**Rejecting and Embracing the Past: The Challenge of
Post-Troubles Identity Construction in Contemporary Northern Irish Novels**

by

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Abstract

The conflict known as The Troubles which has dominated both real and fictional narratives from and about Northern Ireland since it began in the late 1960s characterizes Northern Ireland as a place steeped in ceaseless and uncompromising sectarian violence. Literature, particularly the novel, has long contributed to this characterization. This dissertation examines three novels written and published as the peace process took hold in the early 1990s which deconstruct and posit alternatives to this standard characterization. It explores how the authors of these novels (Glenn Patterson, Eoin McNamee, and Mary Costello) attempt to counter the traditional literary stereotypes in Troubles fiction by exploring the circumstances and motivations behind the violence and victimization. In so doing, the novels offer alternatives to the stereotypical Northern Irish identities of perpetrator and victim. Glenn Patterson's *Fat Lad* explores the viability of rejecting the standard identity in favor of a more cosmopolitan, European one. Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* considers how Northern Irish, British, and American culture create the most extremely violent Northern Irish identity, that of the paramilitary gunman. Mary Costello's *Titanic Town* addresses the roles available to women in Northern Irish society and how the Troubles complicate those identities.

My discussion is grounded in the premise that novels in general help construct our understanding of and attitudes toward particular nations and cultures. The three novels in this study support that notion by providing particular ways of thinking about the Northern Irish that go beyond the usual tropes created by the Troubles even though the alternative identities imagined in all three novels are untenable. I conclude that such failures are caused by the ongoing dominance of violence as the defining trait of Northern Ireland in both popular and academic culture.

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Understanding Northern Irish Identity

Exactly when the conflict in Northern Ireland known as the Troubles began and why are questions with responses as varied as the tactics that fueled the violence and certainly as numerous as the various factions participating in it. A geographer such as J.H. Andrews, for example, contends that historic differences between the north and the rest of Ireland are attributable to the formation of the landscape: "Remoteness from Dublin was what gave Ulster[1] a certain resemblance to the [rural] west. But, like Dublin – only [. . .] more so – Ulster lay open to outside influence" (10). Political scientists such as John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary perceive the conflict as rooted in Irish nationalism: the Troubles were caused by "rival nations and rival understandings of national self-determination [. . .] locked in combat" (14). Other political scientists such as Simon Prince and Geoffrey Warner concur, arguing that, historically, violence in Ireland, including the Troubles in Northern Ireland, occurs primarily because of political conflict

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[1] In this context, Andrews' reference to Ulster is to the ancient province of Ulster which consisted of nine counties. Today, Northern Ireland consists of six of those counties. The remaining three are part of the Republic of Ireland. In contemporary usage, Ulster is sometimes used as an alternative name for Northern Ireland, but the term is politically marked: Its use by Protestant Unionists can be seen as provocative by Catholics since the term technically includes parts of the Republic. Catholics are more likely to use "the six counties" as an alternative term for Northern Ireland.

(5). They identify fifteen major riots in Belfast alone between 1813 and 1909, "with serious rioting usually coming at times of political upheaval, specifically during election campaigns" (Prince and Warner 48). While these riots pitted Catholics against Protestants and vice versa, Prince and Warner contend that neither religious nor ethnic rivalries were the cause. These were first and foremost battles for control of the government (48).

On the other hand, some see economics as the key factor in understanding the Troubles. A report by the Portland Trust concluded that "economic disparity was a principal aggravating factor in touching off and sustaining violence" ("Economics" 4) in Northern Ireland and that resolution of the conflict depended on resolving the longstanding economic differences among competing groups. Irish Studies scholar Maria Power disagrees, contending that the creation of new institutions for governing Northern Ireland which appeared in the 1990s "were predicated upon the conclusion that the conflict [. . .] was based upon ethno-national rather than economic concerns" (3). In other words, peace by political process and/or improved economic conditions could not be achieved until the role of key elements of culture[2] such as nationality (Irish, Northern Irish, and British) and ethnicity (the social and religious ties created by being Catholic or Protestant, Irish or British) were recognized and respected.

What all of these perspectives share is that, at some level, the struggle for control of Northern Ireland has consistently been a struggle for self-determination: the ability to

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[2] I use the term *culture* here and throughout the dissertation in its anthropological sense where culture is defined as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [sic] as a member of society" (Tylor 1). This view of culture recognizes three layers – cultural universals, shared culture, and distinctive culture – which encompass additional layers such as nationality; religious, ethnic, and linguistic affiliations; gender; social class; and age (Moua 11). Politics and economics by this definition are, of course, part of culture.

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decide one's actions for oneself, to control one's own life, to create and define one's own identity. The struggle then is cultural. It is rooted in the desire to control the land, to determine nationality, to select who governs, to pursue careers without restriction, to speak one's native tongue, and to live where one chooses without having one's basic civil rights violated. It is geographic and political and economic and religious and linguistic. In Northern Ireland, this struggle for self-determination began long before the creation of the nation-state, theories of economic development, and contemporary ideas about identity, nation, and culture. It is a battle that has lasted for centuries.

Ireland as an island has at times been ruled by a single government, but it has rarely been unified. Early Irish society was a collection of kingdoms of varying sizes and authority. It was not until Brian Bóru vanquished the Vikings in 999 and the king of Tara yielded authority to him three years later that Ireland had its first strong, central monarchy (de Paor 78). While the Irish achieved a decisive final victory over the Norse at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014, Bóru died in the battle, setting into play rivalries for the high-kingship that diminished what national unity he'd achieved – disputes for self-determination within Ireland that lasted for the next 150 years (de Paor 78). The dreams of the O'Connors to establish a feudal-style hereditary kingship, for example, were hampered by the king of Leinster, a region long hostile to the idea of a central authority. Banished from Ireland, the king appealed to King Henry II of England for help regaining his kingdom. Ironically, this request, far from saving Leinster from rule by a central authority, resulted in the Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169 and the English governing some or all of the island until the end of the twentieth century (Ó Cuív 81-94).

Like other forces that have attempted to control the island before and after Brian Bóru, England's control of Ireland was never fully secure. While the Anglo-Normans introduced a centralized administration and a jury system, built towns and appointed sheriffs to maintain law and order, and established a parliament with elected representatives from each county, they never truly conquered the entire island. As one historian noted, "The tragedy of the Norman invasion was not the conquest of Ireland – for that never took place – but its half-conquest" (Martin 111). In places like Normandy, Sicily, and England, the Normans sought to not only change, but also adapt to the cultures they conquered. In those regions, they settled in large enough numbers that new nations grew and thrived, but they failed to follow through in Ireland:

> The Normans never came in sufficient numbers to complete the conquest, and the kings of England, on whom rested the responsibility for the peace and progress of Ireland were either unwilling to assist their barons in Ireland or too distracted by dangers in England and wars on the Continent to turn their minds seriously to the Irish problem. (Martin 111)

Instead, in the centuries following the Norman invasion, England established policies designed to defeat self-determination by some or all of the Irish people. The Statutes of Kilkenny in 1366, for example, insisted that the Anglo-Irish in Ireland follow English laws and customs and included bans on the use of the Irish language and on intermarriage between the Irish and the English in an effort to ensure that English, not Irish, culture would predominate. Henry VIII brought the Protestant Reformation to Ireland in 1536, establishing the Church of Ireland as its official church (Hayes-McCoy 144). The English never fully enforced the Statutes of Kilkenny and the Reformation ultimately had little

success in Ireland (Hayes-McCoy 144), but such policies did encourage widespread acceptance of the idea that the Irish and English were distinct and different people, and fostered discontent among the Gaelic Irish, the Old English, and the Anglo-Irish[3] with English rule.

Indeed, while the Tudor Conquest of Ireland certainly involved political conflict, the concentrated attempts by Henry VIII and later Elizabeth I to eliminate Gaelic culture weakens claims that the historical underpinnings of the Troubles are essentially political. The Tudors achieved undisputed rule of the entire Ireland (Hayes-McCoy 139), but they wanted more: they sought to thoroughly anglicize Ireland. Certainly, anglicization was politically motivated: both the native-born Irish and more recent Anglo-Irish settlers were often in conflict with English rule. The Tudors sought to strengthen their control of the island by demanding that the Irish swear loyalty oaths and follow English law, political moves that eliminated the ways of the old Gaelic culture (Hayes-McCoy 142). However, what may have started as a conflict for political control in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries eventually morphed into a culture war, creating an ethno-nationalist conflict that fueled the Troubles in the late 1960s.

For it was in what was to become Northern Ireland that the dissatisfaction with the Tudors was the strongest. In the late sixteenth century, the lords in Ulster became increasingly distrustful of England thanks to a series of violent acts by Queen Elizabeth

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[3] Gaelic Irish refers to the native Irish population; Old English is a term for the settlers who arrived in Ireland following the Norman invasion and their descendants. The Old English constitute a different group from the New English or Anglo-Irish who arrived after the Tudor Conquest. A key distinction between the two is that while both were loyal to the English crown, the Old English tended to be Catholic while the Anglo-Irish were typically Protestant. The distinction between the Gaelic Irish and Old English had largely disappeared by 1700 as Protestant policies against Catholics in Ireland eventually encompassed both groups.

I's agents. As the lords became determined to thwart the queen's power, the English became equally determined to control Ulster: "Ulster was for [the English] the recalcitrant Ireland, a possible point of entry for their Continental enemies, a bad example for the uneasily converted, the cajoled and the coerced of other provinces" (Hayes-McCoy 147-8). While the English had "to fight as the English had never in Ireland before" (Hayes-McCoy 148), fighting the Nine Year's War for Ulster, they were ultimately victorious. The subsequent Flight of the Earls[4] left Ulster without Irish leadership. The crown moved to fully colonize Ulster through plantation of English and Scots Protestants. The policy was fairly straightforward: by taking land – the primary source of wealth and power – from Catholic landowners and giving it to Protestant immigrants, support for English rule would increase thanks to a Protestant community large enough to keep the peace in Ireland (Clarke, "The Colonisation"153).[5]

The result was a new and distinct culture in the northern counties of Ireland, one which Aidan Clarke aptly describes as "not only entirely alien to the native traditions of the area, but also entirely different in character from every other part of Ireland. It was not just the Protestantism of the planters that made Ulster distinctive, but their whole way of life" (154). In seizing the right to determine the path of Ireland's cultural and national identity, the crown wholeheartedly rejected the ways of the native Irish. True to form, however, the English failed to follow through and fully conquer the people. Plantation included a segregation plan whereby Catholics would be moved out to the worst lands,

[4] In 1607, Irish leader Hugh O'Neill and about ninety other Irish earls unwilling to accept the new order went into voluntary exile in Europe.
[5] All subsequent references attributed to Clarke will be to Aidan Clarke's "The Colonisation of Ulster and the Rebellion of 1641" except where otherwise indicated.

but this was never implemented. The native Irish remained as tenants and workers so that the supposedly Protestant plantation areas were "riddled with native Irish Catholics – embittered and degraded, awaiting their chance to strike back" (Clarke 154). What arguably began as a political conflict was now a clash of religions, economic classes, and cultural norms.

Thus, the complex cultural foundations of the most recent conflict in Northern Ireland were laid. To contend, as McGarry and O'Leary do, that the Troubles were essentially political (4) ignores the equally essential roles that cultural components such as religion and class have played in forming Northern Irish society. Religion, for example, was deeply intertwined with politics. In the early 1600s, thirty percent of Irish land was owned by the Old English, those early English settlers to Ireland who, although Catholic, were staunchly loyal to the crown (Clarke 156). In seizing land owned by Catholics, the crown eventually made no distinction between Irish and English: the landowner's religion, not his politics, determined whether the land was taken (Clarke 158). By 1641, the English parliament and its Scottish allies were "militantly and intolerantly Protestant" (Clarke 159). The Counter-Reformation, on the other hand, had helped to reinforce Catholicism in Ireland, (Clarke 162).

The collapse of the Protestant-controlled English Commonwealth in 1660 and the restoration of the Catholic King Charles II to the English throne did not lead to full restoration of the land confiscated under Oliver Cromwell as Catholics hoped. Instead, Charles sought a compromise whereby no one group got full restitution. The Gaelic Irish were the biggest losers. Prior to Cromwell, Catholics had owned sixty percent of the land; post-restoration they owned twenty percent. By the end of Charles II's reign, Ireland was

seventy-five percent Catholic, but Protestants owned the majority of the land and dominated government and commerce (Simms 166-7). The island was controlled by a single government, but the vast majority of its population had little to no voice in that government. While political maneuvering permitted and perpetuated this power disparity, religious sectarianism inspired it.

The differences between Catholics and Protestants and Irish and English were reinforced when William of Orange seized the throne from James I. William, the Protestant son-in-law of James I, invaded at the request of English Protestants who feared that the birth of James' son would lead to a Catholic dynasty on the English throne. While the Treaty of Limerick ended the war in Ireland in William's favor, Irish Protestants felt its terms were too generous to Catholics (Simms 174). For much of the next century, an all-Protestant Irish parliament enacted and enforced the Penal Laws to subjugate Catholics and Protestant dissenters. These laws ensured that Catholics were kept from participating in public life: Catholics were barred from serving in parliament or any government office, entering the legal profession, or holding military commissions. Among other restrictions, they were required to tithe to the Protestant church and they were kept from receiving an education thanks to laws that barred Catholics from teaching, attending university, and studying abroad (Wall 176-80).

Not surprisingly, as the Protestant Ascendancy sought to solidify its power to control Irish politics and culture, Catholics sought repeal of the Penal Laws and the right to have a voice in Ireland's future. Most repeal efforts were met with fear and hostility from Protestants. A proposal in 1762 to enlist Catholic regiments to fight for an English ally was adamantly opposed by Protestants: "the leaders of the militant Protestant

ascendancy [. . .] called on influential Protestants to close their ranks and to defeat all efforts by Catholics and by the administration to alter in the smallest degree the system so wisely devised by their ancestors for their protection" (Wall 186).

Yet the religious divisions encouraged by the Ascendancy were not enough to prevent ethno-national alliances across Ireland. Throughout the late eighteenth and all of the nineteenth century, more liberal Protestants allied with Catholics in a push for Irish nationalism. These campaigns crossed classes and faiths, promoting an Irish nationality that encompassed all of Ireland (Whyte, "The Age" 214): they called for an Irish nation which "was a community in which Irishmen, whatever their creed or class or ancestry, were called upon to work together for the common good in mutual affection, mutual respect and political freedom" (Moody 229). The potato famine in the 1840s, however, widened the divide between the Protestant minority and the Catholic majority, particularly in the northern part of Ireland. Unlike the rest of Ireland, two-thirds of which was dependent on agriculture for its livelihood (Green , "The Great" 220), Ulster was highly industrialized. While the famine left most Catholics viewing the Union between England and Ireland as a source of "grievances unremedied, liberties denied, [. . .] poverty, backwardness, and above all [. . .] the great famine" (Moody 229), the Protestants of Ulster attributed their increasing prosperity and the region's successful industrial development to its ties with industrial Britain (Moody 229). As a result, organizations such as the Irish Tenant League, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), and the Home Rule movement emerged to break the Act of Union uniting Ireland and Great Britain in the nineteenth century. Groups like the Gaelic League, Sinn Féin, and the Celtic Revival led by William Butler Yeats fostered awareness and pride in Irish culture

in an effort to build a common Irish culture and undermine the Act of Union in the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In response, Ulster Unionists became

increasingly committed to preserving the union with Great Britain by whatever means

necessary. When, in 1912, a home rule bill finally passed the House of Commons and

was due to go into effect in 1914, Ulster volunteers organized to set up a provisional

government to "take control of Ulster on the day home rule became law" (McCartney

254). Faced with such intransigence, the British prime minister and his Irish allies

retreated from implementing home rule for all Ireland, declaring moving more slowly "as

the price of peace" (Redmond qtd. in McCartney 254). Undeniably, politics preserved

peace at this point (albeit briefly), but differences in other aspects of culture such as

religion, not politics, were driving the conflict.

    Although it took several more years and was by no means a peaceful process,

Ireland did finally achieve a measure of independence in 1921. The treaty ending the

Anglo-Irish War established the Irish Free State, granting status as a dominion of the

British Commonwealth to the entire island. The treaty, however, allowed the northern six

counties to opt out of the agreement, which they immediately did, creating Northern

Ireland (McCracken 264), a political move which helped perpetuate and intensify the

deep religious and cultural divisions created under British rule. As Donal McCartney

notes, in accepting partition, no one's "dreams had been fulfilled. Not the Gaelic

League's Irish-speaking nation, nor Yeats's literary-conscious people, nor the republic of

the IRB [. . .] not [John] Redmond's home rule within an empire which the Irish helped to

build, nor [Edward] Carson's United Kingdom" (259). Moreover, partition had created a

state in Northern Ireland where "about a third of the population was bitterly hostile"

(McCracken 264). The nationalists[6] contested the parliamentary election, and refused to

act as the official opposition: "Since their aim was a united Ireland, since in other words

they aimed not at the overthrow of the government, but the destruction of the state, they

could not play the role of an opposition in the traditional parliamentary manner"

(McCracken 264). As a result, the unionists strengthened their control of the government

and were able "to appropriate loyalty and good citizenship to themselves and to use the

national flag as a party emblem" (McCracken 264-66). This meant that from 1921 until

the Troubles erupted in the late 1960s, Northern Ireland was under unbroken Unionist

rule. A majority of seats at nearly every general election were uncontested (McCracken

267). Any changes in Northern Irish society that might weaken Protestant domination

were quickly addressed by legislation. During World War II, for example, when workers

from the South came to Northern Ireland for jobs, they were required to register and carry

work permits: "the prime minister made it clear that they would not be allowed to remain

and become voters [declaring that] 'a unionist government must always be in power in

Northern Ireland'" (McCracken 269). Politically, the situation in Northern Ireland was

rigid and unchanging.

Indeed, it was civil rights, not politics, that arguably led to the eruption of

violence that became the Troubles. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association

(NICRA), formed in 1967, made no attempt to challenge the existence of the government.

It was interested in issues such as addressing job and housing discrimination against

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[6] While the terms Nationalist and Republican are often used interchangeably to refer to those who support a unified Ireland, the terms are not synonymous. Nationalists desire that the entire island of Ireland become an autonomous nation while maintaining ties to Great Britain and the monarchy. This was a position held by Home Rule advocates prior to the creation of the Republic of Ireland. Republicans on the other hand want all of Ireland to be a completely independent republic, completely severing all ties to Great Britain and the monarchy (Stokes).

Catholics (Whyte, "Ireland" 288). Ironically, the Troubles erupted largely because

Northern Ireland's prime minister agreed to reforms. In 1963, when Terence O'Neill took

over as prime minister, the situation he inherited was not a desirable one for Catholics.

Northern Ireland was two-thirds Protestant, and their overwhelming control of the

government meant that Catholics were very marginalized politically. Most of them could

not vote. Those that could often found their votes worth little because the Protestant

ruling class regularly altered voting districts to ensure Protestant majorities (Conroy 24).

In addition, while non-rate-paying Catholics couldn't vote, rate-paying property owners

were allowed up to six votes depending on the amount of properties they owned (Curtis

39). The few Catholics who were elected often declined to take their seats, continuing the

attitude of non-cooperation adopted by nationalists in 1921 by refusing to recognize

partition rather than working with the existing government. Catholics, then, had little

political representation. This had social and economic consequences: Catholics were

often denied work and housing simply for being Catholic. As Jennifer Curtis notes, "the

devolved political system supported and legitimated widespread discrimination against

the Catholic minority" (39). Without meaningful ways to advocate for themselves

politically, they often had little means of improving their economic plight.

Nevertheless when O'Neill took office, some reforms were already underway.

Catholics had finally been granted the right to higher education in Northern Ireland and

some welfare reforms were helping to improve housing. The liberal attitudes toward

Catholics that led to these changes were from a decidedly Protestant perspective,

however. O'Neill, for example, offered the following logic to explain his desire to

provide Catholics with more opportunities:

[I]f you give Roman Catholics a good job and a good house they will live

like Protestants because they will see neighbours with cars and television

sets; they will refuse to have eighteen children. But if a Roman Catholic is

jobless, and lives in the most ghastly hovel he will rear eighteen children

on National Assistance. If you treat Roman Catholics with due

consideration and kindness they will live like Protestants in spite of the

authoritative nature of their Church. (qtd. in Clarke, "History")

Thus, these reforms stemmed from the same attitudes which justified British colonialism

in the nineteenth century as a civilizing mission rather than from any enlightened

perspective that Catholics deserved to be fully equal participants in Northern Irish

society.

Yet even this type of thinking and the few reforms it sought were too radical for

many Protestant Loyalists. When Terence O'Neill met with the Irish prime minister – the

first time in forty years that the two prime ministers had met – he was roundly attacked

by his own people. The Reverend Ian Paisley led the charge against O'Neill's

conciliatory moves as part of his on-going crusade against any gesture of peace or

tolerance toward Catholics, a population which for Paisley was on a par with animals:

"They breed like rabbits and multiply like vermin" (qtd. in Hain). Paisley and others like

him used their pulpits to incite violence against both reformers and Catholics. Many

Catholics, disgusted by yet more heavy-handed treatment by the ruling Protestants, began

responding with violence. At the same time, the Provisional IRA[7] emerged and the

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[7] The original IRA or Irish Republican Army originated in 1919 and was the main Republican paramilitary group fighting to reunify Ireland and end British rule before the Troubles began in the late 1960s. In December 1969, the Provisional IRA established itself as a splinter group. The Dublin-based original IRA

movement for reunification of Ireland by any means – including violent – gained support. That violence was in turn used by Loyalist organizations like the Ulster Defense Association to justify more violence in retaliation.

The Troubles then have their roots in anger over civil rights violations and on-going colonization, in deep-seated religious prejudices, and in feelings of insecurity at the thought of losing power and in desires to gain it. By the end of the 1960s, O'Neill had resigned and killings had started on both sides. The levels of fear and distrust ran so high that few leaders on any side would talk to anyone on any other side, either because they refused to or because they feared reprisals from their own side if they did. All parties – English, Irish, Northern Irish, Loyalist,[8] Nationalist, Republican, Catholic, and Protestant – wanted to shape the future of Northern Ireland. They all desired a voice in determining its direction. But sadly, this desire within each group to gain control continually asserted itself in us vs. them dichotomies of Catholic vs. Protestant, Irish vs. British, and Loyalist vs. Republican vs. Nationalist. All parties appeared to seek a Northern Ireland where not only their desire for control would be met, but the opposing faction's ability to control anything would be eliminated.

In general, this is where the story of Northern Ireland remained from the late 1960s through the early 1990s. Prince and Warner trace the start of the violence to the first Derry civil rights march on October 5, 1968 when primarily Catholic protestors

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advocated pursuing peaceful channels while the Belfast-based Provisionals insisted that violence was necessary to protect the Northern Irish from abuses by Loyalists and the occupying British forces. The original or Official IRA declared a ceasefire in 1972, after which the Provisional IRA became known as the IRA. They are distinct from the real IRA (rIRA), a group formed in 1997 by dissidents from the IRA opposed to the peace process ("Abstracts").

[8] A Loyalist advocates maintaining union with Great Britain. Also called Unionists, they tend to be Protestant.

gathered as part of a growing movement to protest housing conditions.[9] While moderates in the group intended a peaceful march, radical elements sought violent confrontation. The result was three days of rioting and injury to approximately seventy people (Prince and Warner 98). By August of the following year, the government had deployed British troops to maintain peace – a move initially welcomed by Catholics, but one that soon contributed to the violence. Within three years, tensions had escalated to the point that British soldiers fired into a crowd in Derry, killing fourteen people on what became known as Bloody Sunday. By 1981, Northern Ireland had become a place steeped in such uncompromising sectarianism that when Bobby Sands and his fellow cellmates began a hunger strike to protest being treated as ordinary criminals rather than political prisoners, the British government allowed ten of them to starve to death rather than accede to any of their requests, requests that included items such as being permitted to wear their own clothes. The various factions reacted violently, taking even harder lines against each other through the 1980s. While some moves for peace were made in the latter part of that decade, it was not until the early 1990s and the 1994 ceasefire agreement by the Provisional IRA that any substantial progress toward peace was made.

The literature of Ireland written in English has often paralleled this history.[10] Seamus Deane contends that the inability of England to thoroughly conquer the Irish

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[9] The protests had begun in August, 1968, in County Tyrone, when Austin Currie, a Catholic MP, staged a sit-in at a residence allocated to a single Protestant woman by the local Housing Council despite the fact that much larger Catholic families had been on a waiting list for two years. Currie had already appealed the decision all the way to Stormont and been denied. His eviction from the property was televised, energizing Catholics across Northern Ireland to organize and protest poor housing (Dooley 45-50).

[10] The origin stories of Irish history and great sagas such as the Ulster Cycle make Irish literature "the oldest of European vernacular literatures" (Deane 12). Irish literature in Gaelic past and present offer stories that parallel Irish history. As someone who can neither speak nor read Gaelic, however, such texts are available to me solely in translation. Translations, no matter how well done, still filter a text: a translation is a secondary rather than a primary source text. For this reason, I have chosen to focus my literary analyses solely on texts written in English,

people meant that, from its beginnings prior to the Act of Union, Anglo-Irish literature

was "profoundly affected by a sense of insecurity and crisis" (Deane 31). According to

Deane, this led to Anglo-Irish writers vigorously attacking the corruption in the

establishment's managing of Irish affairs. Works such as Swift's "A Modest Proposal," a

1729 publication which famously satirized attitudes and policies toward Catholics, and

Maria Edgworth's *Castle Rackrent*, published in 1800, which presents life under the

absentee landlord system created by the seizures of Catholic lands, formed a literary

tradition which Deane perceives as:

> dominated by an ideal of a stable and traditional civilization and, to an
>
> equal extent by the experience of an unstable and undeveloped country. [. .
>
> .] The failure of political and economic circumstance, the failure of the
>
> English colonial mission in Ireland, is at the heart of the great Anglo-Irish
>
> enterprise in literature. (36)

For Deane, such writers attest to the fact that Anglo-Irish fiction and non-fiction were

"inescapably bound up with the increasingly partisan debate about the condition of

Ireland and the means of improving it" (90). As a result, the literature reflects the acts of

geographical positioning of the Anglo-Irish occurring in Ireland before 1800, with these

writers "redrawing earlier demarcations, correcting distinctions between 'ourselves' and

'them'" (Douglas 22). The authors were, then, using literature to examine the effects of

various and competing attempts at Anglo-Irish self-determination in relation to the Irish

and the English.

Irish literature in subsequent eras offers similar examples of authors exploring

different cultural identities which reflect real-world struggles for Irish self-determination.

Miranda Burgess contends that nineteenth century national tales were particularly popular in Ireland following the Acts of Union which took effect in 1801 and dissolved the Irish parliament. Their attraction waned following Catholic Emancipation in 1829 which allowed Catholics to sit in parliament. Their heyday in Ireland thus served to imagine and valorize Irish identity at a time when political self-determination was severely weakened. These national tales, which are "centrally concerned with definitions and descriptions of Ireland [. . . are] dialogical, reproducing diverse accents, vocabularies and sometimes languages [. . .] to provide an overview of a national community [. . .] continually in contact with representatives of other nations" (Burgess 39). Burgess offers Lady Morgan's *Wild Irish Girl*, published in 1806, as a typical example. In the novel, Horatio, an Englishman banished to Ireland by his father arrives with fully expecting the island to be a land of savages. His experiences teach him otherwise through lessons that "convey the complexity of Irish culture and the continuing vibrancy of its history" (Burgess 54).

Parallels like these between Irish literature and Irish history are on-going, offering countless examples for understanding formations of Ireland's cultural identities and the various battles for self-determination over time.[11] While such connections between literature and history are by no means unique to Ireland, Irish literature is particularly consistent in its tendency to employ literature as a tool for examining Irish identity, particularly in relation to other cultures.[12] As a colony of England, historically Ireland

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[11] A complete review of the vast number of texts that examine and reflect literary depictions of Ireland's competing cultural identities is beyond the scope of this study. The explorations of Irish identity begun by authors like Swift, Edgworth, and Morgan were followed by numerous texts in every age and continue to be produced today.

[12] Texts such as *Culture and Imperialism* by Edward Said explore how the English used literature to construct a national identity in the nineteenth century, but post-empire English literature tends to focus less on national traits. Similarly, Robert Fraser, in *Lifting the Sentence: A Poetics of Postcolonial Fiction,* shows the evolution of national literatures in colonial and post-colonial nations, contending that eventually

became the antithesis of England: "the English presented themselves to the world as controlled, refined and rooted; and so it suited them to find the Irish hot-headed, rude and nomadic, the perfect foil to set off their own virtues" (Kiberd *Inventing* 9). English literature enforced these conventions by consistently fixing "socially desirable, empowered space in metropolitan England or Europe and connect[ing] it by design, motive, and development to distant or peripheral worlds (Ireland, Venice, Africa, Jamaica) conceived of as desirable but subordinate" (Said 52). As Kiberd argues, much of Irish literature in English, beginning with Anglo-Irish literature, has focused on countering such stereotypes (*Inventing* 9).

