her husband's life assurance policy.

It is for reasons like these that she is at pains to remind herself that luck – good and bad – has played such a big role in her life.

There is the sense, even from the outset of Anne's story, that happiness and success cannot be taken for granted. However, there is only so much that she will acknowledge, whether outwardly to Bridie, or inwardly, to herself:

Bridie had mentioned before to Anne about where Anne's house was on the Crumlin Road, and how Anne must have been the only Catholic for half a mile in any direction. And this had made Anne bristle. She'd found herself being short with Bridie, and even after she'd left to go home and for days afterwards, feeling

annoyed with her.

Perhaps, Anne had thought later, it was because she knew that it was most likely true. But still: it didn't matter to her.³²⁵

Anne clearly thinks (or allows herself to think) that being one of a handful of Catholics living in a majority Protestant neighbourhood doesn't matter. I considered that it would be normal for her to think this, because Anne is not particularly bigoted and is more concerned with money than she is with religion (she doesn't mind having Protestant lodgers, for example). Before the Troubles, although there were *predominantly*-Catholic or Protestant districts in Belfast, none was *exclusively* so:

Specifically Protestant and Catholic working-class settlements emerged in Falls Road and Shankill Road, certainly. But this, as we have seen, derived from many other factors than religion.

...

But the very fact that neither areas was exclusively inhabited by one sect suggests a rather different pattern of normal living than that which comes under our notice when passions ran high.³²⁶

The religious make-up of such areas became increasingly homogenized (and the city therefore polarized) during outbreaks of violence (major riots had taken place in the city on numerous occasions in the latter part of the nineteenth century), when people of a particular religion were expelled from where they lived, or worked, so that: 'Ethnic exclusivity in housing and work was periodically reinforced.'³²⁷

Therefore, Anne's decision to buy a house on the Crumlin Road in 1966 was not particularly foolish or reckless. However, as the story progresses, there do appear to be signs of denial on her part, which in particular lead to antagonism between Bridie and her:

³²⁵ *Turquoise Car*, 10.

³²⁶ Owen Dudley Edwards, *The Sins of our Fathers: Roots of Conflict in Northern Ireland*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1970, 136.

³²⁷ Dominic Bryan, 'Belfast: Urban Space, "Policing" and Sectarian Polarization' in *Wounded Cities, Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalized World*, Schneider, Jane and Susser, Ida (eds.), Berg, Oxford, 2003, 254.

Bridie's words came back to her – the ould bitch, talking things up – sure Ardoyne was as near to Hooker Street as Anne's own house was. '*I'd hate to be livin where you are now*'. How dare she?³²⁸

Even if Anne is aware that things are 'all so precarious' she nevertheless overstretchs herself financially - for example by buying a twin-tub washing machine which, earlier, she considers far too expensive. Her response to the encroaching trouble around her is not to confide in anyone about her worries (and, in fact, she argues with Bridie about the situation), but to place her faith in money and material possessions.

Of course, we know that Anne will be a victim of what we have now come to know as the Troubles. Ultimately, Anne's story is representative of what happened to many people in Belfast: in August of 1969, approximately 1500 families had been displaced from their homes,³²⁹ and by September the figure had risen to approximately 3,500 families.³³⁰

Throughout her life, we see that Anne has suffered from misfortune due to things beyond her control: her father not allowing her to stay on at school; her husband's death; and finally, her eviction from the house on the Crumlin Road. When we see Anne in the final scene, she is unable to decide which way to turn her car, which direction to go in. There is something more long-term suggested here: in going to Ardoyne she would be admitting defeat, almost – going back to her working-class roots, living perhaps with her parents or Bridie or Marie, and immersing herself in the growing bigotry, something she has previously eschewed. On the other hand, she could decide to go to Carey, a choice which could ultimately offer her the middle-class existence she

³²⁸ *Turquoise Car*, 339.

³²⁹ Mick Fealty, 'About Turn', *The Guardian*, Tuesday 31 July, 2007: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/jul/31/aboutturn>

³³⁰ John P. Darby, *Intimidation and Control of Conflict in Northern Ireland*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1986, 58.

has always aspired to, but at a price – compromising her values. There is also a choice for Anne to make here between religions: to go and live among her Catholic friends and family, or to go and live with a Protestant (Carey).

