‘Where I’m Coming from’: Modes of Returning to the Past in Glenn Patterson’s *The Rest Just Follows* (2014)

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Michael Parker opens the second volume of his comprehensive overview of Northern Irish literature with an observation from J. Hillis Miller highlighting literature’s ‘productive effect in history’, and claims that the literary texts discussed in the volume ‘often reflect particular historical moments, yet also offer what Declan Kiberd has termed “anticipatory illuminations”, possibilities of alternative futures and states of being’.[1] Glenn Patterson, described by Colm Tóibín on the publication of his fourth novel, *The International* (1999), as ‘the most serious and humane chronicler of Northern Ireland in the past 30 years, as well as one of the best contemporary Irish novelists’,[2] has certainly been at the forefront in the process of altering perceptions in and about the region. As Patterson himself claimed more than twenty years ago, one of his central aims in writing fiction was to find ‘new perspectives from which to view the city of [his] birth’.[3] His nine novels to date, almost all set in Belfast, justify this claim, as not only do they reflect the particular historical moments in which they were written, but they also offer possibilities of alternative futures and states of being.[4] As he succinctly summed up in an interview *à propos* the publication of *The Rest Just Follows: or Up Here* (2014), ‘My books are, I suppose, alternative histories’ (Burke 2014).[5] Alternative interpretations, interrogations of the past, in turn, facilitate the imagining of alternative futures.

Functioning as alternative histories, the staging of voluntary or involuntary returns to the past is a key component of Patterson’s fiction. The retrospective quality of his post-Belfast Agreement fiction, *The International* (1999) and *That Which Was* (2004) in particular, has been lucidly analysed by Neal Alexander in his 2010 essay ‘Remembering to Forget: Northern Irish Fiction after the Troubles’. Much of what Alexander says in relation to these two earlier novels also holds true for Patterson’s most recent novel, *The Rest Just Follows*. Most importantly, Alexander claims that they emphasise the importance of what Freud, and Ricoeur after him, called the work of memory to facilitate the future, whether at an individual or a collective level, even if at the same time they dramatise the difficulty of such an undertaking.[6] *The Rest Just Follows* also participates in the work of memory to enable the future both for individuals and communities by staging three different modes of returning to the past, which enter into a dialogue not only with each other, but also with current political

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[1] Michael Parker, *Northern Irish literature, 1975-2006: The Imprint of History*, (New York: Palgrave, 2006), xvi.
[2] Colm Tóibín, cited on the back cover of Glenn Patterson, *The International* (London: Anchor, 1999).
[3] Patterson, ‘Butchers’ Tools’, *Fortnight* 331 (September, 1994): 44.
[4] The two novels not set in Belfast are *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* (1995) and *The Third Party* (2007). Despite the fact that they are set elsewhere – the former on the Euro Disney construction site in Marne-la-Vallée near Paris and the latter in Hiroshima – both of them reflect on Northern Irish culture and society by featuring characters from Belfast.
[5] Patterson in Declan Burke, ‘“The Rest Just Follows”: Interview with Glenn Patterson’, *Irish Examiner* 16 March 2014: n.p.
[6] See Neal Alexander, ‘Remembering to Forget: Northern Irish Fiction after the Troubles’, *Irish Literature Since 1990: Diverse Voices*, Eds. Scott Brewster and Michael Parker (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 274-81.

and cultural discourses in Northern Ireland, most notably, with the ongoing practice of truth recovery and the widespread assumption that it can aid healing and reconciliation.[7]

A 'growing up' story of three characters – Craig Robinson, Maxine Neill and St John Nimmo – set in Belfast, the action of *The Rest* spans almost thirty years, starting in 1974, leading through the 'Troubles', the 'Peace Process' and beyond, up to almost the present day. Although the three (Protestant) protagonists come from very different family backgrounds, each of them experience a disrupting moment in their adolescence – brought about by the socio-political situation in Northern Ireland in the 1970s – a moment which determines the whole after-course of their lives and which they revisit more or less reluctantly in the future.

Craig: From History and Melancholia to Hope and History

The most traumatic disruption occurs in Craig's life at the age of seventeen, when his inspirational history teacher, Alec Harrison, is murdered in his own bed by republican paramilitaries at the time of the protests in the Maze prison, Belfast (1976-81). His murder, according to the police, was *possibly* 'connected to an article he had recently published – "Making the Most of Suffering" – about the republican leadership's manipulation of the prisons dispute'.[8] That Craig experiences the event as a trauma is clear from several aspects of his reaction: his memory failure (*Rest*, 109), his withdrawal into silence, creating a year-long hiatus in his friendship with St John (*Rest*, 114), and that he desperately, irrationally clings on to Ros, whom he hardly knows, or even liked the one time he met her, but as Harrison's partner, she replaces the lost object of his respect and admiration.