In Northern Ireland, formations of cultural identity are particularly convoluted. Like the Republic, the Northern Irish have long contended with the cultural stereotypes imposed on the Irish by the British and the accompanying dilemma of how to define identity beyond the limited definition of Irishness as not-British.[13] Partition created an additional layer of complexity by distinguishing the Northern Irish from the Irish as well as the British, a difference that widened after 1968 when the Troubles began. In covering the history of Ireland from 1966-82, J.H. Whyte notes that although similarities between the two areas continued to exist, he writes "about Northern Ireland and the Republic as if they had two distinct histories [because] this largely corresponds with the realities" ("Ireland" 303).

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fully post-colonial nations produce transcultural literatures which focus on universal commonalities rather than on defining the nation. Fraser explicitly excludes Ireland from his discussion, however, contending that where Ireland fits in is an "unanswerable question" (9).

[13] Prior to 1968, both Irish and Northern Irish writers frequently explored the ongoing conflict between a more provincial and insular Catholic identity and a Protestant, more European-focused one, in some cases celebrating rural introversion (as in Walter Macken's novels of life in the west of Ireland) and in others (such as the writings of Francis Stuart and Samuel Beckett) displaying "an implicit critique of Ireland's failture to sustain its earlier engagement with the world at large" (Deane 216).

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Not surprisingly, much of the literature from Northern Ireland since the late 1960s has also developed characteristics which distinguish it from both Irish and British literature. This is particularly the case for Northern Irish novels about the Troubles. Since the beginning of the Troubles in the late 1960s through the 1980s, while various public intellectuals, poets, and playwrights wrote insightfully about the conflict, most of the novels emerging from and/or written about Northern Ireland fell into the genre known as Troubles fiction: stories that emphasize across-the-sectarian-divide love affairs (usually with tragic consequences) and tales of the unwilling and apolitical pushed to commit and/or become the victim of sectarian violence (again, usually with tragic consequences). Numerous critics have noted how these narratives depict a static, one-dimensional image of Northern Ireland as a site of personal and political trauma. Indeed, most Northern Irish novels generated through the 1980s about the Troubles tended to imagine Northern Ireland in the narrowest of terms: violent, sectarian, and unprogressive.

In tracing Troubles fiction back to its earliest incarnations in novels such as Liam O'Flaherty's *The Informer* (published in 1926) and F.L. Green's *Odd Man Out* (published in 1945), Elmer Kennedy-Andrews identifies a tendency by novelists prior to 1969 to explain the violence among Irish, Northern Irish, and British via a "displacement of the social and historical context, the refusal to engage with the political dimension of the struggle and the resort to a 'myth of atavism' [. . . i.e.,] to see the violence in the North as irrational, rather than the result of social and political conditions" ("The Novel" 240; 257). Characters tend to be depicted as victims of fate rather than active agents making informed choices. These tendencies continued not only in popular fiction, but also in serious Troubles novels after the conflict erupted in Northern Ireland in 1968.

Benedict Kiely, for example, published *Proxopera: A Tale of Modern Ireland* in 1977. In this novel, Mr. Binchey, a retired schoolteacher, is forced to become a proxy bomber while his family is held hostage. He recognizes some of the captors, but his outrage is due to their assault on his family and what his society has become. There is no sense of what circumstances motivate the violence. From Binchey's point of view,

> terrorists are simply 'animals', figures out of nightmare, the threatening
> 'other' who are ready to destroy all that Binchey holds most dear. [. . .]
> Terrorist violence is taken out of a political context and treated
> metaphysically, as the manifestation of evil and madness. [. . .] There is no
> attempt to analyze the motives of the terrorist. (Kennedy-Andrews, "The
> Novel" 243)

Despite being a history teacher, Binchey "appears to have no interest in or grasp of the political, economic and social factors that have led to the crisis in Northern Ireland" (Parker 9). As a result, the novel reinforces earlier characterizations of the Northern Irish as victims of fate unable to control or avoid the violence in their midst.

In *Cal* by Bernard MacLaverty, published in 1983, the eponymous character drives the getaway car in the murder of a Royal Ulster Constabulary officer, an act that leaves Cal in fear of Protestant retribution and generates particularly strong feelings of guilt when he begins an across-the-sectarian-divide love affair with the man's widow. Kennedy-Andrews argues convincingly that "by centring the love theme and emphasising the mood of fatalism, the novel inevitably marginalises political explanation" ("The Novel" 246). The narrative acknowledges the circumstances creating Catholic dissatisfaction against the Protestant-controlled state, but in so doing, Cal still emerges as

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a victim of fate: even though Cal may have been a reluctant participant in the violence, it was inevitable that he become involved. By presenting Cal's involvement as unavoidable, "MacLaverty excuses himself from serious investigation of political motivation and may even be accused of obscuring, rather than articulating, the issues which his novel purports to deal with" (Kennedy-Andrews, "The Novel" 246).

These works are typical of other 1970s and 1980s novels about Northern Ireland: they generally highlight the trauma caused by the Troubles without exploring its motivations (Bennett 202-3). As Eve Patten notes, such images reinforced "for an international readership a compulsive literary stereotype – that of the Irish writers defiantly extracting the lyrical moment from tragic inevitability" ("Fiction" 129). Novels about the Troubles again and again perpetuated fanatical sectarianism and poor-victim-caught-in-the-crossfire as the two tropes defining contemporary Northern Ireland.[14]

As a result, just as initial attempts at peace in the late 1980s were stymied by an inability of concerned parties to move beyond the conventional sectarian norms, so did artists who deviated from the norm in Troubles fiction to show more nuanced characterizations initially find themselves subject to "vicious and sustained" criticism (Bennett 202): "Even to ask why or how the bodies came to be there [was] treated as evidence of lack of compassion or, worse, support for terrorism" (Bennett 202). The conventional narrative focused on the violence as tragic, but did not address how individuals on one or both sides might be responsible for perpetuating the violence or that

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[14] This is not to say that all Northern Irish novels about the Troubles in the 1970s and 1980s failed to offer insight into the conflict. Both *Proxopera* and *Cal,* for example, despite their lack of attention to motivations for the violence, nevertheless provide important examinations of the emotional toll and complex relationships and rivalries created by the Troubles.

these individuals might have reasons beyond blind hatred for fighting. The novelist

Robert McLiam Wilson, one of the earliest writers to break the mold, experienced just

how deeply the expectations for these Northern Irish stereotypes ran after his work

appeared in the United States:

> In America my career is, frankly, disastrous. Almost no one reads my
>
> work there. I don't seem to be the right kind of Irishman for America.
>
> They seem to prefer their own version of Irish experience. *The New York*
>
> *Times* even informed me that I obviously didn't know Belfast very well. I
>
> live there." ("Ripley Bogle")

Prior to the 1990s, when it came to international success as a Northern Irish novelist,

"Nothing less than full and unequivocal affirmation of the standard conventions, it seems,

[would] do" (Bennett 202). The Troubles had identified Northern Ireland and its people

too closely with unthinking sectarian violence for the rest of the world to easily accept

any alternative depiction of the conflict or the people in it.

The changes wrought by the peace process beginning in the early 1990s offered

the Northern Irish a means of imagining a world beyond the Troubles, however. It also

marked a parallel evolution in how novelists treated the idea of Northern Ireland in their

narratives and how critics increasingly approved of writers who adopted "a much more

critical stance towards the ideologies that have shadowed their lives" (Harte and Parker

249) and created "an entirely new agenda for the genre of the novel" (Jeffers 1). These

new voices were particularly strong among a group of young Northern Irish novelists

who, along with their peers from the Republic of Ireland, employed the novel as a

cultural tool "to formulate narratives in which social, political and historical change could be accommodated" (Smyth 6).

This dissertation investigates how novels by three such Northern Irish authors – Glenn Patterson, Eoin McNamee, and Mary Costello – imagine Northern Irish culture and identity. I consider a novel by each author that appeared in the early 1990s when it seemed increasingly likely that the stagnation of entrenched sectarianism might finally break apart and allow for a new post-Troubles Northern Irish identity. While the peace process sought to ensure this post-Troubles future, these authors posited how the traditional sectarian roles of the Troubles could evolve.

Arguably, all narrative output offers tools for exploring identity, but I have chosen to focus on novels because they offer especially useful spaces for an analysis of Irish identity. In the 1990s, Ireland, both North and South, was in a state of flux. Northern Ireland was grappling with its peace process; the Republic of Ireland was experiencing the Celtic Tiger boom and the accompanying prosperity that wrought substantial lifestyle changes throughout the country. Writing in 1997, Gerry Smyth recognized the prevalence of the novel as a means of documenting these cultural changes when he declared that "the novel is becoming perhaps the pre-eminent Irish cultural form. [. . . Understood] less as a discrete literary genre than a particular way of engaging the world, Irish culture is in fact in the process of becoming a novel-driven discourse" (6). In other words, more than other narrative forms in this time period, in Ireland, North and South, the novel most closely reflects the cultural evolution of society.

This is the case of the three novels in this project – *Fat Lad* by Glenn Patterson, *Resurrection Man* by Eoin McNamee, and *Titanic Town* by Mary Costello – but it is

equally applicable to other Northern Irish novels published around the same time. Patterson, McNamee, and Costello are part of the wave of authors who first countered the Troubles fiction formula, creating works that actively imagine a Northern Ireland which holds more than the usual sectarian violence. In narrowing my analysis to Patterson, McNamee and Costello, I have by necessity ignored many novels that are equally valuable for understanding the cultural evolution of Northern Irish identity. Robert McLiam Wilson's *Eureka Street*, for example, explores a friendship between a Catholic and a Protestant. Far from celebrating either culture, McLiam Wilson satirizes both, mocking Gaelic language fanatics as well as Protestant graffiti artists. The text serves to cynically identify and undermine the politics underlying the conflict at the same it recognizes the serious effects such politics have on everyday life in Belfast. *Eureka Street,* however, focuses on the contemporary. While McLiam Wilson provides some background on the characters' childhoods, the novel primarily explores life in 1990s Belfast. Deirdre Madden's *One by One in the Darkness,* though lacking in satire, is similar in its emphasis on contemporary life. While the novel offers selected childhood memories, the main focus is on coping in the present day. In contrast, *Fat Lad, Resurrection Man,* and *Titanic Town* all trace the lives of the main characters from a young age in much more detail, exploring each child's exposure to sectarianism and different ways of responding to it.

Like *Fat Lad, Resurrection Man,* and *Titanic Town,* David Park's *The Healing* examines the impact of the Troubles on a young child, Samuel, who witnesses his father's execution, and certainly explores his exposure to sectarianism and the responses to it particularly through Sam's elderly neighbor, a man torn between his faith that God

will punish killers on both sides and his decision to stop the killings himself by murdering his own son. The novel highlights the complexity of reconciling religious and national identities, but it focuses solely on the brief period of time following the death of Samuel's father. *Fat Lad, Resurrection Man,* and *Titanic Town,* on the other hand, explore not only their characters' childhood identities, but also the identities those characters assume as adults. My focus then is a focus on novels which include elements of *bildungsroman* in the sense that each of the novels traces the characters "from youth to experience" (Morner and Rausch 22).

In making this choice, I have consciously chosen authors whose own trajectory from child to adulthood was spent all or in part in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. Patterson, McNamee, and Costello were all born in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Northern Ireland. Having themselves grown to adulthood in the midst of the conflict, they and their Northern Irish peers tend to offer a more nuanced picture of daily life in Northern Ireland than earlier Troubles fiction writers. As Colin Bateman, another Northern Irish novelist who emerged in the early 1990s, notes, the problem with most previous novels about the Troubles is that they have "invariably been written by visiting mainland journalists, who perhaps got most of their facts right, but never quite captured the atmosphere or the sarcasm" (12). Lionel Shriver, an American novelist who spent ten years living in Belfast, echoes Bateman's critique in her definition of a Troubles Writer as "A known subspecies in the North almost always of foreign extraction. [. . .] Gets everything wrong with feeling" (422). Works by writers like Patterson, McNamee, and Costello do more than merely capture the violence, they also detail the atmosphere and the culture from which the violence emerges. By selecting only texts from among this

generation of writers that center on protagonists growing to adulthood during the Troubles, my study is able to examine how different cultural identities emerge. The main characters in all three novels must learn to decipher and choose which particular Northern Irish identities to adopt as their own even as those identities shift amid an increasingly violent society.

By engaging in close readings of *Fat Lad, Resurrection Man*, and *Titanic Town,* I hope to provide useful insights into understanding the construction of national and other cultural identities in Northern Ireland. Such insights can in turn offer evidence of the usefulness of such analysis for recognizing that Northern Irish identity did indeed undergo a shift in the early 1990s and to show how writers such as Patterson, McNamee, and Costello document that shift.

My second chapter explores *Fat Lad* by Glenn Patterson. In this novel, a Northern Irish expatriate who left a Belfast consumed by full-blown sectarian conflict returns and attempts to make a life in the new, commercially focused Belfast, a world that appears more in line with his own desires to move beyond sectarian Northern Irish identity than the city he left behind years earlier. Chapter three analyzes *Resurrection Man* by Eoin McNamee, a fictionalized rendering of the life of the leader of the Shankill Butchers, a group of Ulster Loyalists operating in Belfast in the late 1970s and early 1980s who are believed responsible for the deaths of at least twenty-three people. This novel explores the cultural underpinnings of the gunman identity including how the culture made such an identity first desirable and then questionable as the Troubles progressed. In chapter four, I focus on Mary Costello's *Titanic Town* which traces the coming of age of a Catholic working class girl. *Titanic Town* presents the various options available for

women in Northern Ireland and considers how the Troubles both expanded and contracted female roles.

As the concluding chapter explains, these three texts represent a diversity of perspectives on Northern Ireland: Protestant and Catholic, sectarian and neutral, male and female. My intention is to establish how such works confirm uniquely Northern Irish notions of identity that belie the unthinking sectarianism in earlier novels set in the Troubles.

Chapter Two:

Imagined Possibilities: Evolutions of Northern Irish Identity

in Glenn Patterson's *Fat Lad*

As the peace process in Northern Ireland in the early 1990s offered Northern Irish

society the chance to break free of the sectarianism that dominated the 1970s and 1980s,

so did novelists begin to offer readers new ways to think of the simplistic identity the

Troubles had created for Northern Ireland. One writer recognized by critics as seeking

"new images of Northern Irish society which allow for complex rather than essentialist

representation" (Patten, "Fiction" 144) is Glenn Patterson.

Born in Belfast in 1961, Patterson grew up in a working class family living on a

Protestant estate. Although he participated in Orange Marches[15] as a teen, he eventually

sought escape from the increasing sectarian violence by pursuing higher education in

England (Hicks 106). He moved back to Belfast in 1988 and continues to reside there. To

date, he has published ten novels, all of which take place in Northern Ireland and/or

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[15] Every July 12, members of the Orange Order and Protestant loyalists march in Northern Ireland to
celebrate the victory of the Protestant William of Orange over the Catholic James 1 in 1690 at the Battle of
the Boyne. Because their routes frequently go near or through Catholic areas, the marches often led to riots
and the use of paramilitary force during the Troubles.

include Northern Irish characters. Patterson's non-fiction writing includes many personal reflections in which he grapples with the possibilities and limitations of Northern Irish identity, particularly his own identity as a Northern Irish Protestant (or lapsed Protestant as he refers to himself).[16] Patterson's work reflects the influence of earlier Belfast-born writers such as the poets John Hewitt and Louise MacNiece who "gave the lie to the idea that there was only *one* kind of Protestant experience" (Patterson qtd. in Hicks 108). He explains that, behind his questioning of Northern Irish stereotypes and the traditional Unionist/Nationalist, Loyalist/Republican, Catholic/Protestant dichotomies "is the idea that all of these divisive philosophies are works of collective fiction that we have bought into or sold ourselves" (qtd. in Hicks 108). For Patterson, the Belfast of his childhood often emphasized the narrative that his was "a society characterized – in fiction as in everyday speech – as morbidly immutable; yet there was another equally valid reading which said that, quite the reverse, change was in fact the society's only constant. [. . .] Small movements in [political] circles, we knew, [. . .] could lead to enormous upheaval on our streets" ("I am" 151).

His second novel, *Fat Lad*, published in 1992, explores this notion. It follows the central character, Drew Linden, on a physical and psychological search for identity away from and back to Belfast. Having happily left Northern Ireland for England in his student days, Drew finds himself choosing to return to Belfast in order to advance in his career. Through Drew, as the member of the Linden family least accepting of both the physical

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[16] For example, in "I am one of the people…" Patterson recognizes his identity as a citizen in the European Union; as one of the many who emigrated from Ireland, but also as one who returned; as one who has chosen to carry a British rather than an Irish passport, but who nevertheless avoids using politically-laden terms Ulster to refer to his home (*Lapsed* 9-10).

surroundings and the identity Northern Ireland offers him, Patterson shows Northern Irish

identity not as immutable but in a state of ongoing change. While Patterson references the

Troubles periodically, the majority of Drew's life in Belfast on his return is peaceful – the

quotidian world of any mid-level retail manager on the rise. Drew's memories of old

Belfast include moments when the Troubles touched his life, but the cosmopolitan

Belfast he's helping to build initially appears immune to the conflict. This peace allows

Drew to determinedly reject the traditional Northern Irish identity, even as his search to

redefine himself in relation to Northern Ireland shows how inextricably that tradition is

part of his personal and cultural identity.

Fat Lad has been celebrated by many critics as a novel that offers a new reading

of Northern Irish culture, one that moves Northern Irish literature "beyond regional limits

[and relates] the Belfast experience to that of other urban environments" (Bovone 16).

Because Patterson depicts Belfast as a changing city and shows Drew changing as well,

many readers agree that Drew's story achieves Patterson's own desire to find a

"liberating potential" in the social changes generated by the Troubles, one where

"Identity becomes dynamic, rather than birth-given and static" (Patterson, "I am" 151).

The novel's non-linear style supports a sense that one's birth-given cultural

identity is thoroughly entwined with the present as Patterson constantly interjects

descriptions of childhood memories and family lore into present day events. At least one

reviewer critiqued Patterson's tendency to move about in time as a flaw that "over-

freight[s] the narrative" (Craig 25). Such juxtapositions are essential, however, to

understanding the evolution of Drew's identity and how much both the distant and recent

past cast a shadow on contemporary life in Northern Ireland. By interweaving references

to Northern Irish history and culture with the stories of Drew's life from his birth well into the 1980s, Patterson reveals a struggle to create a Northern Irish identity that both incorporates and moves beyond the past.

The complexity of the novel's structure, however, does not lend itself easily to a linear discussion of Drew's development. It is, therefore, be clearer to explore Drew's growth in chronological order rather than to follow the original narrative's complex organization of layered flashbacks. For example, the novel itself begins with a memory from Drew's college days that is based on a memory from his childhood. Both these memories occur to him in present day as his plane approaches Northern Ireland. While this use of layered memories arguably has a valuable effect in introducing Drew as a character caught in a moment where his past meets his present, considering these memories in the order each occurred in Drew's life is more fruitful for identifying the significance of these events in developing his Northern Irishness.

Drew's identity is influenced by Northern Ireland before his actual birth. His mother's only condition for accepting his father's marriage proposal was that they leave Ireland. But his grandfather Ernie becomes haunted by the fear that the family name will die out and writes to his son, Jack, to come home from England and have a son: "I'm dying, and if our Jack dies without a son, then that's it, the name dies with him" (Patterson, *Fat Lad*, 161).[17] His wife's arguments that there are plenty of Lindens elsewhere aren't effective because for Ernie "here's the only place the names count" (161). Stuck abroad when his father dies, Jack recognizes that "It's no way to live, a blinking sea between you and your family [. . .]. Within weeks of the funeral he had

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[17] All subsequent quotations of Glenn Patterson will be from *Fat Lad* unless otherwise noted.

fetched Lily [his wife] and the wee girl [Drew's sister, Ellen] over home with him" (161). When Lily becomes pregnant almost immediately, Jack "read it as a sign he had made the right decision" (161). Drew's birth justifies his father and grandfather's belief in the need for the family to maintain their Northern Irish roots and identity.

Reinforcing this connection to Northern Irish culture is Drew's name: "They called him Andrew Terence" (145) to recognize that Drew's birth on March 25, 1963 coincided with Terence O'Neill becoming prime minister of Northern Ireland: Jack "decided he'd give the baby Terence as a middle name to celebrate new beginnings" (145). Naming Drew for O'Neill and paralleling his conception and birth with O'Neill's rise to power makes Drew seem analogous to new beginnings – he will be the child that preserves and reveres the family history; his will be the generation that will see less sectarianism and more peace. Neither Drew nor O'Neill, however, fulfill the hopes they engendered. Far from working toward a better life in Northern Ireland, Drew leaves for England as soon as he's able. Although O'Neill remained in office until April, 1969, he not only was unable to reduce sectarianism, under his administration it increased, leading to the break out of the Troubles in 1968 (McCall 40-42).

Drew's childhood appears roughly analogous to the state of Northern Ireland in the sense that as peace in Northern Ireland deteriorates during the six years of O'Neill's administration, so does the joy at Drew's birth give way to abuse and violence. Jack had initially blossomed on his return to Belfast. His daughter, Ellen, remembers:

> Walking, like singing and eating seaweed, was something else her father
> hadn't shown much interest in before coming here [. . .]. In Belfast he set
> out alone every Sunday afternoon to walk his dinner off in the hills [. . .].

There's no comparison, he said. You know you've been somewhere when

you've been walking in the mountains. (34-35)

For Jack in the first years following his return, Belfast and Northern Ireland are better

than England, but the arrival of British soldiers in 1969 changes Northern Ireland: "Drew

was six when the walks in the mountains stopped. One week he and his father went out as

usual after Sunday dinner, the next week they didn't. In between times the soldiers came"

(114). As the Troubles move closer to home in the form of a random bullet piercing the

neighbors' downstairs window, Drew's father begins to beat and verbally abuse him, an

event Patterson describes against the backdrop of *Newsroom* relaying the story of the

latest violence in Belfast (112). The abuse only occurs when the two are home alone, and

Drew's environment teaches him not to tell: crawling to the window after one beating, he

remembers the warning appearing on walls throughout Belfast: "Touts beware! Informers

will be shot" (113).

Drew's childhood identity, then, becomes one of victim, but in Northern Ireland,

victimizers like Drew's father can easily become victimized themselves. Unable to

breach the British security to move about freely and desperate for work, Jack is lifted by

the Ulster Defense Association (UDA), a loyalist paramilitary group, for being a scab – a

sin most of the men in the neighborhood have committed. In detailing the small and large

humiliations Jack faces outside the home – from not being able to go where he pleases to

being attacked by the UDA in front of his son – Patterson adds a layer of complexity to

his character. Jack's abuse of Drew is, without question, wrong, but this scene offers a

glimpse of what's causing him to lash out. Belfast has become a world of frustrated

bullies and Jack is part of that world, trying to grab a little sense of power and control.

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Jack, as much as Drew, may be seen as a victim of forces beyond his control. Without the tools to cope with the attacks on his identity as a provider, his reaction is merely to duplicate the oppression he himself experiences: attack a weaker target to flex his own strength and vent his own fears and frustrations. At this point, the Troubles have defined both Jack's and Drew's identities, eroding visions of them as progressive and peaceful into stereotypes born of abuse and violence.

Unlike Jack, however, Drew begins to emerge from his identity as hapless victim of circumstance when he realizes that it was just bad luck that led to Jack being picked up and humiliated by the UDA in the street:

> Luck was not a factor that had previously figured in Drew's calculations of responsibility. Introducing it now had the transforming power of the final tenth clocked up on a milometer brimming with nines: simple, but profound, nullifying the mine, mine, mine, mine, mine, mine of the previous three years' assumed guilt and translating the bullet that had started it all, by ripping through the Russells' downstairs windows, into a chance in a million stray. He must have been thick not to have seen it for what it was at the time. [. . .] As thick, in fact, as an Irishman. The whole world knew the Irish were thick [. . .]. So they would have loved the one about the eleven-year-old Irish boy who blamed himself for his father beating him up [. . .], blamed himself, moreover, for the deaths of upwards of one thousand people in indiscriminate bombings and random shootings in all corners of the country [. . .]. From that moment forward Drew begin

to dissociate himself [. . .], till one day, [. . .he] departed, vowing never to

return. (126-27).

Drew recognizes that who he is – victim of violence, Northern Irish Protestant, son of a

scab, grandson of a loyalist gunrunner in the 1920s – is simply the result of luck or fate.

But rather than embrace what is a fairly typical personal history for this place and time as

part of the tragic inevitability of being Northern Irish – as many other authors have –

Patterson presents Drew rejecting this identity. If Drew's personal history is merely the

result of chance, then arguably it need not define him if he chooses not to let it do so. By

dissociating himself first psychologically and then physically from these common

Northern Irish identities, he convinces himself that he can reject these identities and,

unlike his father, create a new one, devoid of sectarianism and violence.

To accomplish this, Drew adopts a cynical attitude toward Belfast society, past

and present. As a patron of Finney's bar in the spring and summer of his last year at

school, Drew ponders the old-timers who determinedly never refer to the place "as

Finney's, preferring instead the name on the side of the ship whose black and white

photograph hung in an oak frame behind the bar: the Titanic" (45). The ship represents

the greatness of Northern Ireland's ship-building industry. Drew's grandfather worked on

the vessel and "its name was spoken with reverence in the house long after his death; by

Drew himself before that last summer in Belfast" (46). But on Drew's last evening in

Finney's before leaving for university, the wheel of a Saracen, the armored personnel

carriers used by the British army, crashes through the bar, shattering the mirror behind it,

and scattering the photograph and other accumulated Titanic memorabilia. Drew is left

"contemplating, as though for the first time, a single incontrovertible fact: the fucking

thing sank. Where else, he had thought, but here could failure be so revered?" (46). At this point, Drew's vision of Northern Ireland matches the wholly negative stereotype of Belfast as a violent place caught in a falsely idealized past. Taken home by the police from the bar after the Saracen wheel destroys it, the drunken Drew is violently ill as much from alcohol as disgust at the world he lives in:

> That's one sick wee boy you have there, [the policeman] said. The day before a man had starved himself to death in a jail ten miles to the south of where they stood. That same night, four miles to the north, another man, caught up in the obligatory obsequial riot, was crushed to death in his car by the shed wheel of a crashed army Saracen. Fucking right their wee boy was sick. (135)

Far from aligning himself with this culture or its identity, Drew is repelled by it.

To emphasize this point, a few weeks later, in England, Drew combines his disgust at Northern Ireland's enshrinement of the Titanic with mockery of a defining moment in Irish history with his drunken portrayal of Pádraig Pearse launching the 1916 Easter Rising: "barefooted, trousers rolled, [Drew] had waded into a fountain on an English university campus and acted out [his] vision […of Pearse] delivering the Proclamation of the Republic from the deck of a foundering Belfast-built ship. Irishglug and Irishgurgle: In the glug of Glug and the gurgle gurgle gurgle" (46).[18] The moment is "a cathartic douching" which supposedly leaves Drew "de-Irished" (128). Drew

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[18] The Proclamation of the Republic, read by Pádraig Pearse outside the General Post Office in 1916, claimed Ireland's independence from England and marked the beginning of the Easter Rising (Kee 548-49). The proclamation begins: "Irishmen and Irishwomen: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom."

summarily rejects his Irishness by publicly disdaining Irish history and the cultural

identity and pride drawn from it.

Yet, living in England, Drew cannot escape his Irish identity. The Belfast accent

that his sister fought against acquiring on their return from England becomes, in England,

"a stigma turned distinction" (1), providing Drew a way to attract women. For someone

who has sought to dissociate himself from Northern Ireland, Drew quickly assumes that

identity to lose his virginity and is "amazed at how easy it was [. . .] to make the little

betrayal in pursuit of success" (1). But Drew continues to reject Northern Irish culture.

Within a few weeks of arriving in England, Drew has "fallen in with the Ex-Pats, a group

of jaundiced exiles, sworn to renounce their birthplace and all its works" (1). In a further

step away from the sectarian world he left behind, Protestant Drew befriends Hugh

McManus, "the son of Belfast's foremost Catholic solicitors" (2). Ironically, however, it

is Drew's superior knowledge of Northern Ireland that now allows him to stereotype

others as unaware of the true situation. With Hugh, Drew mocks those in England who

naively perceive Northern Ireland as a distant land of sectarian violence – the language

student from Leicester who sends Drew a Christmas card in Belfast with airmail postage

is, for Drew, "no more ludicrous [. . .] than the posturings of the earnest boys [. . . with]

armfuls of Troops Out papers, bellowing in their best Home Counties accents: -- Support

the revolution in Ireland!" (2). These outsiders don't know the real story like Drew, a

born and bred Northern Irishman, does.