Anne has been a victim of circumstance throughout her life. She has never belonged in Ardoyne and her attempts to escape it are thwarted, it seems, but I hope that the lasting impression of Anne is that she will keep fighting.

By the end of *Turquoise Car*, Anne has indeed become a victim of what we now call the Troubles: thirty years of violence that no-one could have predicted, and so no-one could have prepared for.

A class apart: Carey and Michael

The relationship between Carey and Michael – both Protestant – is important for a number of reasons. Purely in terms of plot, it is entertaining to have two characters who are so different, and who are forced by circumstances into close proximity. But the antagonism so evident between Michael and Carey is symbolic of a more complex societal issue in pre-Troubles Northern Ireland, and one which is thought to have been a contributing factor to the development of conflict.

The first time Michael meets Carey, the former is unimpressed to the point of disgust – and although on the surface it is because of sexual jealousy, there is something else at play:

Carey: ‘...when I was at university.’

He sounded posh, Michael thought - maybe they’d taught him to speak like that while he was there.

...

[Carey] explained that he was an accountant and that the garage was his father’s business. One of his father’s businesses. He worked in all of them.

‘I keep an eye on all the financial dealings in our small empire,’ Carey said.

Michael had to look away, suppressing a snigger. *Our small empire*. What an arsehole.³³¹

From the beginning, Michael resents Carey because he is suave and well-dressed, and has an air of sophistication. He talks in his posh voice about having been to university. He is clearly from a different class.

The fact that Carey is somewhat reminiscent of Michael's despised brother-in-law Charlie is also telling (they are both very tall, in comparison with Michael who is shorter than average). It is Charlie who threatens Michael's family's farm and therefore Michael's heritage and traditions.

When we meet Michael in the second chapter of *Turquoise Car*, we are given a picture of a traditional, Protestant, farming family:

The same suit [his father] wore in church on Sundays, when the two of them would stand side by side, hymn books in hands, singing.
He wore it when he went marching with the Orange Lodge, or when he was going to the Masonic like he was tonight.³³²

Tellingly, there is the photograph of the Inniskilling Fusiliers regiment, which Michael's uncle fought in. It was reading *Protestant Boy* by Geoffrey Beattie which demonstrated to me the great pride in the sacrifice made by so many young Ulstermen in the World Wars, and the importance of this to the psyche of the Northern Irish Protestant working class.³³³

Michael's siblings are all sisters, and his mother died when he was young; consequently he has spent a long time at home with just his father. He has always seen it as his destiny to take over his father's role in running the farm, assuming the role of patriarchal head of the house, and therefore preserving the family's farming tradition.

³³¹ *Turquoise Car*, 77.

³³² *Turquoise Car*, 33.

³³³ Geoffrey Beattie, *Protestant Boy*, Granta Books, London, 2004.

His eldest sister's husband, Charlie ('the big streak of piss'), threatens all this when he moves in and takes over the running of the farm; meanwhile, back in Belfast, Carey is effectively an interloper who disrupts the equilibrium of the house they live in. These two men – Charlie and Carey – subvert Michael's attempts, both in his old life, and in his new, to assert his authority and establish his sense of (adult) self.

But as Michael comes to realise that the city is not the place for him, we see that his anger is fundamentally because of his powerlessness in the face of the loss of his heritage (and by extension, his identity). When Michael is fighting Carey, he is really fighting Charlie, his brother-in-law who is taking over the farm and selling off land.

Carey, on the other hand, is clearly a snob. He thinks that Anne should sell the boarding house (presumably so they can marry and she can be a housewife); he has reservations about the area she lives in. He comes across as being not particularly bigoted in sectarian terms; rather, he thinks that what is wrong with Northern Ireland is the working classes, whatever their religion:

If there's one thing he couldn't understand about the lower classes – the terrace dwellers – it was their love of fighting. It was 'civil rights' this, and 'tradition' that, and let's face it, any ould excuse, and the next thing they were hurling bricks. Belfast had a tradition of rioting over religion - hadn't it happened numerous times all through the eighteen hundreds? The nineteen tens, twenties, thirties? And other times, too, that he probably didn't know about. But always with the shipyard workers, the factory workers, the lower classes.