Most symptomatic of all, time itself seems to become disrupted for Craig. The moment when the three of them (Hammy, as Craig called his teacher, Ros and he) met for the last time *envelops* him and generates an absurd self-blame in him, reminiscent of Drew Linden's childhood self-blame for causing the Troubles in Patterson's second novel, *Fat Lad*:[9] 'And yet there had been that moment, the last time the three of them met, when they might have altered the course of events, when she and he might have altered them, by agreeing to Harrison's suggestion to get together again on the night that – because they did *not* go along with it? – he died' (*Rest*, 115). Craig's emotional scenario recalls Stephen Dedalus's reflection in the 'Nestor' episode of *Ulysses* about possible futures that never came to pass: 'Time has branded them and fettered they are lodged in the room of the infinite possibilities they have ousted. But can those have been possible seeing that they never were? Or was that only possible which came to pass?'[10] By the first anniversary of Harrison's death Craig is still clinging on to Ros and is haunted by self-blame, which suggests that he is still in the grip of melancholia in the sense Freud has defined it in relation to mourning.[11]

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[7] See Stephen Howe, 'Memory and History in Northern Ireland', *History Workshop Journal* 71 (Spring 2011): 228.

[8] Patterson, *The Rest Just Follows: or Up Here* (London: Faber, 2014), 110. Citations from the text are hereafter referred to as *Rest*.

[9] Patterson, *Fat Lad* (1992: London: Blackstaff, 2008). Citations from the text are hereafter referred to as *Fat*.

[10] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 21.

[11] Freud has famously defined melancholia as 'pathological mourning', suggesting that the major difference between the two is that while '[in] mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia

Craig's melancholia, caused by Harrison's death, is paradoxically transformed into a mode of mourning as, living out Harrison's advice, he also becomes a historian.[12] As an MA student he tries to achieve some intellectual distance by revisiting Harrison's argument in his thesis: 'He had taken as his starting point the article that was supposed to have got Harrison shot, developing its thesis and to an extent taking issue with it, arguing that the prison protest had in fact been the first step in a new political strategy' (*Rest*, 154). That Craig's intellectual effort is embedded in the description of the aftermath of 'the Brighton bomb' in December 1984 – the bomb that almost killed Margaret Thatcher – however, highlights how history as an intellectual exercise trying to render historical processes intelligible is challenged by history as a lived experience. The clash between historical abstraction and lived history is eloquently dramatised in the sentence closing the scene, performing two abrupt perspective shifts: 'He turned off the radio and, while the helicopter searchlight flicked once more across the window [of his dead aunt's house, now his home], while rescue workers in Brighton tore apart the rubble searching for survivors, cradled his head in his hands. He might have to rethink' (*Rest*, 154).

By way of a next step, as a history teacher Craig's work of memory shifts the focus from the disabling legacy of the past onto its aspects opening up possibilities for the future. Prompted by the unverbalised emotional impulse that it would be 'a betrayal' of Harrison, he turns down an opportunity to work in a school with a prestigious history and a reputation (*Rest*, 220), and starts revising the practice of teaching history in an ordinary school instead. As the newly appointed head of department with five history teachers under his command, he challenges their practice of engaging the pupils' 'arms and not their imaginations', making whole eras flash 'uninterrogated – unintelligible – in front of their eyes' on the roller boards (*Rest*, 244). In Craig's understanding, as he tells the parents on an open night he organises for them, 'History [...] taught us that we are a more interesting and varied bunch than the newspaper headlines might lead people to believe' and proposes to take their children 'on a journey to help them discover how they had become who they were and *to take pride in where they were from*' (*Rest*, 246, emphasis added).[13] As these utterances and his opening anecdote about Robert Shipboy McAdam – a 'Presbyterian and an Irish speaker' who lived 'once upon a not so very long ago' (*Rest*, 245) – suggest, in Craig's vision history is foundational for one's identity. However, the method of imaginatively interrogating the past he proposes aims to generate pride in his students not by sticking to a narrowly defined

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it is the ego itself', a symptom of which is self-reproach. See Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XIV (1914-1916), *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1917), 246. In contrast to Craig, Ros seems to have completed the work of mourning by the first anniversary of her husband's death – to a great extent thanks to 'the tangled rope of mutuality' Craig has offered her – and severs all contact with him.

[12] As Harrison tells Craig, 'We need good young historians coming through [...] If you can get over the cultural cringe that is' (*Rest*, 74). Harrison's advice echoes a crucial imperative in Deirdre Madden's 1996 novel, *One by One in the Darkness*. Helen, one of the protagonists is strongly motivated to become a lawyer by one of her teachers' repeated call in her convent school: 'We need our Catholic lawyers in this society'. See Deirdre Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* (London: Faber, 1996), 158. Citations from the text are hereafter referred to as *One*.

[13] The fact that only eleven parents turn up out of the potential eight hundred casts an ironic shadow over Craig's effort.

identity, but rather by making their sense of identity more porous, by revealing alternatives – obscured by reductive grand narratives (of two sides) – thus enabling the emergence and acceptance of new subjectivities. In short, Craig's project as a history teacher is consonant with Patterson's literary project of writing alternative histories.[14] The counter-historical nature of Craig's teaching of history is also highlighted by the way that he encourages his pupils to gather knowledge about Belfast's past not only from books, but also by having recourse to alternative sources, especially to what Jan Assmann has called 'communicative memory', the oral memories of their parents and grandparents: 'Now, you have a week to come up with as many interesting facts of your own as you can muster. But, remember, don't just look in books. Ask your mums and dads, your grannies and granddads, listen to what they have to say' (*Rest*, 246).