And so, Drew's desire to dissociate himself from Northern Ireland is greater than

his ability to do so. Through personal journal writings, Drew recognizes the conflict in

attempting to be both British yet Irish, non-sectarian yet loyal to one's past, someone who

despises Northern Ireland yet uses that identity to his advantage when it suits him: "Duplicity is the Northern Irish vice. We are always (at least) two people and always false to (at least) one of them" (214). His journals in England reveal a "constant preoccupation with Over There" (215), that is, Northern Ireland. Much as he wants to be something more than the stereotypical sectarian choices of "ardent republicans and staunch loyalists" (215) and assume a more cosmopolitan, expatriate identity, his English girlfriend, Melanie, suspects that "this pose of ironic detachment only masked an obsession with origins as unsound in its way as anything the extremists in all their blinkered bigotry could conjure up" (216).

The introduction of Hugh McManus introduces an across-the-sectarian-divide element to the novel that demonstrates that Drew is not alone in his inability to de-Irish himself. Hugh is the Catholic counterpart to Drew: "They had both been named, one overtly, the other discreetly, after O'Neills. Terence and Hugh, the tergiversating two, Unionist turncoat and fleeing earl; a reluctant reformer and a grudging Gael" (129). Just as Drew's namesake, Terence O'Neill, began well but in the end became a leader whose actions ended hopes for peace in Northern Ireland, so did Hugh O'Neill destroy hopes for freedom from England.[19] Drew's friend Hugh reviews the significance of the O'Neills in Irish history with a telling of the origin of the Red Hand of Ulster, "one of the only emblems in Northern Ireland used by both [Catholic and Protestant] communities" ("Symbols"). The story emphasizes the disdain these O'Neill namesakes have for their Irish history:

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[19] Though initially successful in defying Queen Elizabeth I, O'Neill's surrender to the English is often considered the end of the great chieftains. His flight from Ireland, along with 100 other Irish lords, led to King James I's settlement of sympathetic English and Scots on their abandoned lands (Massie 96-7).

The O'Neills, at one time, were Ulster, descendants of the fabled ur-Nial who, in a two-boat, winner-takes-all race for the Ulster shore, laid claim to the prize by lopping off his right hand and hurling it on to the beach, and who, said Hugh, in preferring to mutilate himself rather than concede what he coveted to his rival, set the tone for all the Province's subsequent history. [. . .] – The most poignant aspect of Nial's story, though, Hugh went on, is that by the very nature of his triumph he doomed himself to a future of doubt about his ability to defend what he had won. Bloodshed in pursuit of land is only half his legacy, insecurity in possession is the other. (129)

Far from feeling pride in Irish heroes, Drew and his expatriate peers recognize how unquestioning worship of icons like Nial has stunted Northern Ireland.

And so, Drew is never able to achieve a new cultural identity in England. He repeatedly rejects his Irishness, but his attempts to assume a new cultural identity fail. His girlfriend, Melanie, for example, sees Drew in England as comparable to a photograph of a car resting on its head in a field in Northern Ireland, blown there by a fertilizer bomb: "That was Drew for her, a piece of debris, blasted out of his natural orbit, always incongruous elsewhere. And that was why he could never leave it [Northern Ireland] alone. He would deny that, of course, but it was true" (8). Even as Drew claims to reject his Northern Irish identity, it continues to define him.

Patterson further emphasizes how perceptions regarding cultural identity define the Northern Irish abroad with his inclusion of an additional tale of a Linden family member attempting to live outside Northern Ireland with results comparable to Drew's.

At age 17, Drew's sister, Ellen visits Canada and considers emigrating there, but is put off by the over-simplified, uncritical perspectives toward Northern Ireland she encounters – from "What's wrong you guys can't sort out your problems and live together? [to] So how come you fight all the time?" (264). When her childhood friend from England responds to the Birmingham pub bombings[20] with a single line to Ellen of "How could you?" Ellen's reply summarizes a common Northern Irish point of view: "How could you not ask until now?" (265). Ellen by no means favors either side in the Troubles. When an Irish lover confesses he's in Canada buying guns for the UVF, she is unimpressed: "What do you expect me to do? Clap?" (263). Like Drew in his student days in England, how others perceive her Northern Irishness reveal the one-dimensionality of outsiders' impressions of the region.

Ultimately, Ellen, Hugh, and Drew are unable to maintain their distance from Northern Ireland and experience somewhat predictable Northern Irish fates: Hugh becomes the victim of sectarian hatred and Drew and Ellen follow the well-trodden path of the returning emigrant: he with reluctance; she with relief. Hugh successfully defends a Liverpool priest accused of plotting to assassinate the Environment Secretary. The British tabloids begin a campaign of gossip against him based on allusions to negative Irish stereotypes: "a cousin interned in 1971, a family holiday cottage across the border in Donegal, an area long known to security chiefs in N. Ireland as a haven for Republican terrorists" (220). Eventually, he is shot at the base of the skull by a gunman "In the middle of the street – in the middle of London – in broad daylight" (230) in an execution

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[20] On November 21, 1974, bombs detonated in two pubs in downtown Birmingham, England, killing 21 and injuring more than 180. Although no organization ever admitted responsibility for them, popular opinion connected the violence to the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

so stereotypical of those in the Troubles that "Witnesses would testify how they had thought at first the whole thing was being staged and how their instinctive reaction was to look round for the cameras" (230). A year later, Drew fulfills his grandmother's prediction that he would return to Northern Ireland: "For every leaving a returning, as his Granny Linden had said, with all the conviction with which other people say the sun rises in the east and sets in the west [. . .]: I've never seen one leave that didn't come back" (46-7). Ellen's absence is the shortest of the three: she opts not to settle in Canada having woken up

> one night towards the end of her holiday [. . .] feeling scared and lonely
> and confused. It was something outside. She listened hard [. . .] then
> realised that what something was was actually nothing. It sounded as if the
> world had been switched off [. . .] The sky was vast and void. She felt
> adrift in its empty silence. She missed the helicopters' familiar, nagging
> chatter. She missed home. (265)

But, like Drew, Ellen is not fully content with the roles available to her which in her case are limited to Belfast wife and mother: "She would never have believed herself at seventeen that she could have ended up here, like this" (267). Despite their efforts at developing a different path for themselves, none of these characters are able to avoid assuming typical Northern Irish roles.

Nevertheless, Drew's fate is less stereotypical than the others'. Unlike Ellen, his impetus for returning to Belfast is purely economic, rather than sentimental. He's been promoted to assistant manager of the new Belfast location of a global bookstore chain, generically dubbed Bookstore. His goal is to stay "only a year" (4) and use the stint in

Belfast to land a management post on the continent. His return also offers a vision of Northern Ireland rarely seen in novels before the 1990s. To his surprise he discovers that, far from being the isolated, stagnant entity he remembers, Northern Ireland – or at least downtown Belfast – is a place reaching beyond regional limits, a fertile land for international investment:

> The Belfast he left [. . .] was a city dying on its feet: cratered sites and hunger strikes; atrophied, self-abased. But the Belfast he had heard reports of this past while, the Belfast he had seen with his own eyes last month, was a city in the process of recasting itself entirely. The army had long since departed from the Grand Central Hotel, on whose leveled remains an even grander shopping complex was nearing completion. (4)

As consumers in this bustling commerce site, the Belfast residents imagined by Patterson have begun focusing on being citizens of the world and part of the global marketplace rather than provincial and sectarian.

Critics have noted that Patterson's fictional rendering of the city serves as an important vehicle for imagining a new Northern Irish society: "Patterson's portrait of Belfast as a huge contemporary UK shopping-centre serves a dual function: the documentation of faceless anonymity to which 'identity' has been reduced and the erosion of the familiar fictional image of a blasted city upon which a previous generation relies with a kind of perverse romanticism" (Patten, "Fiction" 143). Belfast, in becoming a generic global marketplace, can move beyond the negative stereotypes generated by its conflicted past (Kirkland, "Bourgeois" 226; Bovone 16). By extension, its people, freed of these stereotypes, may be more anonymous and therefore more easily integrated into

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the U.K. and Europe. As Richard Kirkland argues, "If Belfast used to function under a sign of perpetually missed opportunity, it now [. . .] operates within a specious internationalism which questions perhaps the most important affective myth of its inhabitants: that Belfast is a place apart" (Kirkland, *Literature*, 49).

For Drew then, as one subject to this myth, it appears that the Northern Ireland he disparaged and sought to disassociate himself from may no longer exist. As a result, the identity he created for himself as an Irish expatriate requires redefinition. What is this new Northern Ireland and who might Drew be in it? How can he reconcile his deep-seated convictions about Northern Ireland as a one-dimensional, provincial, sectarian, and violent place with a more peaceful and prosperous Belfast? Drew slowly adapts to life in Belfast, but in the process he is constantly haunted by his memories of life in the old Belfast.

For example, Drew arrives in Belfast determined not to feel the traditional Irish sentimentality of his father and grandfather for his homeland. He critically rejects an old man's tearful memories of Belfast's coast on the drive in from the airport: "God spare me this old man's double vision, he prayed. What is is all" (6). His own evaluation of the landscape is cynical. Gazing at the Antrim hills, he scoffs at remembered wisdom: "When you can't see Black Mountain, it means it's raining; when you can, it means it's going to rain. A Belfast proverb. Bum-bumping philosophy. Not so much spoken and heard as transmitted from bone to bone, ground into him [. . . .] – Fuck it, Drew said" (40). When his sister tells him "—Good to see you home," he silently questions her assumption: "Home? Drew thought, but said nothing" (20). He appears to adopt the attitude his mother adopted and maintained after being forced back to Belfast: "Hers [. . .]

was not a physical deterioration [. . .] but something much more intangible and much more appalling. A complete loss of interest" (267).

Soon after returning to Belfast, however, Drew finds himself captured by the view at Donegal Quay. He imagines the pull of the river and pauses to watch as

> on the face of one of the mountains of scrap metal on the far side of the river [. . .] the figure of a man, his clothes, face and hair of a colour with the heap [. . .] gradually detached itself and stood for a moment at the summit, shouldering the skeleton of a wheel, silhouetted in a raised fist [. . .]. Then the figure began to descend the opposite side, merging by degrees with the rusting mound, so that in the end the fist's rise and fall might have been no more than the molecular flexing of an enormous listless organism" (41).

The scene builds a strong image of the man as an intricate part of his environment: the people of Belfast blending with Belfast itself. The contrast to the description of Drew, who in England seemed so out of his natural orbit, is stark. Here, he sees people belonging.

Drew, too, increasingly seems to fit in. While he continues to feel at odds with his childhood and approaches visits with his family as a painful chore, he clearly desires to be a success in the new Belfast. He studiously learns the names of his employees because "people warmed to someone who took the trouble to remember their name" (13). He considers "how quickly he could strike a rapport with them all" (15). In one of his few overt attempts to visit his old life, he returns to Finney's and happily discovers that, like him, it has become more worldly: it has been renovated into jazzbo brown's – an

American style bar that reflects the new cosmopolitan Belfast with its selection of

bourbons "of which there were as many varieties on display as there were Irish whiskeys"

(48). Certainly, at work, Drew's attempts to fit in are something of a failure:

> at one stage he had tried to put into operation a plan, much favoured he
>
> knew, by management in branches across the water, to have everyone
>
> round to his flat for dinner: three at a time [. . .] But the first week two of
>
> the three guests phoned him with last-minute excuses and he dined alone
>
> that night with [his boss] – Bosses are still bosses here [. . .] Staff don't
>
> mind working with you, but they don't expect to have to like you as well"
>
> (43).

Jazzbo's, however, offers him evidence that, while his work culture may not be as

continental as he'd like, promising changes are afoot in Belfast. The bouncer at the door

whom Drew knew in his old Belfast life as "Ralph Tibbs, [. . .] a great beanpole

skinhead" informs Drew that the members of his old skinhead crowd are "away away. [. .

.] Involved" (53-54). The violent and bigoted youths Drew remembers are gone from

Belfast, apparently jailed for their involvement in the Troubles. Ralph, who was

"tolerated rather than accepted by the other skins" (53) has evolved in the new Belfast

into a nicely suited working man, married with a son. Drew's visit to jazzbo's also

introduces another character, Kay Morris, who exemplifies the new Belfast. Aside from

four years in Glasgow for design school, she has lived, apparently happily, in Northern

Ireland. As a director of a design company, Kay is literally helping to redevelop Belfast.

Ralph and Kay offer evidence that normal working lives are not only possible but

enjoyable in Northern Ireland. They model a Northern Irish identity focused on

commerce and development, solidly anchored in Belfast, but well apart from the boys whom Ralph remembers as "bad news" (53).

With Kay, Drew demonstrates his first signs of excitement and positive energy towards Belfast and a desire to share this identity. She shows Drew a photo of Belfast in Edwardian times that includes the location of his bookstore. They spend several moments eagerly pointing out to each other interesting features: "—See the old trams? Kay said. Drew saw them. – See the gunmaker's? he said, joining in. See the gas lamps? There were two index fingers crawling over the page now [. . .]. See this? See this?" (56). Later, as Kay sleeps, he studies the photo more closely:

> Above the window of what had since become the Bookstore sports
> section, to the right of the proprietor's name, the words Castle Buildings,
> were clearly visible. Drew tried them over in his head a few times, on their
> own and in combination with other words [. . . .]So it was that [. . .] Drew
> Linden [. . .] delivered himself of an address [. . .] as solid as it was
> symmetrical, as economical as it was extravagant in its expropriation of
> tradition: Bookstore, Castle Buildings, Castle Place, Belfast. (61)

Drew, so long at odds with the history of Belfast, seizes this image of a pre-1916 Belfast and sells it to Bookstore's delighted owners who embrace it as "the ideal way to consolidate the company's position in the city at the time as stealing a little of their threatened rivals' thunder. Bookstore would out-castle all comers" (65). At a time when Bookstore's competition in Belfast focuses on "English aristocrats, with Oxford and Cambridge pedigrees and City of London clout," the naming imposes on Bookstore a particularly Northern Irish identity: "Castles, you might say, [. . .] were very much in the

Belfast air that spring, with Royal Avenue now resurfaced as far as North Street in readiness for the grand opening of the Castlecourt shopping centre" (65).

This moment reinforces the shift Patterson makes from earlier Northern Irish novels that focused on the Troubles' as a persistent and integral aspect of daily life. Drew has been and remains completely apolitical. He has come to Belfast for his career, not out of any political or national feeling. He embraces the photo of Belfast history not to glorify a sectarian past but to further his career. Drew's embrace of the Castle Place photo reflects a marked shift in his attitudes about Northern Ireland and a desire to assume his place within it not as a victim but as an agent of positive change anchored in a pre-Troubles past. Castle Place's history is a source of pride and professional advancement for him. This history is not the stereotypical Northern Ireland highlighted in the media throughout Drew's lifetime: Drew's Northern Ireland, and the cultural identity it embraces, is that of apolitical commercialism and industry. Certainly, the Troubles still exist in Belfast in 1990, but for Drew, they seem a rare, distant distraction. For example, as he and Kay begin to make love, they are unfazed by a loud bang: "—Blast bomb, Kay said. Andytown, sounds like. They gave each other Moroccan black blow-backs [. . .] and took warm wine from each other's mouths" (68). The explosion is nothing to them. Violence is merely part of the usual urban background noise found in any major metropolitan area.

Drew's growing acceptance of Belfast does not yet extend to his family relationships, however. When he first returned to Belfast, his sister Ellen felt how much Drew hated Northern Ireland: "his loathing amounted almost to a presence [. . . .] But a presence, on second thoughts suggested something vital and this was a dead thing. An

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absence then" (169). His disdain for Northern Ireland is not based on the assumption of

any alternative identity (which he has been unable to achieve), but rather the lack of

acceptance for the identity available to him. Soon after becoming Kay's lover and

discovering the old photo of Belfast, Drew learns his father has had a stroke. Drew, who

so eagerly embraced the integration of past and present for Bookstore, is unable to

reconcile his memories of Jack with the role of dutiful son imposed upon him by his

family. His first attempt at a bedside vigil ends with him fleeing the room when Jack

croaks, "Lilthi" (90), a word Drew's Aunt Peggy takes to be a call for Lily, Jack's dead

wife, but that Drew understands as his abusive father once again calling him "a little shit"

(109). Drew sees his father as placing him solidly back into his identity as victimized

child, a role he fully rejects by physically removing himself from his place among the

family at Jack's bedside.

Patterson's depiction of Drew's father reinforces the fragility of a Northern Irish

identity free of strife. During the period of unconsciousness following his stroke, Drew's

father, Jack, undertakes a dreamlike stroll through his life. Toward the end of his journey,

Jack experiences pride and joy at being home in Northern Ireland. He loses all feelings of

pain and feels so "newly exalted" he wants to sing with joy at feeling "and now I am

home" before his beloved mountains. Then he sees Drew by the side of the road.

> The music was sucked from his breath. Drew. His initial instinct was to
>
> sneak past [. . . .] shame shackled his feet. There would be no moving
>
> them until son acknowledged father and freed him from reproach [. . .] It
>
> was time Drew was made to understand, young as he was, that this was
>
> not the way things were meant to have turned out [. . . .] You must

remember, Drew, he longed to say, but his tongue could find no purchase

and slithered and failed wordlessly on the smooth surface of his gums.

Then all at once the boy's head sprang up and his eyes lit on the shattered

dentures in his father's hand. Disgust spilt like acid across his face. Jack

smiled a foolish, gummy smile. There was no explaining now. (87-88)

Jack's attempt at reconciliation and peace fails, quickly replaced by resentment as he

begins to emerge from his coma and again feels pain and helplessness, a sensation he

experiences as being unable to get through a nearby closing door because he stopped for

Drew: "Please wait, it was all his fault" (88). Not only can the desire for peace and

reconciliation not be maintained, the instinct remains strong in Jack to blame Drew for

his failure to fulfill this desire. His attempts to imagine another identity for himself and

his son cannot be sustained.

Despite these challenges, Drew becomes something of a champion for the new

Belfast when one of Bookstore's owners, James, arrives for a visit and wants "to see a

few of the sights." (203). Drew's reaction is decidedly that of a Northern Irishman more

than a Bookstore employee: he is

surprised to discover that he still harbored something of the old suspicion

of these words; the distaste for tourists, common to those of his

background, who knew that all too often seeing a few of the sights

involved nothing more than a ghoulish fairground ride up the Shankill and

down the Falls [. . .] and a murderous significance ascribed to every street

corner, public house and patch of waste ground. (203)

Drew now not only recognizes but prizes that Belfast is more: "You could find anything you wanted if you went looking for it, and you only had to go looking in any direction other than narrowly west in Belfast to find a different city altogether" (203). With Kay, Drew takes James on a tour that impresses him: James "had expected to see more … well, more destruction, frankly" (204). Kay turns the moment into another example of the economic perspective overshadowing old political attitudes: "The battle between destruction and construction, Kay told him, warming to her guide's role, was the oldest battle in Belfast" (204). But for Kay, the lesson is not about rebuilding bombed buildings but about how the city's developers built Belfast by reclaiming land from the sea: "Dredging, scouring, banking, consolidating, they fashioned a city in their own image: dry docks, graving docks, ships, cranes, kilns, silos; industry from their industry, solidity from the morass, leaving an indelible imprint on the unpromising slobland" (204). Patterson closely allies Kay's drive and passion for Belfast with these early developers: "Those authors of the city's fortunes might have been horrified by Kay's lifestyle, to say nothing of her sex, but they would undoubtedly have applauded her energy, and her zeal" (205).

And yet, Kay – the great advocate of Belfast past and present – and Drew, her seeming convert, continue to take perverse pride in the city's failures, telling James that the water coursing down a decorative, free-standing wall over a sign for Blackstaff Square cannot be real Blackstaff water: "

> Real Blackstaff water, he told James and you would not have been able to
> see the wall, never mind the name. Real Blackstaff water, Kay chipped in,
> and it would have seized up before it reaching the ground. The Blackstaff

had once been voted the dirtiest river in Britain – Europe, some Belfast

people would insist with the same perverse pride with which they would

tell you that the Europa was the most bombed building in the world" (205-

6).

For all that Drew and Kay strive to see Belfast in terms of its industry and commercial

potential, even they are not immune to maintaining the image of the city as a place apart.

Through most of this tour of Belfast, Patterson presents a decidedly un-Troubled

vision of the city and depicts tour guides Kay and Drew as characters proud of their

culture and fully engaged in adopting a new Northern Irish identity centered on bustling

commerce and well-placed hope for the future. Drew rushes to assure James that the days

of bombs in the Europa Hotel "like the hotel's perimeter fence and search hut, were long

gone" (206) and they stroll through colorful, crowded, music-filled streets: "Discrete yet

oddly harmonious; a symphony for any city, summer 1990" (207).

Suddenly, however, sounds of shooting disrupt the flow of the summer day, and a

tale of heartless sectarian violence emerges: "A policeman had been shot on Castle Street.

The killers had posed as a courting couple" (209). Just as suddenly, the cosmopolitan

urbanity of Drew and Kay in Belfast devolves into a provincial world dangerous for

outsiders. James is shocked to learn that the shooting occurred approximately five

hundred yards away. "—Five hundred yards is a long way in Belfast, Kay said and that

wasn't bravado. Five hundred yards was a long way in Belfast. [. . .] Significant distances

were the span of a single borderline street, the thickness of a wall, a wrong turn, a foot

out of place, a whisker, a hair's breadth, the skin of your teeth" (209). Despite their best

efforts to present the Northern Irish as people bent on progress and outwardly focused

global development, by the end of James' visit, Drew and Kay are presented as solidly grounded in the world of the Troubles. Neither is an active participant in any violence, but the culture of the Troubles – being able to identify who's who and what's happening – is clearly an integral (and necessary) part of who they are.

Following the shooting, Drew's relationship with Kay cools perhaps because any meetings now may be tainted by the memory of the Castle Street shooting. Each serves as a reminder to the other of the fragility and even falseness of their new Belfast. The shooting is also followed by a sudden reawakening of Drew's relationship with his English girlfriend, Melanie. If Kay represents the new Northern Ireland, Melanie suggests "the strained relationship between Northern Irish Protestantism and Britain" (Kirkland, "Bourgeois," 223). She represents an England that would prefer not to be bothered with Northern Ireland. She flatly refuses to follow Drew to Belfast even though he has moved twice for her work: "that meant nothing. There were no trade-offs. Everyone had somewhere they could not or would not follow. And for her it was Belfast" (8). Her attitude parallels that of her mother who believes Northern Ireland should not only be avoided but ignored: "Melanie's mother wanted Britain to get the hell out of the place, troops and news crews first [. . .]. – If they'd kept the cameras out years ago, it would all have been over in a matter of weeks, she said, knowing as she did (Melanie's mother had three degrees), that in this day and age what the camera didn't show didn't exist" (218). Shortly after the shooting, however, Melanie returns from New York and offers to visit Drew in Belfast. Her willingness to meet him on his ground, however, coincides with his growing fascination for a third woman: Kay's half-sister Anna from Dublin. When Anna announces a visit to Belfast and wonders if Drew is free to spend

time with her, Drew puts off Melanie's visit, in effect choosing the Republic of Ireland over England. For Melanie, this ends the relationship: Drew has rejected a chance to ally himself with her English identity in favor of pursuing an Irish one.

Anna, on the other hand, represents an alternative Irish identity from Kay. As Richard Kirkland argues, Kay is "the inheritor of the traditions of Edward Harland" (Kirkland, *Literature*, 49), the Protestant shipbuilding magnate who helped build nineteenth century Belfast industry. Her character reflects a Northern Irish identity built on industry and commerce. Anna suggests a twentieth century Northern Irish Juliet with her star-crossed love affair destroyed by hatred and bigotry. At seventeen, when her Protestant community discovers her relationship with the Catholic Conor Bradley, she is tied to a bus stop by a crowd of girls: "They punched her and kicked her and spat on her. Called her a Taig-loving whore, chalked on the footpath at her feet: FREE RIDE. Before untying her, they hacked off her hair and made a pile of it in front of her and set it alight" (240). Conor receives a less violent, but equally threatening warning: "a man he didn't know from Adam stopped him in the street close to his house and pressed something cold into his hand. A live bullet. It wasn't meant as a souvenir" (240). Initially, Anna and Con appear to find a way to put themselves above the Troubles and build a life together in Northern Ireland after a brief attempt at living in Dublin: "They bought a house in the north of the city, in a corridor running between one side and the other. Their peculiar niche" (242). But conflict erupts because of their differing cultural identities: Conor shares a birthday with Bobby Sands, the leader of the 1981 Hunger Strike by IRA prisoners fighting for status as political prisoners rather than common criminals. When Sands starves to death in Long Kesh Prison, Conor attends his funeral, an act of

sympathy with Catholic Northern Ireland for which he gets the "dog's abuse" from Anna (242). Anna eventually regrets her anger and life returns to normal, a situation that parallels how Patterson describes Northern Ireland's response to the hunger strikes:

> It had been a dreadful couple of weeks waiting for the first hunger striker to die. Eighteen days he had hung on after being given the last rites. There were evacuations, predictions of full-scale civil war, just as there had been ten years before when she and Con had left home together. But though there was mayhem for a day or two, as before, the worst was averted. Even when a second hunger striker died, then a third, then a fourth. Nothing stays unusual for too long, not even voluntary starvation. Hunger strikers five and six followed numbers one to four. It was just another way to die. (243)

Patterson's Northern Ireland, however, is a place where fate, not conscious choice, often holds sway. Con, driving to fetch cigarettes, is caught up in a brief demonstration marking the death of the last hunger striker: "It wasn't much of a riot. A few bottles and stones, the odd, misdirected petrol bomb. A mark of respect for the last to die, was all (thinking, perhaps, we turned out for all the others, it wouldn't be right there being no one out for him)" (244). But in a random twist of fate, a "flukey shot" takes out the Army's routine response: a Saracen that had been "hurtling up and down the street now and again to let them know you're there. No real hope of catching anyone" (244). Out of control, the vehicle's driver pulls the wheel to keep from hitting a row of houses and crushes Con. In a further emphasis of how events in Northern Ireland are both random and interconnected, the Sarcen's rear wheel clips a light post, breaks free and

crashes into Finney's where Drew sits drinking on his last evening before leaving for England (244-45). Unlike Drew, for whom the event culminates his disgust and disdain for Northern Irish society, Anna attempts to rebuild her life by opening a dress shop with compensation money reluctantly granted for Con's death. Her attempt to foster a Northern Irish identity that ignores sectarian difference is again thwarted, however. Her shop is firebombed by British supporters who call her a Judas for suing the authorities: "What about the Fenian scum that threw the petrol bomb. Did you ever think of suing him?" (246).

Anna ponders exactly what caused Con's death and the subsequent violence against her:

> [S]he would remember the sheer numbers of people who had combined in his death and wonder whether chance alone could be credited with such intricately choreographed calamity [. . .] She wanted to get to the heart of the matter, to be able to point and say, there, that's where it all started to go wrong. When we moved over to this side of town. When we came back from Dublin. The day and hour we met. Before we met. Before we were even born. Before our parents were born. Before our parents' parents were born. Before our parents' parents' parents were born. But it was like trying to hold a pattern in a kaleidoscope, one tiny chip slipped and the whole configuration changed. There was always at least one more factor to be taken into the account and the heart of the matter, she came to see, was that there was no heart of the matter. (247-48).

With this realization, she, like Drew, abandons Northern Ireland, but for the Republic of Ireland rather than England.

Her story, therefore, develops the theme of identity in two ways. First, the linking of her past and Drew's in the form of the deadly Saracen wheel and her recognition of the role chance plays in determining Northern Irish life helps to achieve Patterson's stated goal of imagining how cultural identity is built through "the kind of influences that are coming into our lives" (Aliaga 105). In his essay, "I am a Northern Irish Novelist," Patterson offers an image of the random dynamics that create identity: "I had in mind when I started [writing *Fat Lad*] an image of jet streams as threads binding disparate land masses together; cumulatively in their comings and goings, the characters in *Fat Lad* were intended to weave a complex pattern of external relationships, to give human expression to historical context" (152). Anna bears a resemblance to women in earlier Troubles fiction with her inevitably tragic across-the-sectarian-divide love affair, but her story varies substantially from the archetype in that Patterson takes great pains to identify the forces that turn the affair into tragedy.

Second, the present day Anna offers Drew an alternative identity: a vision of Irishness untainted by the inevitability of violence. Unlike Drew who never seemed fully at ease in England, Anna blends successfully in Dublin: Walking beside her through the city, Drew "noted her ease of movement through the busy thoroughfares, her knack of side-stepping collisions, even while turned towards him talking, as though sixth-sensed" (194). As the owner of a profitable shop in the heart of Dublin, Anna offers evidence that one may shift successfully from exemplifying the Northern Irish victimized by sectarian

violence and bigotry to the Irish entrepreneur on the eve of the Celtic Tiger economic boom.