The country needed more jobs – people were always going to turn to trouble if they'd nothing better to do. They needed something to get them out of their beds in the mornings and up and about themselves. Someone to give them a paypacket at the end of the week, just like he did, just like his father had done. That soon sorted them out.³³⁴

There are signs that, towards the end of the novel, Carey is coming to reconsider his

³³⁴ *Turquoise Car*, 321.

views on working-class people – this is prompted by the kindly act by the neighbour on the night that Anne and Carey are trapped in her house as rioting erupts outside.

The issue of conflict between the working and upper Protestant classes has already been mentioned in relation to *The Liberty Lad*,³³⁵ and when we see it here in *Turquoise Car*, it is telling of a wider societal issue. Young Michael has more in common with Frank Glass, whereas Carey could easily inhabit the world of *The Maiden Dinosaur*. Michael's struggle to leave the countryside and find work in the city places him in the realm of McLaverty's *Lost Fields*. The tension between Michael and Carey is symbolic of an issue which we now know to be a deciding factor in the development of conflict in Northern Ireland.

Conclusion

Writing Northern Ireland in fiction from a post-Troubles viewpoint clearly carries a burden of hindsight. All the novels considered in this study, whether wittingly or unwittingly, are engaging with the historical process. It is evident that a relationship exists between the time of writing in relation to the Troubles, and the freedom to be able to exclude sectarian markers.

In writing contemporary fiction (*Black Dog*), I have found it relatively easy to exclude the Troubles, depicting present-day Northern Ireland instead as somewhere where sections of society at least are unconcerned with what has gone before. Writing within my own timeframe of reference, I had the confidence to exclude history, or certain issues, just as we find in MacNeill's *The Maiden Dinosaur*. Both novels are concerned with existential crises, as is Tomelty's *Red Is the Port Light*.

I found that writing from a retrospective viewpoint (*Turquoise Car*) was much

³³⁵ Coogan, *The Troubles*, 41.

more difficult, because of an inherent tendency for the narrative to foreshadow the Troubles. My survey of other writers' works has demonstrated that hindsight bias is present when writing, or reading, from a retrospective viewpoint: the way in which the seeds of conflict (such as sectarian attitudes) are presented is open to scrutiny. A comment by Laura Pelaschiar, I believe, succinctly and accurately represents the inherent difficulty: 'Whenever a writer writes about Northern Ireland, not only is he giving shape to a literary vision of the North, but he is also, albeit indirectly, unavoidably expressing a political standpoint.'³³⁶

Existential issues can instead be the focus of the narrative if writing before the Troubles, or if writing contemporaneously post-Troubles, when writers are free to either include and examine sectarianism, or to in some cases disregard it entirely.

In my own novel, *Turquoise Car*, I have attempted to show that in 1960s Northern Ireland, there were certainly sectarian attitudes, but that these were often unspoken. I further examined wider societal issues of discrimination based on sexuality, women's rights and class as issues which would have had equal importance to the characters for this particular historical period.

I believe that in writing historical fiction about the pre-Troubles Northern Ireland, the country's ensuing history cannot be ignored; however, it would be wrong to allow it to become too dominant. Rather, it should be integrated with the author's particular vision and commingled with other facets of the everyday to create a rounded narrative. Hindsight deserves respect, but not subservience.

³³⁶ Pelaschiar, *Writing the North*, 18.

Appendix A – Interview with Deirdre Madden, author of *One by One in the Darkness* – 1st February, 2013

1. *It is possible to see fiction as performing an important role in supplementing the primary historic record. Were you thinking of this function when you were writing One by One in the Darkness?*

– No, I did not think of it in this way. In writing *One by One* there was a wish to write about my own experiences, and to tell a certain story, from a particular viewpoint. Fiction can give us a sense of what it was like to live at a particular time, can record memories and explore different ideas about things that happened in the past. I think it would be strange for a novelist to think of their work as ‘supplementing the primary historic record’ when they were actually engaged in writing a novel.