And yet, just as the success and prosperity of Kay's vision of Northern Ireland was tainted by the shooting in Castle Street, so is Anna's life in Dublin still haunted by the Troubles. When Drew calls Anna's shop only to freeze up after asking for her, both Anna and her assistant see the call as threatening solely because the assistant notes that the caller "had a Belfast accent" (188). Although Drew is initially obsessed with Anna, seeing in her a resemblance to the mythological Irish queen Medb, and ignoring Kay's mockery of Anna's Dublin accent and her life "down there with the bogtrotters" (138-39), in the end he is no more comfortable with her world than Melanie's English one. Unlike Anna, Drew does not easily navigate Dublin's streets: he "seemed forever bumping into people" there (194) and in a telling moment, he is literally unable to grasp where life in Dublin might lead when he comes upon a billboard: "Brighter futures begin with, Drew read, but the rest of the advert was defaced by missing scales and without them the solution was just an indeterminate ripple" (189).

Indeed, nature itself seems unable to imagine this identity for Drew. He and Anna shake hands outside Kay's apartment following their initial meeting. "A dog, it is said, passing that spot three hours later sat down on the footpath and howled its bafflement. Howled and howled until its owner whipped it, kicked it, and finally dragged it, whining and yelping, out from under the ghostly X of their clasped hands" (182). Although Drew continues his pursuit of Anna, it is Northern Ireland, not the Republic which he increasingly views in a positive light. He sees a sunset as a moment when "Belfast blushed at its own comeliness. Dublin paled further" (199) and following a rainstorm

recognizes that "Belfast seemed redeemed by colour, unfolding like a flower. [. . .] Like a flower. Compact and complex" (249).

In the weeks that follow, Drew continues to be Kay's lover in Northern Ireland; holds off his English partner, Melanie; and develops an obsession and then a brief love affair with Anna of the Republic. Through these three women, Drew explores various alternative identities and attitudes toward Northern Ireland without successfully adopting any of them. Much as he might be attracted to the Irish and British identities exemplified by Anna and Melanie, Drew cannot eliminate feelings of Otherness in their worlds. The intrusion of the Troubles in all three worlds – the death of Hugh in London, the fear generated by a Belfast accent on the phone in Dublin, the shootings around the corner in Belfast – reveal Northern Irish social ills as an insidious presence impossible to ignore or leave behind. Attractive though he might find the new Northern Irish identities of successful entrepreneurs that Kay and Anna have molded for themselves, reality shows him that assuming the role of apolitical capitalist is still a precarious undertaking for the Northern Irish, one that might be randomly shattered at any moment by the Troubles.

Nevertheless, Drew clearly appreciates and even strives to model these attempts at a new Northern Irish identity. When Bookstore merges with a Swiss company and Drew is summoned to London and then to Paris to help manage the store there, he takes the time to consider his feelings toward Northern Ireland before he leaves. Patterson devotes the last few sections of the novel to clarifying how the time in Northern Ireland has allowed Drew to explore identities beyond the narrow categories of victimizer and victim presented to him as a child. For Drew (and by implication, for the rest of Northern Ireland), such changes in perception become possible not by wholesale rejection and

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avoidance of the violence in this society, but by acknowledging the complexities behind it. Only when Drew admits the role violence plays in defining Northern Ireland without letting it overshadow more positive aspects does he find peace.

Before leaving Belfast, for example, Drew makes a visit to Con's grave, and sees an army foot patrol spread out in the cemetery. He realizes:

> The dead too needed watching here. The dead above all needed watching here. Containing the dead, it could be said, was the beginning and end of policy in Northern Ireland. Containing the dead, it could even be said, was the whole rationale for the country's existence. But whatever the rationale, the dead continued to leave traces wherever you looked [. . . .] They were every nowhere, not be sidestepped, no matter how far to the side you tried to step. And paradoxically, only when he had accepted that could Drew reconcile himself to leaving again. (276-77)

The death and violence inflicted throughout Northern Ireland since Drew's childhood cannot be undone, but Drew has clearly learned to recognize it as part, not all, of the story. When queried by the cemetery worker who guides him to Con's grave about his relationship with the deceased, Drew merely states the obvious: "It's complicated" (275).

This reconciliation to the complexity of Northern Irish identity extends to his family. Reading the newspaper while visiting his partially-paralyzed father, Drew demonstrates neither anger nor disdain, but a protective respect for him, flicking his "newspaper straighter, making a screen between them. He considered it degrading for his father to have his exertions exposed to the public gaze in this way" (277). His efforts are rewarded: Jack, unable to speak after his stroke, passes a one-word note to Drew: "The

word was sorry" (278). And so, in the end, Drew at least finds peace with his role in his family. He offers to reject his promotion to stay and help the family with Jack. Ellen refuses, but "The fact that this was the answer her brother wanted to hear didn't, to Ellen's mind, detract from the sincerity of his offer" (266). She sees "distinct signs of change in him in the run-up to his departure. He had become more open, for one thing, less anxious to patrol the distances that separated them" (266). Drew, then, leaves Northern Ireland on a hopeful note. He has recognized a more multi-faceted (and therefore more positive) image of the Northern Irish and of himself as part of that culture. From England, he writes to Jack that "he no longer bore [him] any malice" (278). It is easy to imagine Drew willingly continuing in his newly-assumed identities of devoted son and helpful brother.

Yet, just as Northern Ireland in 1990 continued to erupt into violence despite the strong desires of many to move on, Patterson avoids a tidy ending by describing how difficult Drew finds making a complete peace with Jack. He carries the letter exonerating his father with him for two days before forcing himself to mail it: "He had lived with his grievance for so long now that he was reluctant to let go of it completely" (278). He may strongly desire this new identity within his family, but taking the step from imagination to reality still poses a challenge. And Drew's complete assumption of a new identity as a devoted son remains unfulfilled: A few months after Drew moves to Paris, his father dies (281).

Similarly, the descriptions of events in Belfast after Drew leaves reveal that, in the end, Patterson's imaginings of a peaceful, prosperous Northern Ireland are grounded by gritty realism rather than resulting in happy conclusions: in 1990, such peace and

prosperity may be imagined but cannot yet be a long-term reality. Three and a half

months after Drew's departure, Bookstore is destroyed in an IRA firebomb attack. Unlike

Drew, the parties involved are unable to let go of the grievances that destroyed the peace:

> The Economy Minister, on a visit to Laganside, dismissed calls for
>
> government aid and suggested the media take up the issue of the twenty-
>
> four job losses with Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein said, in its actor's voice, that the
>
> job losses were indeed regrettable, but that the blame lay, ultimately, with
>
> the people responsible for the imposition of the border. Unionists said the
>
> border wasn't half strong enough and called too for more visible policing
>
> of the city center security zone. (281)

Whereas Drew was willing to move beyond his disdain for Belfast and, with Kay,

imagine and work to build a better downtown, in the end, such attempts continue to be ill-

fated imaginings instead of evidence of long-term change.

Similarly, Drew's experiences in England and Dublin demonstrate that merely

adopting an Irish or English identity in lieu of a Northern Irish one is not possible: The

Troubles cast a long shadow. Patterson also explores how simply practicing an apolitical

in Belfast life is not the answer either. The arbitrariness of the violence means that

anyone may be a target. Belfast is in a state of flux, and for extended periods, the change

seems to be positive. While these changes help make Belfast more cosmopolitan,

escalating terrorism throughout the Western world, not peace in Northern Ireland, seems

to be what makes Northern Irish culture more comparable to that of other European

cities. In England, Drew comes upon a scene of military vehicles and helicopters

reminiscent of Belfast. He's told "They're making safe a bomb" that's been buried since

World War Two (279). Flying home for his father's funeral takes two hours longer than usual because "there was another war on now, in the Middle East, and what with the new improved high-profile airport security measures added to the everyday hole-and-corner ignominies of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the journey took closer to five hours" (281).

Thus, *Fat Lad* explores several possibilities for redefining Northern Irish identity beyond the traditional stereotypes based in sectarian violence. Without a doubt, Patterson depicts not merely the violence and sectarianism of the Troubles, but also various rationales for them. The novel, however, is by no means an apology for hostility and conflict, but a means of exploring the roots of the Troubles in order to move beyond them. In fact, Patterson fails to offer a cultural identity completely free of the Troubles. Rather, *Fat Lad* proposes a model for recognizing the Troubles as merely one aspect of Northern Irish identity that, while undeniable, is by no means its sole defining characteristic.

Chapter Three:

Living like a Gangster: The Construction and Destruction

of Northern Irish Gunman Identity in Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man*

Drew Linden's desire to completely reject his Northern Irish identity in Glenn

Patterson's *Fat Lad* suggests one means of dealing with the violence experienced in

Belfast in the 1970s and 1980s: to reject that violence in favor of a sectarian-free world.

In the end, however, his attempts to embrace a pacifistic, more cosmopolitan life are

hampered by the violence and terrorism within and beyond Northern Ireland's borders.

His story reveals that while there is more to Northern Irish culture than violence, ignoring

the violence will by no means make it go away. It is not the whole of Northern Irish

identity, but it is nevertheless an integral part.

Eoin McNamee's 1994 novel *Resurrection Man* also depicts characters whose

identities are deeply influenced by the violence in Belfast. The novel offers a

fictionalized account of a Loyalist paramilitary gang, the Shankill Butchers, who killed at

least thirty people in Belfast beginning in the early 1970s and ending with the

assassination of the gang's leader, Lenny Murphy, in November 1982 (Dillon 14; 255).

Like Drew in *Fat Lad*, Victor Kelly (Lenny Murphy's fictional equivalent in

Resurrection Man) grows up in a working class world steeped in sectarianism and violence, and like Drew, he aspires to project a more sophisticated, less provincial identity. Victor lacks Drew's opportunities, however, so Victor's sources for alternative identities are rooted not in English higher education and a life abroad, but in the various popular media and sectarian stereotypes available in Belfast. And unlike Drew, rather than strive to escape the violence by leaving Belfast, Victor embraces it, masterminding a system for kidnapping, torturing, and killing his randomly chosen victims that baffles authorities and elevates him to the status of legend in his hometown. Drew's story reveals the difficulty in constructing a Northern Irish identity untouched by sectarian conflict. Victor's narrative reveals the consequences of assuming a Northern Irish identity created by that conflict, that of the paramilitary gunman.

Prior to the Troubles, the Northern Irish equivalent of an American tough guy was the hard man. Alan Barnier views the identity as "central to the construction of masculinity in working class communities in Northern Ireland long before [. . .] the beginning of the Troubles" (128). John Sugden observes that initially hard men "were those who worked in the shipyards, mills and factories" (129). To be a hard man in the 1950s was to embrace a particular cult of masculinity which emphasized pride and physical toughness. These were men who gained reputations for being quick with their fists, either in the boxing ring or on the streets (Feldman 46). The Troubles, however, caused the demise of the hard man in Northern Irish culture (Barnier 129). As an officer in the Ulster Defense Association explained in the early 1990s, "There is no such thing as a hardman now in Northern Ireland. There used to be before the Troubles. They fought with fists on the street, you see, but when the guns came out the hardmen disappeared"

(Feldman 47). In their place emerged the Northern Irish gunmen, that is, armed paramilitaries on both sides of the conflict.

While it is not unusual to see "hard man" used in British media reports of the Troubles, the media's usage adds connotations not part of the traditional hard man identity. As Allen Feldman notes, the media tends to use the term to refer to paramilitary groups who were particularly fanatical advocates of violence, but hard men employed distinctively different forms, techniques and even ethics compare to paramilitary gunmen (47). He quotes extensively from anonymous sources on the front lines of the Troubles to explain the distinction: "You couldn't be a hardman if you were willing to terrorize women or young people [. . .] It doesn't take a hardman to terrorize people. [. . .] The hardman fight was more for the excitement than the actual fight, but with the paramilitaries it turned violent here and it was all for to inflict bodily harm" (Feldman 47-48). As Feldman explains, "The hardmen's combat revolved around symbolic issues of status and the self-construction of reputation in the willingness to risk the body. [. . .] The hardman 'fought for themselves,' while the paramilitary has 'men behind him' for whom he enacts violence on order" (52). Indeed, as Feldman argues, the media's conflation of the two terms over-simplifies the conflict: "[it] reifies unrelenting violence as a 'fixed' cultural characteristic of certain Belfast communities" (47). In other words, the media denies the cultural shift in masculine identity, perpetuating the notion of Northern Ireland as a place of ceaseless violence.

The distinction between the two identities is important in critiquing *Resurrection Man* because it is the gunman identity – the idea of a man who terrorizes and kills with mechanized weapons as opposed to a hard man street fighter who only engages in fist-

fighting – that is the model offered to Victor Kelley. Moreover, the gunman identity is arguably the quintessential identity of the Northern Irish Troubles: it is an identity so pervasive that it has helped to spawn and has generated characters in hundreds of novels and films set in Northern Ireland. As such, it has contributed substantially to the pervasive notion of Northern Ireland as a place of unceasing, senseless violence.

Resurrection Man arguably contributes to the phenomenon. A novel about a Northern Irish Protestant paramilitary who randomly selects, abducts, and murders Catholics solely because they are Catholics may easily be dismissed as simply another Troubles trash thriller. Troubles trash denotes a fictional category in which the traditional action thriller occurs in a Northern Irish context. Like most novels set in the Troubles in the 1970s and 1980s, these works generally fail to present any nuanced consideration of the motivations behind the violence of the Troubles. Although advances toward peace since the mid-1990s have made the genre less timely (or as John O'Farrell puts it, "musty"), Troubles trash continues to be extremely popular, constituting "one of the most profitable industries in Northern Ireland since the beginning of the conflict" (Morales-Ladrón). *Harry's Game* by Gerald Seymour (first published in 1975) is an early and typical example: An IRA assassin kills a British government official. The hero (in the form of an undercover agent) must find and kill the assassin before his cover is blown and he himself is killed. The assassins in such works, be they Loyalist or Republican, are typically portrayed as ruthless paramilitary gunmen consumed by unexamined sectarian prejudices that allow them to murder without remorse.

A common thread throughout the genre is "a stagnant and reductive version of the dynamics of the 'Troubles', one that bases its premises on clear-cut boundaries between

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opposing poles with regard to nationality, religion or politics" (Morales-Ladrón). A

fundamental criticism of such works is that they reinforce an extremely limited view of

Northern Ireland as a place of constant sectarian violence perpetrated by two groups

caught up in a never-ending series of 'an eye for an eye' revenge killings. These texts

never delve into the motivations behind the conflict and the killings. The Troubles simply

are. They exist as a long-standing unexplained and unquestioned constant. While most

novels set in the Troubles published during the 1970s and 1980s tend to share an

avoidance of questioning the motivations for the violence, more literary responses to the

conflict such as *Proxopera* by Benedict Kiely and *Cal* by Bernard MacLaverty at least

delve into the emotional toll taken by the violence, something Troubles trash rarely

addresses.

Gerry Smyth places *Resurrection Man* firmly in the Troubles trash genre when he

describes the novel as "another reactionary response to the 'Troubles', interested not in

sectarianism (nor indeed in the more significant agendas of state sovereignty which

underpin sectarianism in Northern Ireland) but in some inscrutable darkness at the heart

of the self" (123). Some of the critical rejection of the novel and later its film adaptation

(which McNamee also wrote) revealed the challenges faced when a writer like

McNamee, born in 1961 in County Down to a middle class Catholic family, attempts to

explore the motivations of working class Belfast Loyalists. Several critics claimed to see

political bias: McNamee recalls that "The Tory press lined up to take pot-shots at this

'poisonous out-pouring of anti-unionist bile.' [. . . The film version] was effectively

censored in the North, it was shown on only one screen in the entire province" (qtd. in

Kelly 201).

Certainly, the Victor who leads the Resurrection Men on their rampage of terror can easily be dismissed as simply another Troubles-trash character in general and a negative characterization of Unionism in particular in that Victor can easily be seen as the Protestant paramilitary driven by Loyalist propaganda to beat down an encroaching Catholic threat. The novel offers strong evidence for such a reading. For example, as a child, Victor listens to street preachers "talk of Catholics. The whore of Rome. There were barbarous rites, martyrs racked in pain. The Pope's cells were plastered with the gore of delicate Protestant women. Catholics were plotters, heretics, casual betrayers" (McNamee 9).[21] Throughout Victor's childhood, the family is frequently forced to move when their Catholic-sounding last name creates too much hostility against them in the neighborhood: "a suspicion would arise in each place that they were Catholics masquerading as Protestants" (3). Rather than recognize such prejudice for the uncritical bigotry it is, Victor grows up to share his community's hatred for anything Catholic and to tolerate no suggestion that he is any less than a full Protestant: When a former associate meets Victor on the street and mockingly declares, "'I know you [. . .] for the bastard son of a bastard Catholic by the name of Kelly[,]' Victor raise[s] the Browning [pistol] and [shoots] the man once in the stomach" (201). When his mother, Dorcas, visits him in prison, asking him to stop frequenting Loyalist pubs when he's released, he refuses: "I got a job to finish. The Catholics in this town think they can just take over, the IRA and all. Walk all over you if you let them" (73).

Victor's allegiance to the anti-Catholic cause is rewarded by praise from a Loyalist community that is apparently as uncritical in its disdain for anything Republican

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[21] All subsequent references in this chapter will be from *Resurrection Man* unless otherwise noted.

or Catholic as he is. Despite the brutality of their killings, Victor and his Resurrection

Men gang are "seen as favoured and visionary. Defenders of the faith" (145). A

secondary plot line involving two reporters, Coppinger and Ryan, recognizes that

Victor's style of killing goes beyond the norm for sectarian violence, but these characters

too may be read as typical, representing a lone Cassandra-like voice commonly found in

Troubles thrillers that tries to warn the city of the increasing violence but fails. They are

powerless to stop it.

For many readers, *Resurrection Man* constitutes a particularly offensive form of

trash fiction not only because they believe it presents a one-dimensional depiction of

Northern Ireland, but also because it offers a too disturbingly precise fictionalization of a

real gang of Loyalist paramilitaries. Its stereotypical violence qualifies it as Troubles

trash. Its conversion of real life subject matter into sensationalized violence makes it an

unnecessary and objectionable glorification of that real violence.

For these critics, the book raises questions regarding the role literature may play

in perpetuating violence. In his analysis of several Northern Irish novels, Richard Haslam

argues that representations of violence "involve not only artistic, ideological and

technical choices, but also ethical dilemmas" (Haslam 192). Authors and artists dealing

with violent subjects, Haslam argues, bear an ethical responsibility to avoid perpetuating

violence unnecessarily or gratuitously: "Art has the ability, frequently the responsibility,

to relate and elucidate the most abject and abhorrent realms of human experience. The

manner in which such explorations are performed is crucial, particularly when a work

finds its source material in the torturers and murderers of people whose relatives still

grieve" (208). By presenting the Shankill Butchers' killings so vividly and violently

(albeit under the guise of the fictional Resurrection Men), McNamee's novel "does further violence to the Butchers' real-life victims" (Haslam 208).

For readers like Haslam, the work sensationalizes the very real pain and grief generated by the Troubles without offering any redeeming critique of sectarianism. Dermot McCarthy's claim that "violence and the language of violence eventually generate the culture of violence" (140) ostensibly describes the world within *Resurrection Man*, but could just as easily reference the real world in which McNamee's novel appears, offering credence to the claims that the novel's violence adds to the Troubles by introducing yet more representations of violence: "The metafictive dimension in *Resurrection Man* is symptomatic, among other things, of McNamee's sensitivity to his own complicity in the *literary* culture of violence that the Troubles have spawned" (McCarthy 140).[22] In the novel, Darkie Larche, a character who formerly distributed Unionist pamphlets, comments on the growing body of Troubles literature: "There was no need for them [pamphlets] any more, he said. The violence had started to produce its own official literature. Mainly hardbacks, with the emphasis on the visual" (92). Works that present violent imagery merely to entertain voyeuristic readers do little to discourage the acceptance of violence in a culture, and arguably even contribute to it by making it an acceptable product for consumption.

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[22] McNamee himself contends that fictionalizing real events as he did in *Resurrection Man* are a valid means of exploring them. Indeed, he no longer changes real-life names in his novels: "When I got to the end of *Resurrection* Man, I changed all the names [. . .] but it almost felt like a dishonest thing to do, as everyone knew who it was about, so when I did *Blue Tango*, I just felt it was the right thing to use the real names, because that was the story you were telling. [. . .] People bring up the moral question about putting words into people's mouths, but I keep waiting for someone to come up with a killer argument to say, 'that's not a valid thing to do', and they haven't" (qtd. in Savage).

Other critics have a much more favorable view of the novel, arguing that

McNamee's ability to write "about violence with dreamy, poetic immediacy" results in a

"remarkable achievement" (Banville, "Ventures" 22). The Mann Booker Prize-winning

novelist (and Irish author) John Banville, reviewing the novel in *The Observer,* declared

it "the best novel to have come out of the Northern Ireland violence that I have read"

(Banville, "Books"). Banville notes that McNamee's predecessors and his peers have

tended to focus on "the effects of violence but rarely with the violence itself, its

perpetrators, its rituals, its methods, [whereas] Eoin McNamee ventures into the belly of

the beast" (Banville, "Ventures" 22).

McNamee then is merely doing with fiction what authors like Martin Dillon have

done with fact. In explaining his motivations for writing what is considered the seminal

work on the Shankill Butchers, Dillon cites an "interest in the factors which created the

potential for mass murder. [. . .] Much has been written about the manner in which the

terrorists operate but little has centred on the elements within the psychological make-up

of terrorists which, when placed against the prejudice in the society, coalesce to produce

mass murderers" (xii). McNamee himself claims that, in writing *Resurrection Men*, "I

was looking to encompass some truth about Northern Ireland. It's always presented along

well-trodden paths, and I was trying to get a deeper sense of place" ("First Fiction"). He

justifies the novel's ability to generate negative reactions as essential to understanding the

situation in Northern Ireland: "Anything that serves to throw light on what happened [in

Northern Ireland] and what is going on [in Northern Ireland] makes it more difficult for

people to retreat into the positions of the past [. . .]. [I]f people can see themselves from

the outside, an element of self-consciousness creeps in and makes it harder for them to stick back into their traditional trenches" (McNamee qtd. in Johnston 15).

And so, while Victor Kelly in many ways follows the trope of a typical Troubles thriller paramilitary and McNamee's depiction of specific violent acts committed by Victor and others in the novel reaches a level of detail that may be seen as grotesquely sensational, the work as a whole presents a nuanced portrait of the non-political factors behind sectarian violence. To see *Resurrection Man* as merely another one-dimensional Troubles trash novel or a sensational true crime novel thinly veiled as fiction is to ignore the complexity of Victor's character and of the world in which he lives. Such readings also ignore the critique the novel offers of Northern Irish society, a critique focused less on sectarianism and more on the way the culture celebrates violence regardless of the source. McNamee certainly builds many of the stock traits of the Troubles assassin into his characterization of Victor, and frequently describes events comparable to those experienced by Lenny Murphy, but he also includes other significant details regarding not only how Victor kills, but also the daily life that goes on before and after those killings. Ronan Bennett's claim that the result of McNamee's "preoccupation [. . .] with the inner life, and his portrait of the interior landscape of Ulster loyalism [. . .] is unremittingly bleak psychopathologies shaped by neurosis, inadequacy and sexual fear" (209) is certainly merited. But McNamee also frequently references the world *beyond* Ulster Loyalism in his characterizations of Victor and his fellow paramilitaries. These external influences and landscapes have offered critics fodder for readings of the text as a quintessentially postmodern text reflecting multiple examples of Charles Baudrillard's idea of simulacrum and Frederic Jameson's notions of pastiche.

Such analyses view the novel as a masterful illustration of "the depthlessness of the postmodern culture of the simulacrum and its artifacts-as-commodities, surfaces without depths, styles whose contents are nothing but themselves as style" (McCarthy 132). Dermot McCarthy, for example, sees "Victor as an example of Jameson's post-modern mimic man whose individuality/subjectivity has been superseded in the culture of the simulacrum by a self styled through pastiche. In Victor's case, this feature of postmodern style is evident in his emulation/simulation of cinematic characters" (144). In other words, the elements of Victor's identity built on sources originating from beyond Belfast's borders – such as American gangster movies – round his character beyond the flat assassin trope usually found in Troubles thrillers into a postmodern man exploring "the possibility of authentic existential fulfillment through violence" (Kennedy-Andrews, *(de-)constructing* 128). Elmer Kennedy-Andrews notes how "McNamee foregrounds the intertextuality of 'real' life through pastiche of a range of popular forms and genres, including the American gangster thriller" (*(de-)constructing* 124) to assert that *Resurrection Man* supports Baudrillard's theory that in the postmodern world, "society has become so reliant on models and maps that we have lost all contact with the real world that preceded the map. Reality itself has begun merely to imitate the model, which now precedes and determines the real world. [. . .] We have lost all ability to make sense of the distinction between nature and artifice" (Felluga). Victor is not (or at least not only) a sensationalized pulp fiction parody of a real assassin then, but an example of postmodern pastiche. For parody – according to Jameson – has, in the postmodern age, been replaced by pastiche: "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a

neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter" (Felluga).

Such readings tend to emphasize Victor as a postmodern everyman, adrift in a world that no longer provides solid anchors. Indeed Victor's imitations of classic film gangsters such as John Dillinger, Tom Powers, and Caesar Enrico Bandello, are disturbingly without satire. And attempts to view them through a postmodern lens are certainly merited. But I will explore how the book's intertextuality arguably also achieves a more narrow focus. I contend that Victor's repeated references to and imitations of the language, attitudes and behaviors he's seen on film are part of a serious attempt to employ them in building a persona not as a general postmodern everyman but specifically as a Loyalist gunman, a uniquely Northern Irish identity. Victor is not merely copying what he has seen on film, but using the language – both verbal and non-verbal – he has learned in the cinema to build a particular identity within his culture: one that does not simply support a life of sectarian gang-related violence but embraces it as a preferred reality. "From a postmodern view of the world, language [verbal and non-verbal] does not so much mimetically reflect reality as construct 'reality'" (McCarthy 135). By showing how the culture's verbal and nonverbal communication create Victor's persona as a Northern Irish gangster, McNamee digs at a deeper truth about Northern Ireland and how it became possible in 1970s Belfast not only to build a cultural identity anchored in violence and prejudice, but for people like Victor Kelly (and Lenny Murphy) to use such an identity to prosper.

To do this, McNamee goes beyond simply presenting the Troubles in a traditional trash thriller form that present the sources of violence for the Troubles as coming from

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solely within a stagnant Northern Ireland and addresses the role that global media play in

changing Northern Irish culture and identities. The violence is framed not as random and

isolated provincial killings, but as part of a larger cultural movement wherein a society

becomes defined by and defines itself by violence. Thus, in a fictional way, *Resurrection*

Man offers a clue in Martin Dillon's quest to discover how someone like Lenny Murphy

comes to be. Dillon claims that his study of the Shankill Butchers came out of "a desire to

discover why it all happened. Who could possibly commit such crimes and what was it in

my own society that engendered such brutality?" (268).

Much of Dillon's discussion considers how the psychological make-up of the

killers "placed against the prejudice in the society, coalesce to produce mass murderers"

(Dillon xii). For Dillon, Northern Irish culture in the late 1960s and early 1970s created a

climate amenable to the likes of the Shankill Butchers because it became a society

> where prejudice is so deeply rooted that extermination rather than derision
>
> is the likely outcome when nothing is done to erode it. [. . .] In respect to
>
> the Shankill Butchers, there was another element which was sadism. Many
>
> studies have indicated that sadists need aggression and [. . .] in Northern
>
> Ireland the conflict provides the trigger for this aggression. It also allows
>
> misfits to find social acceptance by expressing the prejudice which is not
>
> just endemic but socially acceptable. It has been argued that a large
>
> percentage of the violence in Northern Ireland has not been political or
>
> religious. This is a simplification, for the political and religious
>
> background has made the violence possible, has often allowed it to be
>
> glamourized and has given it the status of being part of an ideological

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struggle. It has enabled many people who cannot escape prejudice to find

a security within it and to accept manifestations of it as a badge of

patriotism. (51-2)

In other words, Northern Irish society, by the 1970s, had become a culture which offered

"authentic existential fulfillment through violence" (Kennedy-Andrews, (*(de-)*

constructing 128). Dillon's review of Murphy's childhood and testimony by those who

knew him offers support for such claims. Murphy was an individual with socially deviant

tendencies immersed in a community that presented sectarian killing as a socially

acceptable means of satisfying his sadistic urges. Only the most ardent Loyalist could

view Murphy's killings as simple political acts. He chose victims randomly, often

selecting lone men walking alone at night in Catholic areas who had little or no

involvement in politics or the IRA. His style of killing was never a quick military-style

execution but rather drawn out torture – "acts so violent that they could only have been

committed by a psychopath" (Dillon 95).

    Was it inevitable that Lenny Murphy (and by extension Victor Kelly) become a

murdering Loyalist gunman? Dillon's analysis of Lenny Murphy implies that the

endemic prejudice and outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland made murder if not a

certain outcome than at least a very likely one. Karen Yanuba Lezama Morales'

psychological profile of Victor Kelly comes to a similar conclusion about McNamee's

fictional incarnation of Murphy: "Although, at some stages in the book Victor Kelly

might seem to be a stable political murderer, he fulfils all the characteristics and patterns

of a sociopathic personality, which leads him to be a multicide murderer, and more

precisely a serial killer."

The criteria for identifying sociopaths and psychopaths vary and experts differ on how to distinguish the two. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders –* DSM-IV – does not offer a definitive diagnosis for either, but rather classifies behaviors of both as antisocial personality disorder (American 702). Victor, like Lenny Murphy, demonstrates many of the behaviors ascribed to psychopaths and sociopaths, particularly deceitfulness and manipulation. But neither a sociopath nor a psychopath (nor indeed any form of antisocial personality disorder) necessarily results in murder: "Broadly speaking, [these] are people who use manipulation, violence and intimidation to control others and satisfy selfish needs. They can be intelligent and highly charismatic, but display a chronic inability to feel guilt, remorse or anxiety about any of their actions" (Nauert). Citing a 25-year University of Wisconsin study on male prisoners, Rick Nauert claims that "Many who fall into [the definition of psychopath] might lead perfectly conventional lives as doctors, scientists and company CEOs." Paul Babiak and Robert Hare note that while "in popular culture, the image of the psychopath is of someone like Hannibal Lecter or the BTK Killer [. . .] in reality, many psychopaths just want money, or power, or fame, or simply a nice car. Where do these psychopaths go? Often, it's to the corporate world." Such findings raise the question of why Victor (and Lenny) might not just as easily have assumed the role of a charismatic political leader or profitable arms dealer, becoming a citywide or even province-wide voice or supplier for the Loyalist cause rather than the head of a small, street-level gang.

One determining factor could be that the Troubles and various media coalesced to offer Victor the perfect tools for developing his particular persona as a savvy criminal. In addition to detailing the local bigotry surrounding Victor which encourages aggression

toward the Other, the novel also presents a society immersed in media products from Britain and the U.S. Using BBC news broadcasts and Hollywood classics, "the novel points to the way real violence is transformed into *virtual* violence for the world by the media that covers the events" (McCarthy 135).

The people in Victor's world display a perverse pride in televised acts of violence and celebrate lawbreakers as heroes, offering further encouragement to young men like Victor, searching for an identity, to adopt a criminal lifestyle. News broadcasts are used to identify one's place in the community with scenes of violence occupying higher status. In this world, bar patrons sit "watching every news they could in case their street would appear. They looked on TV like a navigation system, migrating home through the channels" (17). The reporter Ryan notices "increased local awareness" of landmarks associated with violence: The Europa hotel "had most-bombed-hotel status. [. . .] Contempt was expressed for quiet areas" (23). People point "out bullet marks and bomb sites. They added to the attraction of the city. Bloodspots on the pavement were marked by wreaths. Part of a dark and thrilling beauty" (34). When the city's downtown commercial district is severely bombed, the perception is that "These attacks had glamour. Damage estimates running into six figures were quoted with admiration, part of an awesome and impersonal civic expenditure" (60). Someone like Frames McCrea, a local man who "had crashed through 164 checkpoints in stolen cars [. . .became] a matter of legend. He was at the center of mystical events" (14). When a local constable, McMinn, finally chases him down,

> the reaction [is] extreme. [. . .] McMinn and his partner were dragged into
> the Victoria bar. They were forced to crawl on their hands and knees.

They had to walk like chickens. McMinn was taken into the toilets where

a shot was fired into the wall beside his head. He was forced to eat shit. [. .

.] The deeply felt immunities of the hero had been breached" (15).

This is a culture where acts of violence and lawlessness – not quiet political maneuvering

or back room profiteering – bring fame and respect.

Victor and his gang strive to be part of this cultural phenomenon: "It was an early

ambition of his to have a [killing] job as first item on the news" (39). Individual gang

members imagine themselves appearing on TV: "When the unit's activities were

mentioned on television Willie Lambe would give himself over to an uncritical delight.

He imagined himself in later years being interviewed in front of the camera. His

confident grasp of the issues raised. His early life. He would admit to dark times, lean

periods when he struggled with despair but then explain the benefits of an optimistic

nature and share insights gained through hardship. He would praise the role of family

life" (40). The personas they create are based on how they imagine such identities

playing out on the evening news.

Nevertheless, as time goes on, Victor and other Loyalists like Darkie Larche often

reject the reality they see reported in the local media and BBC broadcasts because the

reports contrast too obviously with their own reality. For example, Victor comes to

distrust what he sees on TV because "of the narrative devices employed. The

newsreaders' neutral haircuts and accents, the careful placing of stresses to indicate

condemnation or approval, the measured tones of reassurance. [. . .] He heard accounts of

events he had been involved in which conflicted with his experience" (39). Darkie has a

similar attitude: he watches the news "to check on incidents that his unit had been

involved in. He would shake his head in sorrow at inaccurate details; a victim's age given wrongly. It implied a lack of respect, an improper observance of the formalities. [. . .] Errors were subversive. They denied sectarian and geographic certainties" (17). The journalists Ryan and Coppinger also recognize the failure of the media to accurately report events in Northern Ireland, noting how they instead focus on creating a more sanitized reality: "newspapers and television were developing a familiar and comforting vocabulary to deal with violence [. . .] essential details of an attack, the things which differentiated one incident from another, were missing. [. . .] They agreed that the reporting of violent incident was beginning to diverge from events" (58). Those actually living in Northern Ireland see the BBC's presentation of the Troubles as biased and superficial.

McNamee describes how, as the BBC and other news outlets assume a stronger gatekeeper role as the Troubles progress, they eliminate detail and cover only those attacks that best correspond to their deadlines. In this way, the reporters construct a particular identity for Northern Ireland. The BBC World Service newscaster's voice, for example, is "crisp and authoritative. Each sentence was pronounced as if it were an edict to be imposed upon an unruly population" (138). A listener like Victor, one of the unruly population, must look elsewhere for models that reflect the world in which he lives. In this way, the novel goes beyond provincial pulp fiction and hints at the role of the British media in constructing Northern Irish identity and contributing culturally to the sectarian violence. By offering generic, sanitized broadcasts short on specific detail but heavy with condescension at the native brutality, the news loses its force as a tool for someone like

Victor to use in understanding his world. The news is not trustworthy. Other sources for understanding and defining his place in the events he faces every day are needed.

Two such models employed by Victor are the norms of his own world and those found in Hollywood films, particularly the gangster films of the early 1930s. By carefully observing the people around him and the actions of characters in films, Victor learns from a young age how to project a confidence and sense of street smarts that earn him respect and fear. For example, McNamee shows that even as a child, Victor learns to associate violence with power by studying what he sees. He befriends two bullies and instructs them in "how you could take bus passes off younger pupils and sell them. Victor would stop someone at the school gate. McAtee would hold them and Garrity would beat them. Victor watched the eyes. It was a question of waiting for a certain expression. You directed a victim towards gratitude. You expected him to acknowledge the lesson in power" (8). Even as a young boy, Victor carefully studies scenes of violence as something to be directed and controlled.

Later, as a young man, Victor regularly attends the Crumlin Road magistrates' court to witness what does and does not count as evidence: "He drank in the details of a crime, in particular the ornate details of route and destination. He studied the type of weapon used, barrel rifling and trajectory. The pathologist's report with photographs of entry and exit wounds was handed round the court and he followed its intimate passage from hand to hand. Lastly there was the testimony of witnesses. [. . .] The testimony of detectives from Delta or Charlie division" (11). Victor learns well from these observations: when arrested and placed in a line-up before witnesses of the murder of Artie Wilson (a Protestant Victor executes for selling shotgun cartridges to a Catholic

with whom Artie had shared pre-Troubles duck-hunting memories), Victor disrupts the identification parade: "He began to walk towards the lights. [. . .] He stepped in front of the lights and peered into the darkness with one hand shading his eyes. [. . .] 'I'm fucking innocent,' he shouted. 'I never done nothing. I'm a victim of brutality. I been wrong accused of this crime. I got mental conditions the police took advantage of." (53). Taken to an interrogation room, Victor reveals the reason for his behavior to the investigating detective: "Sorry about the identification evidence, Herbie. As you say I don't know what came over me. And here's you with all this evidence you can't use no more since my brief's going to get up on his hind legs in court and say your honour this here evidence is flawed because my client went and made a show of himself in front of the witnesses and that's why they're identifying him [. . .] You see I always took this keen amateur interest in the law and it says all the people in a line-up's got to behave the same way" (54). Victor has clearly learned well from his time in court how to manipulate a situation to his advantage, controlling and directing his world.

Gangster films provide Victor additional models of street smart men who profitably direct and control violence to achieve power and respect and find success outside the law. As a child, "Victor liked Edward G. Robinson and James Cagney in *Public Enemy*" (4) and "worked hard to get the gangster walk right" (5). When accosted by two older boys, Victor "wondered how Edward G. Robinson would handle this" (6). When his mother, Dorcas, complains about his father, Victor plays gangster, "That guy ain't going to do nothing to you, dollface. [. . .] Me and yous going to fill that guy full of lead, blow this town" (10). The behavior is rewarded: "Dorcas loved it when Victor talked like this big gangster from the films" (10).

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The media coverage of the violence that erupted in Belfast in the late 1960s offers Victor an opportunity to see his own world appear on a television screen and see himself as a player in the show the world is watching: "In 1969 the streets began to come alive for Victor. They appeared in the mouths of newsreaders, obscure and menacing, like capitals of extinct civilizations. [. . .] Delphi Avenue. [. . .] He'd listen to the BBC. [. . .] Unity Flats, Kashmir Road. The names took on an air of broken glass, bullet holes circled in chalk, burnt timber doused by rain. He felt the city become a diagram of violence centred about him" (10-11). This media attention makes his world important, defining it as place of violence and offering Victor a recurring role as a gunman of great repute: "On his day off Victor would go down to Crumlin Road magistrates' court. Park the car and then go in, women looking at him. It was a gift he had. Detectives would nod at him in the foyer. Looking good, Victor. It was the quiet respect of the interrogation room, the promise of darker days ahead" (11). Later when Victor is arrested, again he struts like a film star: "Victor was fingerprinted then photographed front and profile. Looking good, Victor. He knew these photographs were important, that in the future they could be released to the press. When he took a comb out of his pocket and combed his hair back none of the policemen objected. There was a silent acceptance of his sense of privilege" (52). When taken in to be part of a line-up, Victor offers witnesses a Hollywood gangster: "Victor turned into the lights and gave them a dangerous smile which he had practiced in front of the mirror. It was a Cagney smile, elegant and derisive. It showed that he had invulnerability to spare" (53).

Again and again Victor assumes a gangster persona and his culture praises him for it. For example, he joins the UVF and begins to extort money from storeowners for

protection – acts much like those in films like *The Public Enemy* in which the protagonist

Tom Powers begins his rise in the gangster world by politely but aggressively forcing

bars to serve only his gang's product or face destruction: "[Victor] learned that he didn't

have to threaten. [. . .] He was offering them a place in random events and always made a

point of calling at the same time every week. He was the means by which they could

align themselves to unpredictable violence" (27). Victor's gang follows a similar

trajectory to those depicted in classic gangster films in that their exploits as the

Resurrection Men eventually make them seem larger than life. The gangs are celebrated

for their criminal acts: "Victor started to see the first graffiti appearing in the derelict

Catholic streets that had been burnt out before the army were sent in [. . .] He was

impressed by the graffiti. It was a rumour of approval in the narrow streets. Resurrection

Men 1. Taigs [a derogatory terms for Catholics] 0. It confirmed he was on the right track.

It was the first sign of a legend taking shape" (134). The reporter Ryan, a stranger to

Victor, recognizes the style of his killings and wonders "Where do they think they are?

Chicago in the twenties?" (35). Ryan describes how young men brought before the

magistrate "all say the same thing. 'It was like a film.' 'It was like somebody out of

pictures.'" (79). Within his own smaller Protestant community, Victor finds that that the

debonair killer persona frequently found in the movies is even encouraged. When he buys

a black Ford Capri from Robinson's showroom, Robinson declares, "Here's a 007 for

Victor [. . .] a fucking Bondmobile. He hinted at lethal extras, hidden blades, machine-

guns behind the headlights [. . .] He picked out the Capri for Victor because it had

suggestions of power and generosity. It implied little margin for error, lives on the edge"

(27). Victor's world offers ample opportunity and encouragement for embracing the identity of a successful killer.

Victor's strategy for planning killings is to imagine them as scenes in a film starring himself: "Victor planned the job down to the last detail. It was almost as if the punishments had been carried out. When he shut his eyes it was like watching a film with the volume turned down. He could see men bundled into a car, their faces obscured, brought to a secret location. The interrogation. The blue muzzle flash. He could see himself being driven away from the scene with the face of a man with a troubled heart" (40-41). While in prison, Victor searches the drug cabinet in the pharmacy for a lethal poison with which to kill another prisoner, Hacksaw: "He wanted to find cyanide. It sounded like something from the pictures. He thought of Bette Davis who was his mother's favourite. Passions seething beneath the surface. A glitter of madness in the eye with only the music giving it away, the fitful nervy violins. Alone in a big house coming unhinged" (99). Walking to Hacksaw's cell to commit the murder, Victor plays the classic gangster: "He adopted the old Dillinger gait, pacey and dangerous. A sweet-faced character in a double-breasted suit and shoes polished to death placing his foot on the threshold of Hacksaw's cell as though the exact angle of his body in the doorway had been planned months in advance" (102).

This persona is so deeply instilled in Victor that later, when McClure begins feeding Victor drugs making Victor more agitated and less in control of himself, Victor's actions still demonstrate awareness of both short and long-term consequences through his ability to quickly imagine how a scene might play out in the Hollywood of his mind. In one instance, Victor, high on drugs stolen from the prison pharmacy that fill him with "a

restless desire for activity" (76), attempts to escape by climbing out a prison window using a rope made from knotted sheets and blankets directly above a passing guard: "Hanging there he could see the screw's white face below him. [. . .] He knew that if he attempted to escape he would succeed in a series of hairs-breadth calculations. He imagined it in the papers. Daring breakout. Fugitive from justice. But he knew that he had to deal with Hacksaw [. . .] Victor climbed back towards the window" (76). The reporter, Ryan, notes that in Belfast, acceptance "was a question of assembling an identity out of names: the name of school attended, the name of the street where you lived, your own name. These were the finely tuned instruments of survival" (33-34). Victor's sense of self (and of survival) is guided as much by the film characters he emulates as it is defined by the Belfast geography that tells him that a person walking a certain direction at a certain time of day on a certain road is almost certainly either Catholic or Protestant.

McNamee's aligning of Victor's character is film gangsters is not mere fiction, but reflects how media from outside Northern Ireland influenced the actions of those within it. Troubles thriller stereotypes aside, daily life in 1970s Belfast was not completely subsumed in sectarian killings. Other influences and role models from beyond Belfast also permeated the culture in the form of British news reports and American cinema. For example, Dillon offers evidence that Lenny Murphy may have been influenced by the film *The Godfather*. Testimony by a police informant details how, after leaving prison, Murphy "needed to show everybody he was back with a vengeance and that he was top dog. That meant he needed flashy clothes and a car to help his image" (237). Murphy attempts to extort protection money from a shopkeeper. When the store owner refuses, Murphy goes to a field where the owner's brother keeps two horses and,

according to one version of the story, cuts off their heads – a gesture reminiscent of the consequences movie producer Jack Woltz experiences when he refuses to cast Johnny Fontane in a film, despite Don Coreleone's request, and awakes to find the head of his prized racehorse on the pillow next to him in *The Godfather*.

In creating Murphy's fictional counterpart, Victor Kelly, McNamee replicates and intensifies the role Hollywood cinema and British news reporting played in Lenny Murphy's life and in so doing offers an even more compelling case for considering the influence British and U.S. media have on constructing social and cultural identity in Northern Ireland. The result is that, while Victor's place in his society as a Protestant Loyalist is the result of growing up in a community where the local culture and British media consistently present political and religious beliefs in uncompromising opposition, the persona he adopts as a psychopathic paramilitary killer identifies strongly with American gangster films.

Violence in the media has often been blamed for subsequent violence in society. In the 1930s, "many respectable citizens believed that films [. . .] based on the lives and activities of Prohibition-era criminals led to an increase in juvenile delinquency and accused Hollywood of delivering impressionable youth into a career of crime. [. . . T]he new Motion Picture Production Code stipulated, partly in reaction to the increasing popularity of gangster films, that movies stress proper behavior, respect for government, and 'Christian values'" (Springhall 137). Many others since the 1930s have claimed that a clear cause and effect exists between various films, television shows, and video games and particular acts of violence committed by individuals known to have seen those films and shows or played those video games. Multiple studies, however, indicate that viewing

media depictions of violence or anti-social behavior will not on their own make viewers prone to imitate what they've seen. The media is not the *cause* of any subsequent aberrant behavior, but merely a means of offering viewers "a metaphorical expression of a much bigger and more intractable set of problems in relation to their experience" (Turnbull 116).

For example, in the 1980s, the headmaster of an Australian secondary school wrote "to the producers of the television soap, *Prisoner*, arguing that this controversial series about women in prison had had a detrimental effect on the girls (but not the boys) in his school" (Turnbull 114). An ethnographic study by media studies scholar Sue Turnbull revealed, however, that the girls certainly knew the difference between real and fictional violence. They identified with the show because their lives as poor students in an area with high unemployment made them feel their school was like a prison and their lives as futile and frustrating as those of the women behind bars. Turnbull concluded that the "television series function[s] for the girls as an elaborate metaphor for the experience of being female, working class and disempowered: an experience that might well be expressed in aggression towards authority, towards others or themselves. The girls were therefore 'using' the television show *Prisoner* as a reference point for acting out of their own aggressive rejection of a system which they perceived as both hostile and repressive" (116).

Turnbull's findings align with others that repeatedly find that people respond to images in the media based on "their sense of who they are and what groups they belong to in the wider world. This strongly affect[s] not only their responses to the particular coverage, but also their wider sense of which media and which spokespeople they will

trust" (Barker and Petley 15). Other scholars have reached similar conclusions: "The 'power' of any media report or advertisement is not embedded in the individual message itself. Each image or item of information enters a world already populated by a multitude of other sources of information [. . .] Mass media messages intersect with moral judgements and broader cultural assumptions and compete with, or reinforce, messages from other non-media sources, such as the attitudes and behaviour of friends, pervasive sexism, racism or heterosexism, and the practicalities of their daily lives. Each message thus interacts with people's personal experiences and structural positions" (Miller, et al. 190).

Thus the girls in Australia could identify with the prisoners on the show because those characters were more in line with their own situation than, say, a well-behaved academically-minded middle class young woman would be. Similarly, white, Latino and black viewers in Los Angeles responded differently when watching television coverage of the 1992 riots following the not guilty verdict for the police on trial for beating Rodney King. Whites and Latinos were less likely than their black counterparts to refer to themselves in terms of race and more likely to condemn the looting and rioting (Barker and Petley 14-15). Palestinian teens prefer to play video games created by Hezbollah in which they kill Israeli soldiers more than games made in the West in which their gaming persona must be an American soldier killing Arabs: "Playing a computer game as an Arab mean[s] enjoying *your own point of view*" (Schubart 3).

Helga Tawil-Souri's study of the teens enamored by these games revealed that "Children had various ways of interpreting their interactions with pro-Arab games, from escaping reality to exacting revenge, from recognizing the political irony of being able to

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reverse the winners to merely a passing of time. Those who sought revenge or retribution were most often those who had directly suffered from violence in reality" (220). Like the girls in Australia, and the blacks in Los Angeles, the teens who identified with the violence did so because it reflected identities which they saw or wished for in themselves. Imitating any behaviors seen in the media was not because the media offered new and original personas to adopt, but because the media presented an identity that meshed so effectively with an existing identity or offered an apt metaphor for understanding the culture in which the viewer already exists. Thus, Victor's affinity for imitating actors from Hollywood films quite probably stems from the fact that such characters offer a framework for how a member of the poor, working class might thrive in a violent society.

Understandably, someone like Victor Kelly, whose world taught him early that aggression, not good behavior, gets results, would be more likely to identify with the culture of the American gangster as produced by Hollywood rather than accept the depictions of his world as revealed by the local news. In searching for models of success, he is unlikely to adopt the norms of more law-abiding characters. As Robert Warshow notes, in gangster films, "brutality itself becomes at once the means to success and the content of success – a success that is defined in its most general terms, not as accomplishment or specific gain, but simply as the unlimited possibility of aggression" (410). In a society like 1970s Northern Ireland where "both sides [in the Troubles] indulged themselves in the most grisly sectarian war of attrition against society yet" (Dillon), where men like Frames McCrea who scoff at the law are idolized and those like Constable McMinn who bring them to account are demonized, brutality could seem as

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commonplace a path to success as it is on the big screen in films like *Dillinger* or *The Public Enemy*.

Such movies do not cause Victor to become murderously aggressive; rather they offer a lens through which his identity as a murderous paramilitary may be better understood. The cinema doesn't teach Victor how to kill but rather helps him understand and assume the identity of a successful killer in society. In analyzing the censorship efforts against gangster films like these, John Springhall concludes that "young men already disposed towards crime [. . .] might possibly have taken cues for their behavior from watching gangster films, among many other sources, yet evidence that the cinema did more than provide suggestions for the form of their criminal or violent behavior is very limited indeed" (150).

Gangster films provide a metaphor for someone like Victor to understand the culture of Northern Ireland during the Troubles much like the *Prisoner* series offered Australian teens tools for understanding their feelings of confinement and powerlessness. Thomas Schatz notes that in gangster films, "The notion that 'crime doesn't pay' is continually qualified by the suggestion that the criminal, regardless of social class, education, or opportunity, can control his own destiny in an otherwise alienating and depersonalizing environment" (94). For someone like Victor, so observant in learning how to take control of his world, such films would offer a compelling model. In his analysis of the gangster film genre, Schatz could easily be describing Victor's Belfast when he describes the typical gangster film setting: "The city represents a complex, alienating, and overwhelming community that initially creates the gangster and eventually destroys him. [. . .] His urban environment, with its institutionalized alienation

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and class distinction, has denied him a legitimate route to power and success" (84-5). Schatz claims that the gangster hero's tragic flaw lies in "his inability to channel his considerable energies in a viable direction. Society is partially responsible, of course, in that it denies individual expression and provides minimal options to the struggling aggressive male from an inner-city, working-class background" (Schatz 88-9) – an observation that could also describe Victor's character. Jack Shadoian, in identifying typical traits of the gangster hero, might also just as easily be talking about Victor: "The gangster gets to run, if only for a while, 'the big show.' The gangster hero feels he has mastered his reality [. . .] The gangster does get to do his thing and thereby gets his kicks" (20). Victor's identity as a Loyalist gunman has its roots as much in Hollywood as it does in Northern Ireland.

Exactly what films Victor may have seen to construct this identity is not always made clear. Dorcas, for example, merely refers to him "acting the big gangster he saw in the pictures" (38) and loving it "when Victor talked like this big gangster from the films" (10). McNamee specifically mentions several classic movies and actors by name, providing rich intertextual references for Victor's behavior. We learn that "Victor liked Edward G. Robinson and James Cagney in *Public Enemy"* (4). From his perch in the projection room during a visit to the Apollo Theatre to see Chalky White, the projectionist and old school friend of his father's, young Victor carefully studies the 1945 release of *Dillinger:* "When he looked through the slit he could see Laurence Tierney as John Dillinger laid out on a morgue slab like a specimen of extinction. Flash bulbs went off. A woman said I thought he'd be better looking. Dillinger kept his eyes open, looking

beyond the women and the reporters towards his Dakota birthplace, small farms glistening under a siege moon" (4-5).[23]

Similarly, exactly what lessons Victor learned from observing Hollywood gangsters are not explicitly stated, but the films certainly offered him models in how to lead through intimidation and fear, deal with betrayal, and die. Many gangster films depict bold, brutal attacks – bank robberies in which guards and civilians are gunned down (as in *Dillinger*), the execution of rival gang members by machine gun (as when Tom Powers and Matt Doyle are attacked leaving their safe house in *The Public Enemy*). The Resurrection Men engage in similar acts of intimidation. The scene in *Scarface* when gang members enter the Shamrock Café and start shooting to kill rival gang members (as well as anyone else who happens to be there) is comparable to the job Victor's gang pulls on the Shamrock Pub. Biffo and Victor enter the bar and begin firing randomly. Afterwards, "the two men backed out of the bar, firing as they went" (141). Had they been wearing double-breasted suits and fedoras rather than yellow bank moneybags over their heads, the scene could easily have been mistaken for one from any number of Hollywood gangster films.

As a leader, Victor is careful to avoid complacency, having apparently learned the importance of change from watching films: "Heather noticed that each time Victor established a pattern he would break it. He would stay two or three nights at her flat then

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[23] *Dillinger* starring Laurence Tierney does not include such a mortuary scene. The film ends with police officers emptying Dillinger's pockets on the street after he is killed. Several photos of the real John Dillinger laid out in a mortuary do exist, however, and are quite famous. His eyes are unlikely to have been looking toward his Dakota birthplace, however, since he was born in Indiana and the bullet that killed him "hit Dillinger in the back of the neck and exited through his right eye" (Leroux). McNamee's factual inaccuracies do not detract from the overall point regarding Victor's character formation: as a child, he was exposed to and keenly observed stories of gangsters' lives.

disappear for day. He never travelled by the same route [. . .] A gift for survival, he called

it, secrets of a fugitive heart. One night he told her how John Dillinger had undergone

plastic surgery to avoid detection. Victor was deeply impressed by the possibilities of

transformation" (63).

The need to ensure loyalty by practicing a zero tolerance policy in regards to any

hint of betrayal is also a practice of Hollywood gangsters that Victor follows. Victor's

execution of Darkie Larche, though more brutal than Tom Powers' shooting of Putty

Nose in *The Public Enemy*, or John Dillinger's killing of Specs Green in *Dillinger* is

based on a similar code of behavior. Darkie, Putty, and Specs all hold leadership roles

when Victor, Tom, and Dillinger begin their careers as gangsters. All three are usurped

by the newcomers. All three demonstrate disloyalty in some way. In *The Public Enemy*,

Putty abandons Tom after a failed robbery. When Putty returns to town several years

later, Tom learns that he plans "'to get him again. He thinks you're soft.' 'He ain't gonna

get me,' says Tom, who then kills Putty the same night. In *Dillinger,* Specs Green

provides information that allows the police to arrest John Dillinger. Dillinger escapes

from jail and shoots Specs in front of the gang to re-establish his authority. Similarly, in

Resurrection Man, Victor is so well known as someone who kills those he believes to be

disloyal to him that, following a public argument, Darkie correctly predicts that Victor

will kill him. When asked by Victor's girlfriend, Heather, why he doesn't visit any more,

Darkie responds, "I can't. You don't mind the row we had in the bar, I told him he was a

Catholic and all. Victor never forgets that. I'm a dead man. You wouldn't want a dead

man to come calling" (171). When Victor finally kills Darkie, he does so to re-establish

his position as an outlaw gangster. Driving with McClure to a safe house, Victor sees

Darkie on the street. "'Darkie Larche,' McClure said in a low threatening voice. 'Turned yellow he did. There's a traitor for you. Would have shot you in the back, Victor, if he had the guts to do it'" (204). Locked away in the safe house, Victor realizes it's time to return to action: "From the films he knew that outlaws sometimes got lost in romance, and that it could become necessary to return to the basics of a savage, haunted existence. He could start by settling a score" (205). Victor has learned from watching the likes of Edward G. Robinson in *Little Caesar* that to not execute a traitor is to be considered a coward – as Rico (played by Robinson) learns when his childhood friend must be shot by one of his gang for disloyalty because Rico can't bring himself to pull the trigger: "Now you're getting soft," he's told. The killing of Darkie reasserts Victor's position within the Loyalist community as anything but soft: "Victor began to return to his old haunts [. . .] Men greeted him cautiously. About you, Victor son. He never had to put his hand in his pocket for a drink. Barmen accepted that they were dealing with something outside the ordinary range of commerce and set drinks before him unasked" (214). Like the gangsters in film, Victor guarantees loyalty through violence and intimidation.