2. *Would you agree that depictions of the sisters’ childhood (pre-Troubles Northern Ireland) in One by One in the Darkness often appear to have a sense of their own comparative place in history, for example, as contrasts to ensuing violence?*

– The two different strands of the novel provide contrast on several points: childhood and adulthood, for example. As the children grow up, the political situation in the country changes, and those changes are shown through their experiences and their developing consciousnesses. Obviously, as the characters become older, they become more aware of the wider context and the full implications of what is happening in the society around them.

3. *Do you think that, in general, people are aware at the time that they are living through and witnessing what will later be viewed as historic events?*

– Absolutely. People are very much aware of the times that they are living through. If you think about the events of the Arab Spring, or World War Two, it's obvious that the people who lived through and witnessed these events knew at the time that they were significant. People are much less aware of the historical import of their times when they live in a stable society, even if that society is incubating something that will lead to conflict or disaster.

4. *What do you think are the challenges of writing pre-Troubles Northern Ireland free from the influence of the ensuing history?*

– It depends how far back you go before the Troubles started. I remembered the north before the Troubles so I could draw on memory, and was confident about writing about it in *One by One*. It also depends on the angle you wish to take. Are you writing about pre-Troubles to make some point about the Troubles? Or are you just writing a story which happens to be set in Northern Ireland before 1969 but is about something else entirely: a love story, or a murder or the life of a family or whatever? Often one tends to set work in the place where one grew up and which one knows well, and if that was pre 1969 (or indeed post 1969) Northern Ireland might be beside the point if one was really writing about something else.

5. *It has been suggested that women writing about Northern Ireland are concerned primarily with writing the experiences of women and children (Linden Peach, The Contemporary Irish Novel, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 58). When you were writing One by One in the Darkness, was it important to you to show the experiences of women?*

– Yes. I felt that, at the time, there was a particular military, political representation prominent in fiction dealing with Northern Ireland. When I began writing *One by One* I

was conscious of making a choice to bear witness to women's experiences of the Troubles.

6. *Can you say something about the way in which the timeline in One by One in the Darkness is fractured, and the way in which it takes the reader back and forth between past and present?*

– There are two very different timeframes interlocking here: there's a lot of past interspersed with a small amount, only a week, of the present. The way in which the past is remembered here and encroaches on the present shows internalisation. Our past is always within us.

7. *Do you think that fictional narratives can successfully reclaim places and people from traumatic history or dominant historical events?*

– I'm not sure that 'reclaim' is the right word here, because there's no getting away from the fact that what has happened has happened. I think that history makes it inevitable that we will always view the past with hindsight.

8. *One by One in the Darkness was written by 1993-1995 – a transition period in Northern Irish politics, which saw the IRA ceasefire in 1994. Did it feel like the right time to write a book like One by One in the Darkness, which shows the hurt endured by victims of the past, while cautiously looking towards the future?*

– No. My decision to write *One by One* was not related to what was happening politically at the time. It was just the need I felt to tell a certain story at that time.

Appendix B - Interview with Glenn Patterson, author of *The International* – 22nd February, 2013

1. *Would you agree that it is possible to see fiction as performing an important role in supplementing the primary historical record?*

– I would say that fiction can have a corrective function in relation to the historical record. When we talk about history we usually assume an objective discipline, but we can see things hardening into history. Different versions. Even as we move not too far from past events, there are versions which are hardening into fact, or becoming the versions which will be accepted. When politicians talk about the present, they say, ‘The reality is...’ and when they talk about the past, they say, ‘The reality was...’ and fiction can say, ‘Yes, and it was also like this, and this, and this.’

2. *The first line of *The International* acknowledges history directly. Do you think that this first line helps to gain the reader's trust (acknowledging that both reader and narrator are viewing 1967 from a post-Troubles retrospective viewpoint)?*

– It wasn’t always the first line. It’s a way of saying that the events which happened, happened without the benefit of hindsight, and they are now being told *with* the benefit of hindsight. It is also concerned with framing, and is a way of saying: ‘This [the following narrative] is not now. We didn’t know that what you now call “then” was going to happen.’