A moment in Victor's life that is undoubtedly influenced by his knowledge of gangster films is his death scene. Like the lead characters in three of the most well-known gangster films, *Dillinger, Little Caesar,* and *Scarface,* Victor is gunned down in a blaze of bullets as he leaves a safe haven. In *Dillinger*, a woman betrays Dillinger so that the police await him as he leaves a movie theater; in *Little Caesar*, Rico leaves the flophouse where he's been hiding from police to prove that's he's not a coward. In *Scarface*, Tony Camonte is forced to surrender when he's unable to get the steel window covers of his safe house in place before the police toss in tear gas. When the police attempt to handcuff

him, however, he runs out into the street to be killed by police gunfire rather than be taken alive. In *Resurrection Man*, Victor is killed as he leaves his mother's home, having left his safe house on the advice of McClure who has in fact arranged for his assassination. Victor plays the scene in true Hollywood gangster fashion, apparently intuiting immediately what the situation requires. As he leaves the house and realizes McClure isn't there to pick him up, Victor makes no attempt to retreat. "He felt an expression cross his face like in a film [. . .] Victor knew the moves. Struggle to raise the gun. Clutch the breast and lean forward in anguish. His face hit the pavement" (229-30). Clearly, Victor's ideas about how to die have been influenced by American film.

Victor's story reflects a classic Hollywood gangster tale – a rags to riches tale of the poor kid who becomes somebody only to lose it all – with a particularly Northern Irish twist since in Victor's case, there is no Prohibition bootlegging to make him rich. His wealth is less material: he never earns a great fortune, but he does earn great respect, becoming a legend within his community. Northern Ireland provided the setting; Hollywood offered the behavioral cues. Together the two offer a glimpse of the darker side of the global marketplace and its potential for perpetuating violence. External media sources imported into Northern Irish society provide men like Victor with additional identity models in a world where the Troubles seem without end. When those sources present Northern Ireland one-dimensionally as violent, sectarian and unprogressive (as the BBC news does in *Resurrection Man*) they are rejected in favor of others that offer a more culturally compatible world view. For Victor, living in a culture that valued violence, the Hollywood gangster was an apt metaphor.

McNamee offers through Victor not merely an extreme example of provincial sectarianism but also a consideration of how such an identity is constructed from both local and global cultures. The story of Victor Kelly shows how adopting more worldly personas can be just as dangerous as stagnating in provincialism if the identities chosen enforce the restrictive sectarian options available on the home front. As Margaret Scanlan argues, Victor's world is "a highly contemporary site where the 'new myths of television' and the new ways of understanding one's self and one's world that a global electronic culture fosters have been assimilated to inherited antagonisms [. . . forcing] readers to see Northern Ireland in a context that outsiders at least usually ignore, as vitally connected to London and New York and Hollywood" (54-5). In this way, Victor reveals how American and British cultural products – not just the Northern Irish – may be complicit in generating and perpetuating the least desirable and most violent forms of Northern Irish identity such as the paramilitary gunman. The Northern Irish society of *Resurrection Man* is indeed rife with the types of sectarian violence found in earlier Troubles fiction, but McNamee's depiction of this society doesn't merely describe the violence. It explores the motivations and models behind that violence.

Chapter Four:

Complex Beings Who Fumble:

Re-thinking Gender in Northern Irish Identity

through Mary Costello's *Titanic Town*

As the two previous chapters show, both Glenn Patterson and Eoin McNamee

have written novels that offer new and original ways of imagining Northern Irish identity.

Yet like most male writers fictionalizing the Troubles, they have focused on exploring

identity primarily through male protagonists, and like their Irish literary forefathers, have

"made considerable use of stereotypes in their presentation of female figures" (Ni

Chuilleanáin 9). The grandmother in Patterson's *Fat Lad* who doggedly preaches that no

one can leave Ireland forever personifies the self-sacrificing Irish mother, an image often

used to symbolize Mother Ireland (Rolston 48). The protagonist's Northern Irish

girlfriend Kay serves as a goddess-like symbol of the new Northern Ireland, keeping with

a long tradition in Irish literature of mixing the idea of nation with the idea of

womanhood (Boland 80). In McNamee's *Resurrection Man,* the two women in Victor's

life—his mother and his girlfriend—are typical of one of the most common female tropes

in Troubles fiction: woman as passive victim (Ward and McGivern 584). Neither of these

women ever stands up to Victor. They exist entirely as objects of his attention; their primary agenda is to please him.

Such flat characterizations are standard depictions of women in Northern Irish fiction. As Elmer Kennedy-Andrews notes, "there has certainly been no shortage of images of women in the Irish tradition," but he observes that these images tend to depict women as simplified types (*(de-)constructing* 34-35). Nuala O'Faolain identifies two recurring female archetypes in Irish literature: one in which the "women are mindless and ferocious" and another in which they are "ferociously mindless" (130). These types generated the standard for "the figure-women with whose stereotypes we now live—the goddess, the slut and the hag. The counter-myth to these is the minor one of the saintly Irish mother" (O'Faolain 129-30). In their constructions of Northern Irish female identities, both Patterson and McNamee follow these traditional stereotypes.

To be fair, female authors have not done much better in revealing the complexity of an Irish woman's life. In 1985, O'Faolain bemoaned the state of women's writing in Ireland, North and South, noting that modern Irish literature can boast world famous male writers, such as George Bernard Shaw and James Joyce, but that, "only one Irish woman writer, Edna O'Brien, has reached a mass audience at home and abroad" (128). While certainly other Irish women had been writing, publishing, and receiving recognition for novels, O'Faolain elevates O'Brien based on the simple fact that, in 1985, O'Brien was the only Irish woman whose "books [could] be found on the revolving book-stand of any small town Irish newsagent's shop. She is published, advertised and distributed. Not one other native woman writer is, in those respects, comparable" (132).

Five years later, Eve Patten noted that the situation had not changed substantially. While the late 1980s saw the publication of several anthologies of Irish women's writings, they tended to follow a predictable structure ("Women" 5). Most of the pieces "are primarily concerned with a woman in a bad relationship with a man; often it is marriage, usually it is in some state of breakdown. [In about half the selections] the male element resorts to violence" (Patten, "Women" 5). In other words, the characterizations perpetuate the traditional idea of Irish womanhood as passive victim. Ten years later, particularly for Northern Irish women, the situation had yet to improve. In surveying the state of contemporary Northern Irish writing in 2000, Christine St. Peter concluded that "[t]he last generation has seen a remarkable flowering of men's literature in the North, but when I turn to women's fiction to see how northern women are imagining their respective communities, I find just a handful of published books" (99).[24]

The fact that male authors like Patterson and McNamee who emerged in the early 1990s fail to create well-rounded female characters is troubling, but typical. Later authors, both male and female, have also failed to offer significant alternatives to stereotypical female characterizations. Northern Irish identity has been re-imagined in multiple ways in novels published since the Good Friday Agreement, but in general women's identity has not.

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[24] Ruth Hooley calls the silence from Northern Irish women "ambiguous" (1). Like others, she is unable to pinpoint if it is due to a lack of women writers, a lack of confidence and opportunities to develop as writers, outright discrimination or even "passive resistance by those who find the language so steeped in gender-biased values as to be alien and inadequate to express their meaning (Hooley 1). A former editor at Blackstaff Press claims that its lack of female writers "has much more to do with what is submitted for consideration than with any bias within the press itself. [. . .] They simply do not receive a sufficient number of manuscripts from northern women writers" (Pelan 53). Rebecca Pelan posits other contributing factors. Northern Irish writers may not be identified as Northern Irish since "[m]any Northern Irish women are included in publishing figures for Britain or the United Kingdom, rather than Ireland or Northern Ireland" (54). The traditional nature of women's roles in Northern Ireland also means that many women who might write are unable to do so because of family responsibilities (Pelan 55).

Arguably, the lack of women writers to choose from can partially explain this (Pelan 53), but Northern Irish women, though few in number, have authored quality work and gained recognition from both popular and academic readers. For most, however, that recognition is fleeting. Mary Costello and Deirdre Madden were both often mentioned in the early 1990s alongside Glenn Patterson, Eoin McNamee, Colin Bateman and Robert McLiam Wilson as young novelists who were redefining the Northern Irish novel. The focus of this chapter, Costello's novel *Titanic Town*, met wide acclaim upon publication in 1992 – one reviewer declared it "a glorious book" (Boland). It became a film that earned its own accolades, and several scholars cited it as an example of how the new Northern Irish novels were re-imagining cultural and national identity. Marie Hammond Callaghan argued that the novel reflects the reality of working-class Northern Irish "women [who] failed to act like 'women'" (38). Jennifer Jeffers hailed it as an important depiction of "female agency in a patriarchal, heterosexual society" (49). Yet, today, *Titanic Town* typically merits only a passing mention. Mary Beckett's *Give Them Stones* or Madden's Belfast novels are more usually held forth as the texts that best exemplify the experience of Northern Irish women during the Troubles.[25]

I contend, however, that *Titanic Town* merits a more central place in the Northern Irish literary canon, not simply to include more works by women in the canon, but

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[25] Why Beckett and Madden get more coverage than Costello in Northern Irish literary scholarship is a puzzle beyond the scope of this work. Perhaps it is because both Beckett and Madden wrote additional texts for scholars to study. Readers trying to make sense of the Troubles from a woman's perspective therefore have multiple narratives to work with from each author whereas Costello only produced a single work. Alternatively, (or possibly in addition), the book's dry humor may discourage discussions of Costello because it adds a mix of comedy to the tragedy of the Troubles that Madden, Beckett, and most other female Northern Irish writers lack, and so it fails to follow the norm that life during the Troubles was not only senselessly violent, but unremittingly bleak. This unique element makes it harder for generic statements about Northern Irish novels to apply to *Titanic Town*.

because the novel is particularly useful for understanding the complexities of identity during the Troubles for working class Catholic girls and women. Costello's work is particularly significant because she addresses Northern Irish female identity in ways that other women authors such as Beckett and Madden do not. In Beckett's *Give Them Stones,* the protagonist is an elderly woman living on her own – an important but distinctly different lifestyle and set of circumstances from those of the women in Costello's work. Beckett was born in 1926 and experienced the Troubles as an adult heading into old age. Her perspective is distinct from women writers like Madden (born 1960) and Costello (born 1955) who are part of the generation of children brought up in Northern Ireland during the Troubles – children described by Ed Cairns as "growing up in the midst of a society in turmoil [. . .] in which they have before them the example of adults unable to settle arguments except by stone-throwing and/or murder and in which the forces of law and order have been openly challenged" (71). These circumstances created a very different childhood from the one Mary Beckett would have had in the 1930s and 40s and in all likelihood generated a different perspective on the Troubles.

Similarly, while Deirdre Madden may share generational attributes with Costello, their perspectives vary due to class differences. *One by One in the Darkness* is the novel most similar to *Titanic Town* in that both involve adults remembering their childhoods, but in Madden's novel, these adults are well-educated and financially comfortable. The family owns their home and the children weren't reared in the thick of the city of Belfast during the worst of the Troubles as Costello's protagonist is. Thus, neither Madden nor Beckett explores cultural identity and gender in the way that Costello does. To my knowledge, until the publication of Anna Burns' *No Bones* in 2002, *Titanic Town* was the

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only Northern Irish novel written by a woman raised in Belfast in the 1970s that focuses on the varied and difficult choices faced by young Northern Irish Catholic women coming of age during the Troubles.[26]

Titanic Town is loosely based on the author's own experiences growing up in West Belfast in the 1960s and 70s, but it most decidedly deviates from the traditional Troubles novel which emphasizes sectarian differences. Instead Costello focuses on differences among members of the Catholic working class. Its autobiographical nature and working-class focus make *Titanic Town* a key artifact for understanding the Troubles since novels which give a voice to Northern Irish working class women are so rare.

Moreover, Costello's emphasis is on the women of the community – their conflicts with each other and their differing means of coping with the violence in their community. This narrow focus is significant. As Lynne Crook notes, "Most writers consciously write about both communities [Loyalist and Republican], and there is often a pressure to ensure a balanced view in Northern Ireland, especially within comedic texts. Costello is, therefore, unusual for a comedic writer in dealing almost exclusively with one community" (62-63). This focus breaks what Eve Patten describes as a predictable structure found in Irish women's writing in the late 1980s that showed women living "more or less the same experience" ("Women" 5). In fact, the novel is both original and traditional: it imagines nuanced and complex identities for Northern Irish women in the

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[26] Costello appears to be the only female novelist from a working class Catholic background published during the Northern Irish novel boom period of the early 1990s. A Northern Irish Protestant female novelist from this generation does not seem to exist, or at least has not made a strong enough impact to reach American consumers and scholars. Linda Anderson, born in 1949, comes closest with novels such as *To Stay Alive*.

Troubles instead of merely repeating the stereotypes, yet it constructs these new roles

partially through humor, a quality long considered integral to Irish identity.[27]

Costello tells her story from the point of view of young Annie McPhelimy, who at

age 32 is reflecting on a Belfast childhood repeatedly defined and disrupted by the

Troubles. As the story unfolds, different figures and events emerge to provide implicit

and explicit models for behavior for young Annie to accept or reject. At age five, she is

introduced to gender difference: "[M]y mother told me I was a girl and moved me out of

my brother's bed. I was disappointed. I felt cheated [. . .] But I didn't seek a clearer

explanation" (Costello 5-6).[28] At this point, Annie accepts these gender norms without

question. She also develops a basic and equally unquestioning understanding of her

community's views of sectarian differences. By the time she is school-aged, she knows

that Protestants are the enemy and that she is "an Irish Catholic and thus one of the new

chosen people" (9). She obeys her cousin Terry when he insists that she must not look

frightened and cover her ears at the tattoo of a Lambeg drum during marching season, the

period each summer when members of the Orange order and Protestant loyalists march in

Northern Ireland, often through Catholic areas, to celebrate the Protestant victory at the

Battle of the Boyne in 1690. He tells her "[t]hey only beat it to frighten the Catholics.

Don't let them see you're afrad. [So Annie] dutifully uncover[s] [her] ears, put[s] on [her]

cheeky face and stare[s] brazenly at the men in the dark skirts" (14). Annie's community

teaches her its cultural norms and, as a child, she adopts them as her own.

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[27] In his anthropological study of humor in Irish culture, Lawrence Taylor, for example, notes that "ironic views of Others, as well as of the personal and national Self, [are] not rare and [. . . within these views there is] much concern with defining Irishness" (174).

[28] All subsequent references in this chapter are to *Titanic Town* unless otherwise indicated.

As the story progresses, however, Annie encounters contradictions to these norms. For example, while the novel's male characters are flat, they are not stereotypes. In the 1970s, Northern Ireland, like most western societies, constructed family as "a profoundly patriarchal institution [where] traditional gender roles persist" (Coulter 103-4). Males, then, were (and arguably in many instances still are) viewed as the traditional authority figures in a family – a perception that held fast even when lack of job opportunities for men meant that many wives became the breadwinner (Coulter 104). In Ken Harland's study of Northern Irish masculinity, the participants, all of whom were from inner city Belfast, overwhelmingly believed "that men should be powerful, strong, brave, intelligent, healthy, sexy, mature, and in control of every aspect of their lives" (1). For working class males, the default behavior for asserting this power and control has long been domestic violence (Coulter 106). Indeed, until the 1980s, when several initiatives directly addressed gender-specific violence in Northern Ireland, attacks against women were usually excused as a natural response to the stress of the Troubles and abused women were pressured by clergy and family to stay with violent partners (McWilliams and McKiernan, 50). As Begoña Aretxaga notes, "images of the conflict in Northern Ireland [are] saturated with images of violent men and victimized women" (4). The angry and abusive Northern Irish male is a firmly established norm in Northern Irish culture.[29]

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[29] This stereotype also appears in the two novels discussed in my earlier chapters. Drew's father in *Fat Lad* and Victor in *Resurrection Man* can both be described as angry and abusive. Both engage in domestic violence.

In *Titanic Town*, Costello reveals alternatives to the aggressive male: Annie's next door neighbor, Mr. French, is far from the stereotype of the loutish, abusive Irish father who takes out his anger at the world on his wife and children. Instead,

> Mr French was a battered husband. Admittedly when he got drunk he became moody, even a bit verbal. But his plaintive twitterings did not compare with the response they evoked from his wife. Although a drinking woman herself she objected when Mickey came home bluttered. [. . .] Her shrieks and curses would rend the night [. . .] She resorted to violence. She often left him black and blue. (55-56)

This description is followed by Costello's depiction of the beleaguered Mr. French lying in the garden "a little dazed and bloody" after his wife throws him through the large glass panel on the lower half of their door (56).

Certainly on one level, the scene is a horrifying example of domestic abuse, but while Costello builds some sympathy for Mr. French – "he was essentially pleasant and harmless" (55) – it's clear that he is not a passive victim: "When he recovered enough to stand up he went off to seek consolation at the White Fort Inn, came back in the evening, emboldened by drink, and broke every window in the house" (56). When viewed in the context of domestic abuse typical for this time and place, the couple's behaviors vividly re-imagines gender roles. Costello turns the traditional image of the victimized Irish wife on its head. Mr. French has assumed the part of the long-suffering Irish mother while it is his wife who is the loutish brute. Yet the response for being thrown through a window is to break more windows, not remain passive.

Despite its violence, the scene reads more as physical comedy than domestic tragedy given how Costello's re-working of the traditional man-beats-wife scenario clearly exemplifies comedic inversion, i.e.,

> the 'world-turned-upside-down' scenario where slave governs master or man bites dog. Foolishness, intellectual myopia, or the rigid insistence on inflexible systems of being or thinking are ridiculed by transformations of different kinds, investigations of alternative identities, or a relaxation of social codes. (Stott 2)

In this case, Costello clearly offers an alternative to the violent Irish husband and father. Stott notes that such scenarios generate a continual "disparity between place and self [. . .] used in comedy, [to tell] stories in which people are geographically, linguistically or, in some profound existential way, misplaced" (9). Indeed, the difference between the usual and expected and the unusual and unexpected is essentially what makes something funny, according to the incongruity theory of humor widely accepted among scholars in humor studies, (McGraw and Warner 7). The Frenchs' relationship generates such a disparity. Mr. French demonstrates none of the qualities of a powerful family patriarch. He does not protest the abuse by his wife, but instead engages in "plaintive twitterings." Mrs French's "shrieks and curses [. . .] rend the night" (56) not as pleas for help against an oafish spouse, but as the sounds of attack and aggression from a woman who by no means fits the long-suffering Irish mammy stereotype. The Frenchs' behavior imagines a world that rejects the strong man/weak woman norm and instead places a woman, not a man, in the role of abuser. Yet in this world, the abused is also capable of returning fire. Moreover, by the next day, the couple has made up and walk arm-in-arm to the pub to the

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great delight of Annie's father who concludes the scene by declaring "There is no love that can compare with that of one drunken sod for another" (56).

Such role reversals constitute what McGraw and Warner refer to as "a benign violation" (10). In benign violation theory,

> humor only occurs when something seems wrong, unsettling or
> threatening (i.e., a violation), but simultaneously seems okay, acceptable,
> or safe (i.e., benign). When something is just a violation, such as
> somebody falling down the stairs, people feel bad about it. But [. . .] when
> the violation turns out to be benign, such as someone falling down the
> stairs and ending up unhurt, people often do an about-face and react in a
> least one of three ways: they feel amused, they laugh, or they make a
> judgment – 'That was funny.' (McGraw and Warner 10)

Had Mr French been seriously hurt, or had the couple continued to be at odds with each other, the scene would serve a very different function; however, because the couple is not only fine, but apparently quite content with each other, the situation serves as a humorous alternative to the status quo.

In Annie's world, domestic violence against women is part of the status quo, but one that had long been ignored as a significant social problem at the time Costello wrote and published *Titanic Town*. By presenting the situation as comedy, Costello not only makes it laughable, but more importantly "reinforces its importance" as an issue in Annie's world (Crook 61). Andrew Stott argues that such comedy doesn't necessarily lead to new truths or even fully destroy untruths about a community (14), but it can serve as a means of attack against community or individual hypocrisies (Crook 70). In this way,

Costello's humor places her squarely within the Northern Irish comedic tradition: "Much of the comedy in the novel, as often in writing from Northern Ireland, is used by the individual as a resistance to the dominant [. . .] ideologies fighting for supremacy which threaten to subsume them" (Crook 62).

The Frenchs' relationship, then, posits alternative gender roles. A woman behaved like a man; a domestic abuse victim returned an attack. Yet everyone survived. As a result, while the Frenchs may not be particularly desirable alternatives to the status quo, they at least contradict the either/or fallacy of the community's traditional male/female identities. The fact that their violations of social norms are presented as benign makes their behavior unthreatening to the dominant gender ideology. It's socially acceptable, even enjoyable for others in the community that they choose to defy the norm. Even if some find these roles unacceptable, their presence in the novel opens a space for exploring which roles in the community are appropriate and why. For example, community members who might feel that the violence against Mr French is not benign (i.e., to argue that a woman beating her husband is not a benign comedic act but a highly unfeminine one which is neither humorous nor acceptable) could arguably be required to then justify why such violence is acceptable for a man but not a woman. Either reading marks the scene as significant: the inversions (whether seen as successful comedy or not) reveal domestic violence as an issue in this community rather than ignoring it.

In addition to highlighting gender issues, comedic inversions also reveal power not as a "coherent and all-pervasive monolith [. . .] but constituted of contradictions and unacknowledged dependencies" (Stott 37). Costello's use of such humor reveals again and again that even when the men in Annie's life assume traditional roles, they are not

uniformly powerful leaders and heroic protectors. They are complex beings who fumble. Indeed, Costello's depictions of male power tend to reveal weakness, not strength. In most cases, attempts by males to assume traditional roles such as family protector or freedom fighter reveal a lack of any real power. They juxtapose male characters' desire for power against the reality of their powerlessness.

From the novel's first page, Costello uses inversion to reveal this. The book begins with a random brick coming through a bedroom window in the middle of the night. Annie's father's reaction paints him as ridiculous and foolhardy rather than heroic: "He flourishes a sword of Toledo steel in his right hand, a souvenir of [Annie's] trip to the ancient Spanish capital. El Cid McPhelimy. *Excalibur Na H'Eirann"* (1). That he wields the sword as he stumbles behind his wife, "one leg struggling into his trousers" adds absurdity to his attempts to protect his family. El Cid may have been a masterful military leader, but El Cid McPhelimy can't even get his pants on without tripping. Excalibur may be the sword that brought King Arthur power, but Excalibur Na H'Eirann (Excalibur of Ireland) seems unlikely to bestow sovereignty on its holder.

Such tongue-in-cheek perspective is not simply Annie's jaundiced teenage view of her father. She bestows it mercilessly on all the men in her life. The IRA men in their black balaclavas outside her window each night are dubbed "the charge of the armalite brigade" (4), a clever play on Tennyson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade* commemorating the Battle of Balaclava in the Crimean War. The reference links a badly-equipped and futile attack by the British to the IRA men hiding behind trash bins with only ArmaLite rifles. Later Annie's cousin, a youth determined to become a tough IRA hard man, is hit by a bottle at a July 12th march commemorating William of Orange's

victory over the Irish at the Battle of the Boyne. Far from admiring her cousin's courage against Loyalist marchers, Annie dubs the weapon "the bottle of the boing" (15) suggesting an almost cartoon-like image of the scene when the bottle bounces from her cousin's head – an image quite at odds with the traditional stereotypes of brave IRA men fighting for freedom.

Again and again, Annie shows disdain toward the men directly involved in the conflict whether they be IRA or British, presenting them as uniformly bumbling and even absurd at their war maneuvers and macho posturing. Again and again this disdain emerges not through straightforward criticism, but through humor as Costello shows how the culture's notions of potent masculinity are, in practice, ineffectual posturing. Such discourse places the accepted truths about gender in a dialectic with the reality that alternatives can and do exist. The descriptions of Annie's father mock his attempt at assuming his traditional role of family protector. Costello shows Mr. French, whom tradition places as head of the household, as weak and powerless against his wife's aggression. These contradictions to community norms deconstruct the typical attitudes and behaviors toward gender roles, particularly male roles, by presenting behaviors that would be traditionally marked as masculine (such as abuser) and feminine (such as victim) to the opposite gender and/or by presenting the masculine role as absurd (as in the case of El Cid McPhelimy).

Costello also questions the validity of how males in her community approach the conflict between Republicans and Unionists. Her word play – the use of puns like "the armalite brigade" and "the bottle of the boing" – turn aggressive shows of male strength into jokes and so contradict the traditional, stagnant notions of masculinity. In her world,

men are not uniform pillars of strength and authority, but rather ridiculous caricatures of those stereotypes.

Certainly such comedic inversions and word play can make reading more enjoyable, but more importantly for understanding Northern Irish identity, they serve a nation-building function. In *The Irish Comic Tradition*, Vivien Mercier observes the Irish propensity to accept humor to mark false or destructive conditions, an attitude that gives comedy a political function in Irish culture: "embedded in the popular beliefs of the Irish [is the idea] that truth can be arrived at by witty dialectic" (86). In the case of *Titanic Town*, Costello uses humor to challenge gender norms, and by extension, the political foundation of the Northern Irish conflict, a foundation built on traditional notions of masculinity. As Tamar Mayer notes, in cases like Northern Ireland, "the connection between masculinity and nationalism remains strong: men take the liberty to define the nation and the nation-building process, while women for the most part accept their obligation to reproduce the nation biologically and symbolically" (16). For the Northern Irish Republican male, nation-building may be particularly essential to identity since they are more likely to see "acts of saving the nation from its own government [as] the ultimate masculine task" (Mayer 16). Costello's humorous jabs at traditional masculinity therefore form what Lynne Crook has dubbed "an important resistance towards the violence" by positing alternative interpretations of male behavior (72). As Crook notes, "This may not seem immediately radical; however, the aim may be to offer a space which is not apolitical, but one that allows political opinion, unconstrained by violence or an imposed way of thought" (72). This also makes the book a particularly relevant

alternative to the typical depictions of Northern Irish life prevalent in literature and other media.

Such alternative spaces are offered more overtly through the novel's women since the most influential and complex figures in Annie's life are overwhelmingly female. While male characters stray from the traditional masculine ideal, they are fairly uniform in that they all share what Ken Harland calls "protest masculinity – whereby [males] make claims to power when there are no real resources for doing so" (1). In contrast, femininity appears in many different forms: a female character in Costello's fictional world can be both passive and active. Her women achieve positions of power and act independently, but their methods for gaining authority and the range of their control vary. The result is a diverse array of how to imagine gender roles for Northern Irish Catholic and working class women and how women might function politically without violence or unthinking adherence to socially imposed norms.

For example, Mrs French, the woman who defies the stereotype of the long-suffering Irish mammy, offers a model of Irish womanhood that is simultaneously admirable and disgusting, both hag and goddess. Using words with negative connotations such as "tangles," "bloated," and "mousey," Costello constructs an image of a slovenly crone. Although not yet forty-five years old, Mrs French is described as someone who

> had already lost all her teeth and would never insert her falsies before
> noon. Her hair was dyed strawberry blond, but never recently, so that it
> would graduate in tangles round her big, bloated face and down over her
> shoulders changing in colour from grey at the crown, to mousey, the blond

at the dried ends. She never put a comb through it, but she did scratch it a

lot. (53-54)

However, Costello admits the stereotype only to contradict it: "To all appearances Mrs

French was a dirty throughother sloven, yet she saw herself as Róisín Dubh, sloe-eyed

symbol of young Mother Ireland, an inspiration to gallant patriots, a stalwart soldier in

the fight for national freedom" (54). Gerardine Meaney argues that the use of women to

symbolize the Irish nation restricts women to a passive, secondary role (17). Louise Ryan

and Margaret Ward concur, noting that in the Irish Nationalist movement, "women

become the bearers of the symbols of the nation, but their everyday experiences and

agency are denied [. . . .] While nationalist movements seek to mobilise women, they do

so in strictly limited ways" (2). One such form of mobilization is for a woman to emulate

Róisín Dubh, (or in English, the Black Rose). Traditionally, this has meant representing

an ideal of nation men would die to save; the women then are mere objects, not active

participants in the fight itself.[30]

Notably, however, Costello's reference to Róisín Dubh acknowledges the term's

passive, metaphorical meaning ("symbol of young Mother Ireland, an inspiration to

gallant patriots") and Róisín Dubh's alluring beauty ("sloe-eyed"), but it also describes

her as active ("a stalwart soldier") (54). And it is this active role that Mrs French

emulates. When British soldiers arrive to search her home, Mrs French launches "an

auditory counter-attack" (55) of Irish revolutionary songs and recites verbatim Padraig

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[30] James Clarence Mangan's poem "Róisín Dubh," for example, celebrates Dark Rose (or Rosaleen in some translations) as worth dying for. The term Róisín Dubh was used in lieu of naming Ireland explicitly as a way to disguise the poem's anti-English sentiments. In the verse, Róisín Dubh (i.e., symbol of Ireland) is instructed to neither sigh nor weep for the soldier's death in her name, creating the sense of Róisín Dubh as a woman left behind, passively await the return of her man.

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Pearse's famous oration given at the grave of Fenian leader O'Donovan Rossa. The speech begins with Pearse celebrating Rossa as an example of both the typical and the ideal: "O'Donovan Rossa was not the greatest man of the Fenian generation, but he was its most typical man. He was the man that [. . .] stood most starkly and plainly for the Fenian idea." The ending of the speech in particular has long been a rallying cry for Irish Nationalists and Republicans:

> They think that they have pacified Ireland. They think that they have purchased half of us and intimidated the other half. They think that they have foreseen everything, think that they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools! — they have left us our Fenian dead, and, while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace. (Pearse)

Pearse speaks for all of Ireland as though it was a homogenous community, and in this community, the typical man is a Republican or at least a Nationalist. Mrs French's ability to passionately recite Pearse's words suggests that she considers herself part of this Ireland. She may be a woman, but she holds the Fenian idea as dearly as any man. As the British approach, she personifies not the more typical Róisín Dobh, a symbol of passive beauty for whom men should die, but rather Róisín Dobh, a stalwart soldier entering the fray herself.

Mrs French then is both unkempt hag and warrior goddess. One might presume that Costello offers Mrs French as a critique of Irish Republican fervor since she associates the character – undoubtedly the novel's most fanatical Republican – with such negative terms as dirty and slovenly. Yet to view Mrs French as a stereotypical fanatic

and then to conclude that Costello disdains her ignores other key elements of Mrs French's character.

As a traditional female role model, Mrs French is undesirable. Her appearance is grotesque. There is strong evidence of poor mothering skills -- her four children eat corn flakes every night for dinner (55). She beats her husband (55). Her "alternative Irish welcome" (95) of blaring music and abusive taunts for British soldiers shows that she is rabid in her attacks on her enemies. And yet to define her solely as a ferocious harpy is to deny other aspects of her character. For example, when a British soldier is shot in the street and left behind by his comrades, it is Mrs French who comes out with a pillow for his head and helps Annie's father staunch the blood until an ambulance arrives (124). When the soldier is frightened and tries to protest, Mrs French's nurturing deed is contrasted with her Republican mania: "Why don't you just shut up and do what you're bloody well told. You're bloody lucky the IRA don't come and finish ye off. She drew on her cigarette, flicked the ash over the soldier's legs" (124). The moment reveals that Mrs French is not merely the voice of Republican extremism in the novel; she is also a nurturing female capable of comforting a fallen enemy soldier. She breaks type as an extremist to show humanity to the enemy, revealing that there is more variety not only within the community but within individuals than the usual stereotypes allow. As a desirable model of Irish or female identity, Mrs French arguably falls short in many ways, but as an example of a more complex identity for Irishness and Irish womanhood, she offers a startling contrast to the women in most Troubles fiction.

Costello offers an additional model of Irish womanhood in the form of Annie's grandmother, Brigid McPhelimy. Annie openly admires her grandmother, proudly

claiming "I take after Brigid" (20), and calling her "a woman of wit and vigor, not entirely of her generation" (19). That Brigid is viewed so favorably is noteworthy since Brigid is a woman who both maintains and breaks stereotypes for Irish womanhood. Like Mrs French, Brigid disdains the traditional domestic responsibilities of a typical mother. Indeed, Annie's mother Bernie attributes Annie's father's ulcers to her mother-in-law's poor mothering because "Brigid never once cooked [Aidan, Annie's father,] a meal. [. . .] She wouldn't put her arse in a cramp" (19). In this regard, Brigid defies the cultural tradition of the saintly Irish mother, an image "canonised in literature, legend and song [and] embedded in the national psyche" (Kearns xiii). The saintly Irish mother in this context is a model of self-sacrifice, devoted to home and family. William Butler Yeats among others particularly encouraged this trope, "poignantly" remembering his own mother as someone for whom "desire of any life of her own had disappeared in her care of us" (*Autobiography* 19). Poems such as "The Song of the Old Mother" describe the life of such a woman: "I rise in the dawn, and I kneel and bow/ Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow;/And then I must scrub and bake and sweep/Till stars are beginning to blink and peep" (Yeats). Brigid, as an individual "unskilled in the womanly arts" (19), defies this cultural expectation just as Mrs French does.

The identity Brigid does sustain however is that of actual Irish motherhood. Her lack of domesticity may make her "not entirely of her generation," but as "a woman of wit and vigor," she adheres to the descriptions of typical Irish mothers as described in sociological and psychological studies: a woman who is "a strong-minded, commanding, powerful presence in any situation – regardless of the struggles [she is] enduring internally" (McGoldrick, "Irish Mothers" 3). Brigid is also perhaps a more realistic

character than Mrs French in that she personifies a common role women in Northern

Ireland assumed throughout the Troubles. As Margaret Ward notes, far from being the

passive victims or ferocious sectarians depicted in much Irish literature, real "women in

Northern Ireland have been vital in maintaining some semblance of 'normality'

throughout years of devastating conflict" (265). Like these women, Brigid gets on with

life as usual rather than let trouble disrupt it.

Brigid offers a more traditional model of Irish womanhood than Mrs French. Like

Mrs French, Annie's grandmother is a woman loyal to the cause and subjected to raids by

opposing forces; however, the women differ widely in how they occupy political space in

the novel. Mrs French, when visited by the British, reacts aggressively, spewing

Nationalist ideology at the soldiers. Indeed, the scene is yet another instance of comedy

in the novel as Mrs French verbally abuses the armed soldiers, clearly hoping to instigate

violence and failing. Instead the juxtaposition between her rabid defense against a British

invasion and that invasion consisting of the removal of a few placards and the shifting of

some kittens provides a comedic moment in its benign violation of the expected (96-98).

The scene merely highlights the futility of Britain's policy of house-to-house searches in

Northern Ireland and, because Mrs French is treated respectfully throughout the

encounter but responds so aggressively, caricatures the uncompromising and monolithic

hostility against all non-Republicans their presence generated in residents.

In contrast, Costello describes no such chest-thumping drama for Brigid

McPhelimy. A visit to her home by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) is included

merely as an aside to the larger point that Brigid "bore eleven children counting Kevin

who died at birth following a raid on the house by the RUC" (19). The loss is a

subordinate clause, a minor aside, not the trigger for an extended dramatic scene. Costello merely adds that the RUC "had come to seek out Grandfather. Needless to say he had not waited to be collected" (19). Costello makes no attempt to present this as a comedic moment, but neither does she dwell on the baby's death. Indeed, further attention to Brigid's loss could support a more traditional characterization of woman as victim. Instead Costello de-emphasizes the loss and moves on to describe Brigid's penchant for outrageous stories,

> like the one about her hysterectomy. As she walked across the kitchen she suddenly felt something drop beneath her skirt onto the oilcloth. Splat. Something organic. [. . .] Unperturbed she scraped it up [. . .] and threw it into the back of the fire. After mentioning it to her doctor and being examined, he reports to her 'That would have been your womb, Mrs McPhelimy. It must have dropped right down over the years.' [. . .] 'Well,' sez she, 'id did me my day.' No fuss, no nonsense, presumably no knickers. (20)

Brigid appears neither as passive victim (despite being a woman) nor as ferocious hardliner (despite being Republican), but as practical and down-to-earth.

Certainly neither Brigid nor Mrs French embrace the traditional female roles depicted in story and song. Mrs McPhelimy is no more a goddess at the hearth feeding her family than Mrs French is with her daily dinners of corn flakes. While Mrs French may recite inspiring speeches like battle cries at the British and Brigid lives with a husband wanted by the RUC, neither fully meet what Brian Cleeve describes as the "Irish masculine view" of a woman as mother, i.e., "the family tyrant grasping limp and

bloodless sons and husbands against her monstrous breasts; and the loving, all-enduring victim willing to feed her (male) children on her heart's blood" (76). In this sense, they are similar: in contrast to female characters in other Northern Irish Troubles fiction, neither woman meets the mythical expectations for female roles. That Annie prides herself on taking after Brigid (20) suggests that the one stereotype the novel appears to value is the one based in reality: that of the Irish woman who, like Brigid, lives as a strong-minded, matter-of-fact female.

While these two women present more nuanced and realistic depictions of Irish womanhood than most fictional texts, each still tends to fill a singular role, albeit with some variations from traditional norms. Mrs French represents a woman pursuing a Republican identity first and foremost. She exemplifies a woman who puts political passion over domestic concerns. Brigid's practicality emphasizes her identity as the Irish woman who first and foremost maintains a semblance of normality in the midst of conflict. Both identities appear tenable in this community. While both women are criticized for poor mothering skills, neither are ostracized or harassed for their behavior. This suggests that woman as staunch Republican and woman as competent, strong and calm are both acceptable identities for Northern Irish working class Catholic women.

Bernie, Annie's mother, on the other hand, presents a more challenging identity – a woman who seeks to combine political activism with typical female roles. The novel clearly establishes that the McPhelimy family is firmly Republican in its politics. As Republicans living in Northern Ireland, the McPhelimys exist in a state that Annie describes as "The Troubles were always with us" (35). As a young girl, this has typically meant hearing stories of Michael Collins and other heroes of the 1916 Rising, and

meeting family friends such as Oisin who are active in the IRA. These scenes, however, always include not only Republican fervor, but also Bernie's more balanced point of view. In them, Bernie reveals how a woman need not blindly adhere to sectarian views and shows Annie (and the reader) that independent thinking in a Northern Irish woman is a normal way of life.

For example, Bernie's father joined the British army at age fourteen following a downturn in the Mohan family fortunes. Annie notes that "My own father, quaintly, appears to hold my mother responsible for this gross act of treachery on her father's part. Maybe because she's not properly contrite" (26). Aidan sees only that, as a member of the British military, Paddy Mohan "took the Queen's shilling [. . .and] did the Brits' dirty work for them" (26) while Bernie insists on recognizing the extenuating circumstances: her father had "ended up in the street with only the clothes he stood up in. [. . .] What else could he do? [. . .] He only joined the army to get work. There was no boru [welfare] those days you know" (27). Her perspective recognizes that survival can sometimes mean making tough decisions that trump political ideologies.

Similarly, Bernie is saddened when she learns that their friend Oisin is responsible for blowing up Nelson's Pillar in Dublin because it was where Aidan proposed to her and so "has sentimental associations" (39). Oisin offers her the pick of some of the rubble from the explosion. She "chose three small pieces and [. . .] still keeps them in a little cardboard box displayed on her dressing table" (39). For Bernie, life is not black and white. A man can be in the British Army and still deplore its violence. An imperialist symbol can have positive associations. She even recognizes areas where Protestants are superior to Catholics, noting that "They [Protestants] fairly know how to

dress [. . .]. They always look immaculate on parade. With their bowler hats and all. Not a speck on their white gloves, their very shoes gleaming. [. . .] Not like our boys [. . .] they were pathetic at the Easter parade. Half of them hadn't even bothered to run a comb through their hair. No suits, no ties…" (16). Again and again, Annie describes moments such as these where her mother takes a nuanced view of the Troubles, choosing always to see more than the limited sectarian perspective in which British and Protestant are all bad and Irish and Catholic are all good. Bernie is a loyal Republican, but not unthinkingly loyal. While this sets her apart from others in the cause – she notes, for example that her husband's family never liked her: "I wasn't enough of a Republican for them" (247) – her views are tolerated. Like Mrs French she is free to speak her mind politically even if her stance might not be widely accepted.

Moreover, she keeps her own opinion even when her husband disagrees if it means keeping a semblance of normality, fulfilling that norm as Brigid did. For example, she doesn't leave her job when Aidan first claims it is necessary, but rather when she determines she must. She sews in a factory located in a Protestant stronghold and begins to experience harassment as she enters and leaves work. Tensions escalate to the point that the gates are blocked by an angry crowd and Bernie calls for Aidan to help her get out. This first of several such rescues provides a humorous scene through the unexpected way Aidan manages the crowd in order to enter and leave the site: he simply drove up to the factory, "gave them a smile and a salute, flashed [his] Hughes Bakery pass and they waved [him] on" (88). Once out of the factory grounds, he hangs "out of the window, one hand on the wheel, the other waving the oul' hatchet at the Prods, driving like a lunatic. So they all backed off" (89). Despite the "laughing and giggling" (88) this generates in

Bernie and her co-workers, Aidan takes a hard line and declares "that's the end of the

[job . . . .] You're not going back, Bernie, that's final" (89). But Bernie demurs: "'We'll

see what happens,' she said pleasantly" (89) and indeed, she continues to work for

several more months until the situation deteriorates, police protection proves inadequate,

and "it became obvious, even to Mother, that it would be bound to end badly" (89).

Bernie's willingness to give up her job comes long after her husband, Aidan, demanded it

and is a situation she describes as "heartbreaking" (89). She leaves only because she

decides it is necessary, not in passive compliance to her husband's wishes.

Despite what literary stereotypes of passive Irish women suggest, Bernie's

defiance of Aidan in this instance is, in fact, not unusual for an Irish woman. It reflects a

typical quality of the Irish womanhood that scholars such as Monica McGoldrick and

Margaret Ward discovered in their studies of and interviews with Irish women which

identified this group by adjectives such as "formidable, tenacious [. . .] feisty, [and]

independent" (McGoldrick, "Irish Mothers" 6-7). McGoldrick found that far from

embracing a life devoted entirely to domestic pursuits, Irish women tend to value

working outside the home. Thus, the loss of work means not only a loss of income but a

loss of Bernie's normal way of life as an Irish woman, a life where women "have always

remained reluctant about the prospect of giving up their freedom and economic

independence for marriage and family responsibilities" (McGoldrick, "Irish Mothers" 8).

Bernie further defies the literary stereotypes in favor of more authentic womanly

behavior in her role as a normal Irish mother creating a typical Irish family dynamic. She

adheres to the common practice of infantilizing sons while having higher expectations for

and heaping responsibility on daughters: "Sons might be pampered and protected much

longer than daughters and in traditional Irish families were often called 'boys' way into adulthood" (McGoldrick, "Irish Families" 602). In contrast, "daughters are raised to be over-responsible and self-sufficient as the mothers are themselves" (McGoldrick, "Irish Mothers" 5). For example, Annie notes that if her brothers "Thomas or Brendan were late in coming home from school Mother would ring the Incident Centre to see if they'd been shot or arrested. She knew that I would have more sense" (2). At age three, Annie is taken to the local shop as part of being taught "independent skills" (8). During her teen years, Thomas wants to help his father and the other men man the barricades blocking the streets, but Bernie refuses (74). When Annie asks permission to check on her father, however, Bernie agrees: "Aye, maybe you should, love" (75). Far from encouraging Annie to be a passive, dependent female, Bernie encourages her to be capable and strong, perpetuating the culturally-acceptable identity of a woman as competent and responsible.

Bernie also meets the norm for typical Irish motherhood in terms of discipline and control. McGoldrick notes that "The Irish mother had a reputation for ruling the family with an iron fist" ("Irish Families" 603) and Annie alludes to her mother's toughness multiple times in the novel, remarking that when told to do something "with my mother it was never wise to insist" (22), and recognizing that while other children might be allowed to run amok at a parade, Annie and her siblings would have attended "only over [Bernie's] dead body" (44). In Bernie, Costello creates a strong woman – a fictional parallel to the real-life Irish mothers who are "indomitable [. . .] outstanding female role models" (McGoldrick, "Irish Mothers" 3).

Indeed, Bernie matches a stereotype for Northern Irish female identity, but it is one anchored in reality rather than myth. Again and again, Bernie shows herself to be

fearlessly protective of and devoted to her family. In this role, she perpetuates the long-held tradition in Irish culture, North and South, that family is paramount and that the role of a mother is to maintain the family. The importance of family is, in fact, so entrenched in Irish culture that Article 41 of the Republic of Ireland's constitution recognizes "the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society [. . . .] In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved" (*Bunreacht*). While the constitution doesn't apply in Northern Ireland, the values it imparts exist throughout Irish culture, North, South, and expatriate (McGoldrick, "Irish Families" 603). Unlike Mrs French and Brigid McPhelimy, Bernie seems to fully embrace this role. She performs traditional tasks such as cooking and cleaning for the family, and she is determined to keep them safe.

For example, in the novel's first chapter, Bernie angrily confronts an IRA gunman who dares to use her garden as a sniper perch:

> "What the hell do you think you're doing shooting from this house? You'll get us all killed. Now get the hell off this path and go and shoot at your own door.'[. . .] The sniper paused, undecided, then determined to take a hard line. 'get the fuck inside, missus, or I'll blow your fucking head off.' He had spoken with conviction, but now watched uncertainly as Mother edged out the lower lip and really lost the temper.
>
> 'The insignificant wee bastard!' she yelled with unaccustomed profanity. [. . .] 'You get off this bloody path now or I'll shove that

fucking gun up your arse,' she yelled, now entirely out of control. [. . .]

The sniper turned and edged down the path. (4-5)

The scene may seem to be an example that Bernie is merely yet one more of the "mindlessly ferocious" women Nuala O'Faolain found all too common in Irish literature, but Bernie's motives mark her as distinct from the usual archetype. She is ferocious for the safety of her family, not for a man or for Ireland. Indeed, despite the family's Republicanism, Bernie makes it clear that she puts family above nation. While Mrs. French might recite speeches extolling pride in fallen sons sacrificed to the cause, Bernie declares that such a sacrifice would be, for her, most unwelcome: "If the army ever killed any of mine by Christ I'd go over to London and chain myself to the gates of Buckingham Palace naked, caesarian scar and all, and I'd tell the world. I'd soon make them sit up and listen. By God they'd rue the day they touched any of Bernie McPhelimy's family" (102).

This privileging by women of domestic concerns over political ones is not unusual. As Claire Hackett notes, "Feminist theory has articulated this division between public [i.e., nationalism and politics] and private [i.e., the domestic sphere] as a central concern for women" (147). In many cultures, including Northern Ireland, the two spheres have traditionally been gendered with the private, domestic sphere seen as a space for women and the public, political sphere as one for men despite the fact that women have often participated in active warfare and in Northern Ireland "have been involved in armed republicanism since such movements first organized" (Talbot 133) including being imprisoned and participating in hunger strikes (Talbot 138-40). Their participation,

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however, has tended to be ignored (Aretxaga 3).[31] Annie experiences this gender bias

first hand when she visits a barricade to take her father some tea and asks "'Are there any

women on the barricades?' 'Of course not. Christ! Wouldn't that be lovely!' 'Well, there

should be. I don't see why women can't man the barricades as well.' 'Would you talk

sense, Annie, and get on home'" (76). The men scoff at the idea of openly violating

gender norms.

Bernie's balance of public and domestic, on the other hand, appears both desirable

and stable, just as those of Mrs French and Brigid appear. Her assumption of the roles of

Republican sympathizer and Irish mother are apparently ones which many Northern Irish

women have long adopted as their own, and so one might imagine that this cultural

identity (despite its lack of recognition in Irish literature) is a viable Northern Irish

identity for women. As events unfold, however, Costello reveals that maintaining both

the indomitable Irish mother identity and the Nationalist woman identity are untenable in

time of war. While one might presume that a fervent supporter of the Nationalist agenda

who simultaneously promotes and maintains a stable domestic life would be desirable, in

fact, this combination faces increasing obstacles as the Troubles escalate.

The challenge, arguably, emerges when the conflict begins to blur "the distinction

between public and private domains" (Hackett 147). Annie comments that "The trouble

with the Troubles was that it was impossible to leave them at the front door [. . .] it did

not help that the area directly outside our house was a great spot for a riot" (84). "The

ugliness" of this, as Annie calls it seeps into her domestic life bringing "the tension, the

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[31] There was, for example, "no mention of women in the multiple declarations and news reports about the peace" (Aretxaga 3) following the cease fire agreements in September, 1994.

aggression, the tendency towards sporadic outbursts of violence" (84). Annie's five-year-old sister Sinead reveals how this affected young children. When a bomb goes off next to Sinead's school, the child is "blown out of her desk by the force of the blast" (85). Though unhurt, once at home Sinead hides in an empty wardrobe. When she attempts to leave, she discovers she can't. Her cries for help are unheard, so she finally hurls herself against the door, bursting it open but also toppling the wardrobe to the floor with her still inside: "The screams were unmerciful, the panic universal" (85).

The scene marks a shift in the novel which in turn leads to a shift in Bernie's identity. Until now, the text has been wryly humorous, peppered with benign violations that juxtapose expected harm or injury against a benign reality. Sinead's escape from both the explosion at school and from the wardrobe are arguably benign: the explosion left her "unruffled" and the wardrobe collapse left her "alarmed, but in one piece" (85). The scene offers no humor, however. Instead, the wardrobe – which like Sinead has escaped unscathed – becomes the target of Annie's father's wrath: "Father, cursing the bastarding thing to hell, attacked it with an axe, smashed it to pieces and threw it out the bedroom window into the back garden" (85). In sharp contrast to other moments of stress and danger in the novel before this point, Costello offers nothing to mitigate the seriousness of this scene. It merely ends with the comment that the wood from the wardrobe gave great heat when burned (86).

While the novel never completely loses its humorous edge, from this point on, the family's life is increasingly disrupted by the Troubles, and the violations they experience are less benign. The disruptions of normal life are particularly apparent, making any attempt by women like Bernie to maintain a normal home increasingly difficult. For

example, on July 31, 1972, Operation Motorman, the British Army's attempt to break down barricades and flush out the IRA commences. The family is confined to the house as the British begin house-to-house searches. What begins as a humorously benign situation eventually turns ugly. Initially, the house-to-house searches border on the absurd as Annie's mother frets about the soldiers seeing the dust under her children's beds and is "mortified the traditional mortification of the Irish mother" as the men rummage in underwear drawers (99). The family smirks as the soldiers ignore a garden shed which Annie's father notes "could have had the entire Belfast Brigade" (101). They compound their inefficiency by leaving behind a rifle whereupon Annie determines that she couldn't shoot the soldier who left it: "he was too stupid" (101). But then, Costello's lighthearted tone disappears when a second group of paramilitaries arrive asking for her father by name. Bernie fights back panicked tears and Annie fears her father may be arrested or shot. Soon after, a woman is shot with a rubber bullet as she opens her window. The soldiers order everyone back into their homes, threatening that anyone who doesn't obey will "get the same bloody thing" (105). Annie is stunned. Life as she knows it no longer exists: "Two or three of them were aiming rubber bullets at us. Big, black, lethal. We cooperated. We heard later that Ellen Nolan's skull had been smashed by the impact of the bullet, caving in her face. She had lost the sight of both eyes" (105).

Despite such moments, the family stoically tries to maintain some form of normalcy, but the Troubles have brought a new normal. For Annie, like many teenage girls before and after her, the "apparent inability to secure reasonable male companionship was the principal distress of [her] girlhood" (141), but in her case one obstacle is the "revolutionary activities of many young men who expended all their

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energies on the cause" (141). Like other young girls, she's delighted when her mother's former co-worker gives her a lipstick for doing a favor, but for Annie the favor is speaking French to foreign journalists in the hope that a more complete story of the Troubles might be shared with the world (120-22). Annie's mother learns that the lipstick came from a van hijacking and rather than reprimand her daughter for receiving stolen goods, she wonders if the van might not have carried tranquilizers as well and disappears to get some (123). Bernie keeps a semblance of normality – she participates in the new behaviors of her community – even as the definition of normal behavior shifts to include a state where getting goods from "hijackings became all the rage" (123).

Eventually, the active warfare in the streets makes any attempt to maintain normal life and maintain the separation of the personal and the political increasingly difficult, even when normal includes talking to the press and receiving stolen goods. This means that the model of Irish womanhood that Annie's mother, Bernie, provides for her daughter evolves as well. For Bernie, the violence reaches a tipping point with the death of Mary Dillon, a typical Irish mother headed home from a quotidian errand:

> About four o'clock on a grey Holy Thursday afternoon Mary Dillon, wife of Jimmy, mother of twelve, was killed in crossfire by an unidentified bullet. She had just been to the butcher's. A bullet in the chest and two pounds of beef sausages, a quarter of vegetable roll scattered on the damp grass [. . .] Neither the IRA nor the army made their target. But one stray bullet from the brief interchange went wide and blasted Mary Dillon in the chest. (157).

The escalation of the Troubles in the form of events like the shooting of Mary Dillon put

Bernie's domestic priorities in direct conflict with the battle for Irish nationhood. Mary

Dillon's death brings the battle for the nation into the domestic sphere. Bernie is both a

mother and a Republican, however, so while motherhood and family may trump politics

when it comes to keeping her children safe, she is by no means against the Republican

cause.

Indeed, as the Troubles blurred the boundaries between public/political/masculine

and private/feminine/domestic spaces, turning residential areas into frontline

battlegrounds, women throughout Northern Ireland began to work within their

communities to address the violence and protect their families while still supporting their

Republican or Loyalist political agendas (Persic 167). Nancy A. Naples has dubbed such

behavior "activist mothering," and notes that one motivation for such involvement is "as

an extension of their [the women's] self-definitions as women and mothers" (443). Callie

Persic's study of Northern Irish mothers engaged in community work supports this claim:

"When asked why they become involved in community work, many women inevitably

associate it with a better future for their children and see such involvement as an

extension of their caring role" (174). This seems logical given the cultural norm that

women contribute to the common good through mothering. Within the scholarship and in

the public sphere, labor, politics and mothering may typically be considered separately,

but the work of scholars such as Naples and Persic shows that for women the traditional

dichotomies of public vs. private, paid work vs. social reproduction, activism vs.

mothering and family vs. community don't exist: "A close reading of the community

workers' oral history reveals the inseparability of these so-called spheres of social life" (Naples 446).

Bernie exemplifies this mindset when, following the death of Mary Dillon, she decides to attend what she believes to be "a meeting of the women of the estate who want to get the shooting stopped when there's civilians about" (162). Initially, Bernie's move to shift the concerns of the private, domestic sphere into the public arena seems reasonable: "It seemed a harmless enough initiative – a group of local women getting together to improve living conditions" (162). Unfortunately, Bernie very quickly faces what many real Northern Irish women discovered when they too attempted to work with their communities during the Troubles: the saintly Irish mother's role is to stay by the hearth. Women may be a "crucial part of nationalism, both as symbols of the nation and guardians of national traditions, [but . . .] the portrayal of women as symbols of the nation defines women's role in nationalism as passive and secondary" (Ryan and Ward 1). The women who took action and demanded that their concerns be given priority quickly learned that what might seem like a small and reasonable initiative was instead viewed by some as disloyalty and a threat to the cause. In other words, mothers' attempts to address the safety of their children in the Troubles meant that "bringing up a family became a political act" (Hackett 166). Whereas the women sought a better life for their families, politically they were seen as taking sides. Persic describes an interview with a Northern Irish woman who articulated this position: "When you're out protesting against plastic bullets they say you're being political, but you're not, you're being a mummy" (174).

Such is the case for Bernie at her first community meeting. She arrives to find a crowd of protesters outside the community center, but decides to attend anyway, fighting

her "way through the gates under a volley of abuse and stones from the angry mob. The move may have been unwise, the gesture uncalled for, even foolish. But Mother is nothing if not a champion of the individual and no one [. . .] was going to deny her the right of free assembly" (164). Once inside, Bernie learns that a group of middle class Protestants have also come to the meeting. It is the idea that women like Bernie have entered the building to meet with the enemy that has angered the crowd of nearly 300 outside, most of whom are young women. To these women, those who engage in conversations with the other side are "Traitors! [. . .] Touts. Backfuckingsliders" (166).

Such a position against peacemakers is not as unreasonable as it might seem at first glance. Organizations promoting peace could be seen as helping the British propaganda campaign against the Irish since the British repeatedly put the responsibility for ending the conflict on the Irish Republicans. They took the line that they would not negotiate with terrorists and the IRA were terrorists; therefore, in order to achieve peace, the IRA must stop their campaign. (Callaghan 41). They sought to create the perception that the IRA represented only a small minority of the population and that most peace-loving people wanted them out. (Callaghan 41). Community meetings about peace like the one Bernie chooses to attend, then, could understandably be seen as playing into British hands by highlighting the community's dissatisfaction with the IRA's tactics and be used to argue that the community wanted the IRA out.

Bernie's circumstances thus reflect the struggle faced by many Northern Irish women regarding which identity should take priority: that of being a good mother or that of being a good Republican. The Troubles mean that women like Bernie are expected to choose, and if they choose motherhood, they are immediately in conflict with the

Republican agenda. Yet, true to her Catholic, working class roots, Bernie sympathizes

with the Republican cause. Appearing in a television interview following the community

meeting, Bernie strives to clarify her position when asked if she wants the IRA out of her

community:

> I believe that I am speaking for a large section of the people of
>
> Andersontown when I say that we want peace and the chance to lead
>
> normal lives. However, we are not turning our backs on the IRA, because
>
> we do need the IRA for a number of reasons. (175-76)

Bernie then works with the other women in the group to further spread their message,

including having pieces published in the *Irish News* in an effort to combat what her letter

to the editor terms "the Goebbels-type propaganda which has been circulated against our

humble efforts towards a peaceful solution of a problem that concerns us all" (177).

Bernie consistently reiterates her support of the Republican cause throughout her work

for peace.