3. *Do you think that, in general, people are aware at the time that they are living through and witnessing what will later be viewed as historic events?*

– That depends. We can see with hindsight, how Peter Ward’s death was one of the first

murders to happen in relation to the Troubles. It became a familiar pattern – people being shot as they were coming out of bars. At the time, of course, it wasn't recognisable or understandable as such.

– We're harder on the past than we are on ourselves. In writing *The International*, I wanted to get back to the time when the past was the present - when no-one knew what was coming next. I wanted to explore whether there was a way of looking again at where we were back then. And the implications this has for where we are now.

4. *The character, Danny, in The International is bisexual and areligious. Is this because Danny is a neutral observer (the perfect narrator)? Or is Danny representative of the commonality of people caught up in history?*

– A bit of both. I have always been uncomfortable with the 'two communities' [Catholic and Protestant] rhetoric. I am interested in communities of choice, other senses of identity, whether that's sexuality, sexual preference, gender, musical taste, football team allegiance – not just this label which is supposed to determine how you'd worship or how you'd vote. Around the time I was writing *The International*, I was also writing a play and I got talking to an actor; he told me about being gay in Belfast in the 1950s, and about gay bars at that time. I thought it was interesting. And of course, Danny is slightly 'outside' which gives him a particular viewpoint. I think that we often don't articulate to ourselves what our identity really is, much in the way that Danny doesn't to himself.

5. *What do you think are the challenges of writing pre-Troubles Northern Ireland free from the influence of the ensuing history?*

– It's impossible. You can't write anything without the benefit or hindrance of where we

are now and where we exist in relation to history. I wouldn't claim that *The International* was historically neutral. I have my beliefs and agendas and can't pretend to be neutral or uninvolved in these things. But again, I would say that fictional narratives can be 'corrective.'

6. *Do you think that sectarianism in Northern Irish fiction can be a historical cliché?*

– It can be if it's the main theme, or the only theme in your novel: if that alone is your story. But it isn't a cliché if it's just a feature of the world in which your characters live. You can't say it's unrepresentative. I remember that just after the ceasefire someone in London asked me what we were going to write about, now that the Troubles were gone, and this made me angry. All I have ever written about is the business of living. I used to say that [in relation to writing about Northern Ireland] I wrote about people living ordinary lives in extraordinary circumstances. But I'm reminded now, that my own mother witnessed the World War II bombing in Belfast. I now think that my writing is about the extraordinary business of living in the ordinary mayhem of the world.

7. *The International was written in the late 1990s – making it an early 'post-Troubles' novel. Did it feel like the right time to write a book like The International, which looks at how Belfast was and gives us a sense of how the city might have been if the Troubles hadn't taken place?*

– I knew about the murder of Peter Ward, and where it stood in relation to what followed. At a certain moment, on seeing *The International* [the hotel] in a book by Jonathan Bardon, it was like looking at the title of a book.

And yes, there can be reasons, political events, which might trigger the beginnings of a book. It was early 1996 when I started to write *The International* and I remember there

Appendix B – Interview with Glenn Patterson

was a drug dealer who was murdered by the IRA while I was in Lower Crescent [a nearby area in Belfast's university area]. I was struck by the thought that we should not allow the death of fellow citizens to pass or to be accommodated. This led me to thinking about the response to the death of Peter Ward in 1967.

Days after I had thought about the International as a title, and as a prism through which to view these events, I went to the Linenhall Library and read about the first meeting of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. I looked at newspapers from the time in question and found only two small (single paragraph) references in the Irish News and the Belfast Telegraph to this founding of the movement.

Perhaps the key point of the book was to capture something I'd read about in a speech by Eddie McAteer: 'A faint feeling of lightness in the air'. It's not the thing which triggered the writing of the book, but I now realise it's come to be the essence of the book – the need to write about that 'faint feeling of lightness in the air.'

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