Costello reveals, however, how the increased threats to family safety and the

evolution of the mothering role into the public sphere threaten another aspect of Bernie's

Irish mother identity: the ability to maintain control regardless of the situation

(McGoldrick, "Irish Mothers" 3). Following her altercation with the sniper in the front

garden, for example, Bernie "took two more Doriden and four more Valium" (5). Prior to

the television interview about the community interview, she took five Valium (175). It

was not unusual for a woman like Bernie to take such large doses of tranquilizers:

"During the Troubles, many women developed addictions to prescribed medication like

Valium" (Poole, et al. 27) and Northern Ireland residents consumed more tranquilizers

than anywhere else in the U.K. (Sluka 141) with women having double the rate of consumption as men (Shannon 251). As one social worker described it, "Addiction – particularly to prescription drugs, [. . .is] not always, but invariably a woman, trying to hold a family together and without access to other forms of drugs [. . .] in order to function" (Poole, et al. 26). On the night she faces down the sniper, however, the sedatives are "no use to [Bernie]. She sat up all night reading *The Walk of a Queen* by Annie M.P. Smithson" (5).

That Bernie chooses Smithson as a way to reduce anxiety and re-establish feelings of control is noteworthy. This 1922 novel of young Republican love and pure Irish womanhood offers a variety of models for women seeking to support the Irish cause yet maintain their feminine identity. For all her feistiness, Bernie is also quite feminine. Throughout the altercation with the sniper, for example, Costello repeatedly intersperses mentions of Bernie's femaleness. Her petite build means that all her children refer to her as "the wee woman," she is modestly dressed in a long dressing gown, "pink knickers bobbing on her head" (5). She is delicate enough to require tranquilizers after the event. Aggressiveness is often seen as a masculine trait, but Bernie's aggressiveness is not presented as masculine in any way. It is most decidedly part of who she is as a woman, not a moment in which she assumes a masculine role. This combination of fighter for a cause and femaleness is an important part of Bernie's character, and it mimics some of the female characters in *The Walk of a Queen.* The novel's title comes from the last line of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, a play by William Butler Yeats in which an old woman, Cathleen ni Houlihan, serves as a symbol of Ireland and convinces a young man to fight for Ireland (*The Hour-Glass)*. His agreement transforms her into a young and vibrant

beauty with the walk of a queen, and the novel itself is unquestioning in its support of the Republican agenda. At the start of the novel, which takes place from 1917 to 1921, only one of the four central female characters is an ardent Republican. The others are indifferent or hostile. By the end of the book, the hostile character (a British spy) is dead and the others are devoted to the cause. Indeed, one of the women engages in a race to warn the men of danger, ramming her car through a checkpoint, getting shot and then crawling bleeding to their hideout. In other words, a female character, as Danae O'Regan argues, "plays an active role in the Republican cause" (92). Presumably, such a text where the women who fight for their cause triumph might comfort Bernie as she faces the need to take a more active role in the conflict outside her front door.

Bernie does indeed rise to the challenge of making the streets safer for her children, and achieves some success. She and another local woman, Deirdre, as part of a group called the Peace Women, serve as go-betweens meeting with the Provisional IRA leadership and with politicians at Stormont to make the streets safer for civilians. This public role is not natural for Bernie. Arriving at Stormont for a press conference, "She was sick with nerves [. . .] She felt wretched" (236). She is obviously not comfortable in the public sphere, yet her role in the domestic sphere demands participation in it. She cannot keep her family safe unless she takes action to reduce the violence,

Ironically, however, this public blending of her Republican and maternal identities brings a good deal of hostility from the community. The family's home is attacked despite Bernie's appearance on television and the group's letter to the editor clarifying support for the IRA. Nevertheless, she remains loyal to the Republican cause. While Bernie is furious when her front window is broken, declaring, "I'll go down and

show the bastards who's a tout. [. . .] the stinking cowards [. . . .] I'll kill the bastards"
(180), the next day she refuses to discuss the attack with reporters, knowing it could be
used as propaganda against the community: "I wouldn't let the Catholics down [. . .] for
the sake of a few hoodlums" (181). This public life, however, threatens the safety and
stability of her family. Annie is shunned at school and told that her mother "should be
more loyal to her own people" (196). Bernie and Aidan argue about her peace efforts: "At
night we could hear the parents arguing in their bedroom. Every night. It would go on for
hours. Sometimes Mother could be heard crying through the walls" (246). By questioning
how the community's political beliefs affect the personal domain, Bernie's role in both
spheres is threatened.

Nevertheless, Bernie and fellow members of the Peace Women canvas the
community and even have the priests preaching their cause from the pulpit during mass in
order to gain 63,000 signatures on a petition to present to the British authorities
confirming the residents' desire for peace in their streets. This is no mean feat. This "wee
woman" (4) has made strides toward peace, bringing the opposing sides into contact with
each other to consider a halt to street violence. It is not a resolution of the Troubles, but it
is certainly a significant step. Moreover, Bernie uses her newfound contacts at Stormont
to arrange for the release of several men from internment in Long Kesh prison by making
sure the authorities understand these men are not involved in the conflict (242).

All hopes of success are lost, however, during the press conference when,
cameras rolling, Deirdre clearly asks Mr Brandywell, the British representative,

> 'Are you pleased with us, Mr Brandywell?' [. . .] 'Very pleased,' Mr
> Brandywell pronounced, a contented growl, 'you've done very well

indeed.' [. . .] Bernie's heart stopped with a thump, her legs weakened, bowels churned, She suddenly understood what they had done, how it would be seen, how useless it all was. At that second her intuition told her that this would be the end, not the start of it. There would be no peace. There could be none. (241)

The moment presents the women's petition against street violence as part of a larger British agenda to undermine the IRA's authority in the community, a means of arguing that the IRA is working against the people, not as a grass roots effort to encourage both sides to reduce violence. The backlash from the community is swift and severe. For Annie, "School was unbearable after the scene at Stormont. Some girls ignored me, others would stop talking when I came into the room [. . .] Thomas and Brenda were having a bad time at St. Mary's [. . .] Brendan came home one day with his face all cut and bruised" (246). Bernie is devastated, declaring to Annie, "I've made a mess of everything. I think your daddy's starting to hate me, and even Thomas is ashamed of me" (247). The neighbors are furious, gathering in a mob outside the family's home to taunt the family with cries of "Peace with justice! [. . .] Sell out! [. . .] Touts out! Touts out! Touts out!" (249). They accuse Bernie of forging the signatures on the petition, and one young man attacks Thomas with a hatchet (253). The family is forced to move, and while Bernie continues some community work in the form of campaigning for votes for a local candidate, she abandons any serious work for peace.

In Bernie, Costello creates a Catholic working class mother who fights for peace in Catholic working class Northern Ireland, but the novel fails to imagine that such an identity can be sustained in this time and place. Indeed, the novel's penultimate chapter

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suggests that the same old violence seems more likely than peaceful change as Annie witnesses a shooting in the street outside her aunt's front door. A first shot wounds the young man and as the shooter moves forward and points his weapon at the victim's back, Annie yells at him not to shoot. "But the gunman hardly glanced at me. He pulled the trigger and fired again" (321). Called to halt the violence by Annie, in other words, he consciously chooses to continue it.

Arguably, Bernie's failure to maintain an identity that is both actively political and maternal goes against historical reality given that the efforts of real women like Mairead Maguire and Betty Williams were quite successful. Maguire and Williams organized the Peace People in Northern Ireland and earned the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts. Historically, then, evidence existed well before the publication of *Titanic Town* that women in Northern Ireland can be both activists and mothers successfully. Key to understanding Bernie's failure, however, is recognizing that most references to women's peace groups in Northern Ireland emphasize the award-winning work of the Peace People, but "few have made any reference at all" (Callaghan 33) to other organizations such as the Derry Peace Women (DPW). Granted, the origins of the Peace People echo those of Costello's Peace Women. For Bernie, the death of a mother instigated her activism. For Maguire and Williams, the impetus was the death of Maguire's sister's children hit by a car careening out of control after its IRA driver was killed by British soldiers. Williams was a bystander who witnessed the incident. The tragedy pushed these two women – one Catholic and one Protestant – to unite and become voices for change. While the Peace People endured some community backlash, they successfully organized multiple well-attended rallies and demonstrations to create an

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undeniable cross-sectarian argument that people desired an end to the violence. As Mairead Maguire describes it,

> We [the Peace People] went to communities that had a great deal of violence and set up discussions and provided platforms for people who otherwise would be committed to the armed struggle or to the loyalists. We had them coming together on the same platform to talk. That was very important -- step by step -- for bringing together people to realize that they could solve their problems without killing each other. [. . .] The point was to try to bring down the fear between the two communities. (qtd in Pal)

A key component of the Peace People was the fact that Nationalists and Loyalists were put in a position to listen to each other and see the enemy as thinking, feeling humans, a type of exchange not generally available in Belfast which was segregated so thoroughly that so-called peace lines (concrete walls nearly thirty feet high) were constructed to create a physical barrier between Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods.

Indeed, Bernie's organization has no ability to cross the peace line given that her group is entirely Catholic. Thus, the fictional Peace Women hold more in common with organizations like the Derry Peace Women (DPW) than the Peace People. As a solely Catholic endeavor, the DPW encountered extensive opposition from the community. Marie Hammond Callaghan reports that "DPW activists reported a range of abuse, from having their windows and doors smashed and their cars burned to experiencing physical threats and assaults" (44). One woman's daughter was beaten unconscious over the woman's participation in the group, and the family was eventually driven from their home (Callaghan 44-45), events that echo the treatment experienced by the McPhelimys.

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Like the Peace Women, the DPW dissolved. Marie Hammond Callaghan traces its demise to reasons that mirror Bernie's experience: "the lack of support and growing opposition they faced within their own community; the negative impact on their families; and their resulting weariness with the activist struggle as well as their disillusionment with politicians, the media, and the peace movement in Northern Ireland" (45). In other words, by engaging only the Catholics, the DPW lacked the ability to reduce the fear of the opposition that the cross-sectarian platforms had. The members eventually gave up on the group as a force for change and the organization folded. One former DPW member reported feeling regret that her efforts for peace had "prevented her from carrying out her traditional gender role in the home" (Kerr qtd in Callaghan 45) and presumably many of the members of DPW returned to the private sphere rather than continue public activism. It appears then that mother as peaceworker is an untenable Northern Irish identity. Within a sectarian community like Catholic working class Belfast, any attempt to critique the Nationalist effort during the Troubles, even in the name of peace, is futile.

As a result, *Titanic Town* offers alternatives to the usual stereotypes, but ultimately reveals that the culture is not yet prepared to embrace all of these new identities. The book ends with Annie, now an adult, reviewing the ongoing news reports from Northern Ireland as a continuing litany of violence and death: British soldiers killed by a mob after they mistakenly drive into a Sinn Fein funeral cortege, riots erupting following the extradition of a Republican leader to the Irish Republic, and finally, a photo Father Regan "who didn't mind my marrying heathen, didn't insist that the children be brought up Catholic" tending to a dead soldier in the street (334). Annie imagines her mother's reaction to the scene: "Some woman, somewhere, as the wee woman would say,

will be breaking her heart for [the dead soldier] tonight [. . .] 'Somebody loves him,' she would say, for Provo, or Stickie, or soldier, or RUC man, 'the mother that bore him. Nothing's worth a life'" (339). This voice echoes that of the Bernie who adamantly refused to sacrifice her sons to the Irish cause and who sees the effects of the violence on both sides. Yet in the novel's final chapter, Costello emphasizes the futility of this voice, concluding that yet again this is a case of

> Her [Bernie's] rambling and the rest of us egging them on. For the cause, for queen and country, for peace, with justice or at any price. For there will be no surrender, fuck pope and queen both the same. Sons, sisters, father, daughters, husbands, and brothers will not be grudged, though they go out to break their strength and die. We will not give an inch and shall not be moved, till the last drops of blood, orange and green, run down the street. (340)

The mothers in Costello's Northern Ireland may vehemently wish to break free of their stereotype as long-suffering Irish mammies at the hearth. They may, in reality, have the competence and strength to fight for change, but in the end, the novel reveals that the feisty, indomitable Irish mother is only a tenable identity within the domestic sphere for Catholic working class women.

The very fact that, within this community, a woman cannot yet assume a national identity with political complexity beyond the home highlights an essential reality about the life of Catholic working class women in the Troubles. As Lorraine Dowler has noted, war can often serve as a catalyst for change in a culture's gender roles, "reinforc[ing] traditional roles [. . .] while simultaneously disrupting those same roles" (160). *Titanic*

Town offers a means of understanding exactly how this occurs, a way of expanding

conversations about the Troubles beyond the political and paramilitary battles into a

discussion of "violence as a dynamic sociocultural phenomenon" (Dowler 160). The

novel's treatment of gender in general and the ways various characters fail to meet

traditional gender stereotypes in particular shatter any illusions that the Catholic working

class community is homogenous in its ideological solidarity. *Titanic Town,* then, marks

an important contribution to Northern Irish literature, an essential tool for understanding

that the Troubles were not merely a conflict between Republicans and Loyalists, but a

conflict within those communities as well.

Chapter Five:

The Importance of New Generation Novelists

in Understanding Northern Irish Identity

Prior to the 1990s, the novels generally offered to American readers for understanding the perspectives of those involved in the Troubles suffered from a lack of complexity. The works typically failed to tackle the specific motivations and circumstances driving Northern Irish culture in favor of one-dimensional renderings of standard tropes steeped in violence and sectarianism. These narratives emphasized violence as a key component of Northern Irish identity. As part of the new generation of novelists raised during the Troubles and emerging in the early 1990s, Glenn Patterson, Eoin McName, and Mary Costello created three novels which imagine alternatives to the standard Northern Irish identities of perpetrator and victim of sectarian violence dominating those earlier narratives.

In Glenn Patterson's *Fat Lad,* Drew Linden rejects his native culture in favor of a corporate branding of Northern Ireland as part of a generic global marketplace. This identity, however, is unsustainable because, like the narrow perspective of Northern Ireland as solely a land of violent sectarianism, it is incomplete. Only when Drew

recognizes that the social and familial violence of the past are part of being Northern Irish can he begin to find peace and accept his family, his childhood, and his cultural identity. Drew's story recognizes that a Northern Ireland moving toward peace cannot deny its past.

Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* posits an opposing identity: that of a man fully embracing the violent aspects of Northern Irish culture rather than avoiding them. Yet Victor Kelly's gunman identity is no more viable than Drew Linden's global one: Victor ends up mentally broken and ultimately dead. While Northern Irish society may have initially promoted such an identity, as the Troubles evolved, the tolerance for such senseless and uncompromising violence ebbed. Victor's story suggests that a Northern Ireland moving toward peace must eliminate its most violent and sectarian identities.

Mary Costello offers a third alternative in *Titanic Town* through Bernie McPhelimy, a woman who acknowledges the presence and even necessity of violence in the culture to achieve particular aims, but who nevertheless works for peace. This Northern Irish identity, too, is untenable. A woman can spout Nationalist ideals, like Mrs French, or be a stoic source of maternal strength for her family, like Brigid, but a woman cannot publicly fight for change to ensure domestic safety if that change potentially limits the Nationalist fight. Bernie's narrative shows how a failure to embrace new identities can keep Northern Ireland from moving toward peace.

These three novels confront traditional stereotypes and offer clear alternatives to the limited identities of mindless patriot and tragic victim so prevalent in earlier works. That they themselves fail to imagine Northern Irish identities which actually thrive is significant. The texts provide us with possibilities for identity, not seemingly set-in-stone

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stereotypes. They provide insights into how very challenging constructing and maintaining new cultural and national identities can be. They rightly show that embracing the past, rejecting the past, and redefining past roles are not cultural shifts that happen quickly or easily. The novels then mark an important moment in the evolution of Northern Irish identity, but it is the moment when it became possible to imagine that such changes in identity were possible, not the moment that such changes actually happened.

Similarly, the peacebuilding efforts which occurred contemporaneously with the writing and publication of these three novels created neither immediate lasting peace, nor an immediate redefinition of Northern Irish identity. *Fat Lad* and *Titanic Town* both appeared in 1992, the year before the Downing Street Declaration in which the British "Prime Minister, on behalf of the British Government, reaffirms that they will uphold the democratic wish of the greater number of the people of Northern Ireland on the issue of whether they prefer to support the Union or a sovereign united Ireland" ("Joint"). The document was a significant step forward for political self-determination in Northern Ireland. While in practical terms, no borders changed and Ireland did not reunite, the possibility now existed. *Resurrection Man* appeared the next year in 1994, the year of the IRA Cease Fire Agreement. While the ceasefire had broken by 1996, the violence was not enough to permanently derail the peace process.[32]

The reverse has been true as well. The signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 which is often used to mark the end of the Troubles dramatically reduced, but was not enough to permanently end all sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. The document

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[32] Indeed, since 1994, violence had declined so dramatically that by 2004 Belfast had become the world's second safest city for crime (Power 10).

"raised enormous hopes in relation to Northern Ireland, but the sharp divergence between

unionist and nationalist aspirations remained" (English 320). By extension, the sharp

divergence among the various Northern Irish identities also remained. Certainly, the

Agreement's emphasis on granting the Northern Irish, not Great Britain or the Republic

of Ireland, the self-determination to choose their identity for themselves was essential for

resolving the issue of whether the Northern Irish should be Irish or British or both:

"Central to the Belfast Agreement[33] is the proposition that people in Northern Ireland

have a birthright 'to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as

they may choose'" (Kiberd, *Irish* 628). Particularly significant is the renunciation of the

Republic of Ireland's territorial claim to the northern six counties. Kiberd notes the

importance of that claim to Irish identity: "Every schoolchild in the Republic has been

taught to see that claim as a force of nature, confirmed by the very shape of Ireland as an

island. Yet [the southern electorate voted] to rescind the claim, for the sake of peace and

good relations" (*Irish* 629).

The Good Friday Agreement served to eliminate legal and political obstacles to

Northern Irish self-determination, but like the fictional worlds imagined by Patterson,

McNamee, and Costello, imagining these new identities does not make them easily

achievable. The sectarian identities of the Troubles have proven difficult for the Northern

Irish to reject. Prior to the Troubles, for example, twenty percent of Protestants in

Northern Ireland categorized themselves as Irish as opposed to having a British or Ulster

identity. By the late 1970s, only eight percent self-identified as Irish. Surveys taken since

the Good Friday Agreement show that the shift away from an Irish identity continues:

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[33] The Belfast Agreement is an alternative name for the Good Friday Agreement.

surveys in 2003 and 2005 show no more than three percent of Irish of Protestants

identifying themselves as Irish (Muldoon, et al. 90). Surveys of Catholics show similar

sectarian preferences, categorizing themselves overwhelmingly as Irish with only a small

portion defining themselves as British and extremely few embracing the Ulster identity

(Muldoon, et al. 90-1). And yet, the more complex Irish identities imagined by Patterson,

McNamee, and Costello may slowly but surely becoming more possible. Since 1986

when surveys began including Northern Irish as an option, both Catholics and Protestants

have increasingly chosen this identity. Approximately twenty percent of both groups now

choose Northern Irish either exclusively or in addition to other identities (Muldoon, et al.

91). Indeed, for many in Northern Ireland a change in self-categorization rarely meant a

complete change in identity (as in from British to Irish), but "a holding of several

identities which they felt could overlap (British and Irish, British and Northern Irish,

more Irish than British) – boundary blurring rather than boundary crossing" (Muldoon, et

al. 96). Though still a minority, this growing identification with multiple identities

suggests that were Drew Linden of *Fat Lad* or Annie McPhelimy of *Titanic Town*

growing up today, the identities which were untenable in their childhoods might have

more success.[34]

And yet, large-scale significant change in depictions of Northern Ireland has not

occurred. In popular media today, for example, twenty years after the publication of these

novels, the idea of Northern Ireland as a troubled place certainly lingers. Despite the 1993

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[34] Indeed, Glenn Patterson is among those who has blended the boundaries among identities, suggesting
that the more global identity he imagined for Drew is one that he desires for himself: "In matters of
nationality I am shamelessly promiscuous. I hold to several identities at once – Northern Irish, Irish,
British, European – and am happy to add to them at every opportunity" (qtd. in Richtarik and Chappell).

Downing Street Declaration and IRA ceasefires of 1994, the signing of the Good Friday

Agreement in 1998 and the subsequent referendum by voters in Northern Ireland in favor

of the agreement, sectarianism continues to dominate the narrative of Northern Ireland in

popular culture. For example, a cartoon map published in 2014 of Northern Irish

stereotypes identifies Belfast and a wide swath surrounding it as a "bit scary" (Phillips).

The west side of the map identifies the area around Derry/Londonderry as "Can't decide

what it's called" (Phillips) – a nod to the naming dispute between Nationalists and

Loyalists over the names for the area. The only other spot noteworthy enough for

identification is Ballymena, marked by the name of its favorite son, the actor Liam

Neeson. Aside from the addition of Neeson, this map presents Northern Ireland exactly as

it might have been presented in the 1970s and 80s before the peace process began.

Similarly, an in-depth feature on present-day Belfast by Michael Moynihan in

2011 emphasizes that sectarian identities and violence persist not only for the older

generations who were part of the Troubles, but for those born later. Moynihan asked local

teens about their plans for attending university: "all agreed that if forced to choose

between earning an advanced degree and staying to 'defend their community,' they

would, without hesitation, choose the latter." He mentions

> a cherubic 11-year-old kid, born a year after the Good Friday Agreement,
> [who] provided [. . .] a potted history of the [July 12] bonfires ('something
> to do with the king') and wanted [Moynihan's] opinion of the pope. His
> line of questioning wasn't designed to precipitate a conversation on Pius
> XII's diplomatic relations with the Third Reich, but rather an opportunity

to offer his preteen objections to the Catholic Church's conduit to God:

'The pope's a fucking cunt.'

Though born well into the peace process, the boy's sectarianism replicates attitudes found in 1970s Belfast. Such attitudes continue possibly because reminders of the Troubles are constant: a new Northern Irish growth industry dubbed Troubles Tourism, for example, keeps the history of the Troubles vibrant by offering guides to scenes of some of the Troubles' most infamous trouble spots. While such tours present the Troubles as past, their emphasis on detailing the violence arguably contributes to the on-going impression of Northern Ireland as a place steeped in sectarian conflict.

News outlets in North America reinforce the perception of Northern Ireland as violent and dangerous. A search for current news of the Northern Irish Troubles reveals a series of recent headlines covering two separate shootings in Belfast in 2015 that perpetuate the idea of Northern Ireland as a place still roiled in conflict: *The Chicago Tribune* reports on "Fresh Troubles in Northern Ireland," in Canada, a MacLean's headline declares "In Northern Ireland, the Troubles are Brewing Again" (McLaren), and *The Wall Street Journal* announces "The Return of the Irish Troubles." Interestingly, the return of the Troubles has been imminent for some time: In 2009, *Time* asserted "Terror Returns to Northern Ireland" (Coll) and *The Christian Science Monitor* fretted "Could IRA splinter groups bring back Northern Ireland's Troubles?" (Walsh) and *The Wall Street Journal* employed a headline nearly identical to that used in 2015 with "'The Troubles' Return" (Mollenkamp and Martinez). In this case, a police constable and two British soldiers had been shot in separate incidents. Certainly, sectarian violence continues in Northern Ireland, but to declare every instance of sectarianism a harbinger

that a full-scale return of the Troubles is imminent denies the substantial progress toward peace since the mid-1990s. Yet both popular culture and mainstream news media outlets perpetuate the idea of Northern Ireland as first and foremost a place of ongoing conflict: the Troubles define the region as much today as they did at the height of the violence in the mid-1970s.

An additional contributing factor entrenching violence and victimization as defining Northern Irish traits is the lack of availability of contrasting voices, not only in news but in literature. Just as the news media tends to limit its Northern Irish coverage to incidents of sectarian violence, so do publishers tend to limit the availability of texts that explore more complex Northern Irish identities. *Fat Lad, Resurrection Man,* and *Titanic Town* reflect this phenomenon. Though praised upon publication for their insights into Northern Irish identities beyond the stereotype, like most novels by that new generation of Northern Irish writers who first reimagined Northern Irish identity in the early 1990s, all three of these texts are out of print in the United States. They have been superseded by noir-style detective fiction by authors such as Adrian McKinty and Stuart Neville. In classic noir fashion, these newer works "celebrate lowlifes, convicts, hookers, private eyes, cops and reporters" ("Belfast Noir") and achieve a level of violence on a par with Troubles thrillers. Though undeniably fast-paced and entertaining reads, they are arguably the modern-day equivalent of Troubles trash in that their depiction of Northern Ireland emphasizes senseless and unceasing violence. Often this violence continues to be tied to the Troubles as in Stuart Neville's *The Ghosts of Belfast* in which a former IRA gunman is driven by the ghosts of those he killed to hunt down and murder those who ordered the killings.

While *Fat Lad* and *Resurrection Man* are still available for purchase as new print books in the U.K., *Titanic Town* is not. For critics like Christine St. Peter and Nuala O'Faolain, this reflects a long-running tendency by publishers to not offer as many titles by women: "few female authors find their way onto reading lists for higher and further education courses" (Hooley qtd. in Pelan 52). They contend that the failure by academics, even those within Irish Studies, to extensively publish on contemporary Northern Irish women writers contributes to these authors falling out of print more quickly than their male peers.[35]

Rebecca Pelan observes that "most of the women's writing from the 1970s and 1980s is now out of print" (52). This is equally true of Northern Irish women's writings published in the 1980s and beyond and especially true of Northern Irish women's writing in the United States. Indeed, in women's fiction, up and coming Northern Irish authors such as Emma Heatherington, Claire Allen, and Fiona Cassidy are available new in the U.S., but solely as e-books whereas McKinty and Neville can be found in print and electronic forms. Like the noir writers, Heatherington, Allen, and Cassidy also write fast-paced, entertaining fiction, but the characterizations tend toward one-dimensional stereotypes of a woman in search of a man. Their work has been dubbed "chick lit" and "romantic comedies," labels that for better or worse place their work in "an inferior genre" (Downey). Irish novelist and short story writer Evelyn Conlon identified a standard for Northern Irish women's fiction in the 1990s that appears to continue today:

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[35] In 2000, Christine St. Peter noted that "the Irish critic Ann Owen Weekes has published the only single-authored monograph on Irish women's fiction at the time of writing" (3). This volume, *Irish Women Writers: An Uncharted Territory*, considers only eight authors, all of whom were born before 1930 and none of whom were raised in the North. St. Peter's critique is valid: since Weekes' study, only a handful of volumes devoted to Irish women writers have been published and, to my knowledge, no academic study focused entirely on Northern Irish women novelists exists.

reader expectations are low and "the book by a woman which is not dangerous—slightly provocative but not dangerous—the book where a woman is playing at being a baby male; or the book where she is being daring about acts that lead to orgasm, but again never dangerous, that is the book which gets most approval" (Conlon qtd. in Patten "Women" 6). Arguably, a similar claim might be made for works written by Northern Irish men: the book by a man which is about violence, the book where a man plays a tough guy, where he goes about armed and righteous and successfully confronts danger, that is the book which gets the most approval. In other words, the works which reinforce the accepted defining traits for Northern Ireland – violence for men; domestic roles for women – are those which are most likely to be found in print and studied by scholars.

In contrast, novels like *Fat Lad, Resurrection Man,* and *Titanic Town* demonstrate the fluidity of national and cultural identity – a fluidity confirmed in the changes in Northern Irish identity since the Good Friday Agreement, but one that the traditional stereotypes about Northern Irish culture deny. Nationalist movements tend to describe nations as an inevitable result of modernity with clear and specific origins in an idealized past (Renan 174; Bhabha 1). In fact, nations are fairly recent creations based on culture, developed through economics, and defined by politics (Gellner 49). They are, to adopt Benedict Anderson's phrase, "imagined communities" and our national characteristics and identities tend to be whatever we imagine them to be (Corse 11). Narratives like *Fat Lad, Resurrection Man,* and *Titanic Town* posit new characteristics and identities and new ways of contemplating the role of the past in forming national traits. They reject the pasts idealized by July 12th commemorations for Loyalists and by the Celtic Revival for Nationalists in favor of new stories that reject sectarianism. While one's nationality may

seem such an essential part of one's identity that it feels inborn, the inability of the three novels to provide a single Northern Irish identity capable of fully superseding the stereotypical Troubles' tropes as well as the growing number of Northern Irish who identify with multiple national identities reflect the reality that nations and national identity are socially constructed (Gellner 49).

It matters, therefore, that works like *Fat Lad, Resurrection Man,* and *Titanic Town* are accessible to American readers and scholars. They mark a particular phase in the evolution of Northern Irish identity – a moment when the region's artists consciously sought to deconstruct the violence and sectarianism defining the culture. If these voices are ignored, traditional Troubles stereotypes can easily continue to dominate both popular and academic ideas about Northern Irish novels. That in turn perpetuates very narrow notions about Northern Irish culture and identity today. Northern Ireland was and is more than the Troubles. Since the 1970s, Troubles fiction has been a cornerstone of Northern Irish culture, but if Northern Irish culture is to become less sectarian, then so must the stories creating that culture change. The three novels in my project provide examples of this cultural shift. All that remains are for these stories to be heard.

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