The confluence of hope and history, the potential of interrogating the past with a view to creating a healthier sense of identity, envisioned by Craig as an inspired young history teacher, however, becomes challenged in the rest of the novel.[15] Craig himself seems to lose focus of this ideal as he grows older. It is still his idealism and the memory of Harrison that compels him to get involved in the political negotiations leading up to the Belfast Agreement – as a paid historical/political analyst for a unionist 'party he claimed not to support or even to like' (*Rest*, 299)[16] – but with the passing of the euphoria surrounding the signing of this historical document, his youthful idealism also seems to evaporate. Enabling historical analysis becomes emptied out into a routine, and a potentially enabling idea – 'the Danzig option', the idea of Belfast becoming 'a free city within a reconstituted federation of the islands' (*Rest*, 269) – becomes a 'spiel' that he writes up into a monograph (*Rest*, 313), getting him invitations to numerous 'conferences on conflict resolution, as well as to other cities with a bit of "Belfast" form – starting with Bs, of course: Berlin, Beirut, Bogotà', which allows him in the end to resign from his school (*Rest*, 313).[17] The most serious challenge to Craig's idealistic approach to history is posed, however, by St John's different kind of project to revisit the past.

St John: The Media and Truth Recovery (Or: 'One City's Calmer Was Another City's Holy Fuck')

Craig's idealistic project to enable the future by counter-historical analysis is replicated and at the same time ironically counterpointed by St John's media project to revisit the past with a view to reconciliation. Having made a career in satellite TV over in England, St John is asked

[14] Craig's effort as a history teacher is also reminiscent of the Presbyterian minister's, Ken Avery's idealistic efforts at cross community building in *That Which Was*, or of the utopian vision offered by the Catholic lawyer Hugh McManus transcending sectarian divisions in a 'land of excluded middles' in *Fat Lad*.

[15] The description of Craig's idealistic historical project is preceded by St John's misfired oral interrogation of his mother's past, which casts an ironic shadow forward (*Rest*, 241). Thus, one could say, Craig's project is poetically shot by both sides. The song 'Shot by Both Sides', released by the post-punk band Magazine in 1978 marks a major turning point in Maxine's life in the novel.

[16] It is largely because of Ros, and thus indirectly Harrison, that Craig becomes a political analyst for an unidentified unionist party, whose members want him to challenge and extend their views, and thus becomes a player in the Peace Process (*Rest*, 251).

[17] Participants of a 'Writing Out of Conflict' conference are also portrayed satirically in *The Third Party*. Particularly scathing is the description when a bomb scare turns "eminent writers and academics" into a 'herd' (*Rest*, 78).

to feature in a television programme *Where I'm Coming From*, 'taking personalities back to the place where they had spent their childhood, seeing what it revealed about them' (*Rest*, 318). St John asks for Craig's assistance in the programme, inviting him to jointly interrogate their history teacher's, Alec Harrison's past, as in the course of preparing for the shooting of the documentary, his researcher, Skater Tom 'came across a document, a list of names the IRA had of people who were being used [by 'the security forces and some loyalists they were running'] to undermine the hunger strikers' cause' (*Rest*, 325-26), and among them he found Harrison's name.[18]

St John presents his interest in the issue to Craig as a disinterested act of truth recovery, which could function as 'an illustration of how fucked up things were', and invites him to interrogate it 'with an open mind' (*Rest*, 326), or, as he later describes his plans for the programme: 'I was thinking an interview, walk and talk, maybe along the front of the school, putting things in context. The idea isn't to condemn, but to understand – why people made the choices they did in those days' (*Rest*, 328). But as the subsequent bracketed comment of unidentified narrative status clearly points out, there is a crucial personal dimension at stake that St John would not readily admit: '(The idea in structural terms was to put into perspective his own father's sudden departure, leading up to a reunion, possibly on Derry's Walls)' (*Rest*, 328).[19] Thus, the programme could offer St John an opportunity to revisit and re-inscribe a disruptive moment in his own past, his father's sudden and unexplained abandonment of the family, which, as he finds out much later, was largely motivated by the father's altered political convictions. He became 'a republican by virtue of being a socialist', 'not a republican socialist', as the father tries to explain to his adult son, and he left his family in order to escape from his wife's bourgeois world (*Rest*, 294). In other words, the programme could potentially function for St John as a form of therapy with a cathartic reconciliation scene, which, owing to the highly symbolic site of Derry's Walls, could also suggest (or indeed allegorise) the need for reconciliation on a collective level in Northern Irish society.

Instead of a cathartic reconciliation scene with his father, however, St John's effort at truth recovery ends in an irrevocable breach in his friendship with Craig.[20] Apparently belying his belief that it is necessary to interrogate the past, Craig refuses to cooperate at first, then thwarts St John's project in a wily way. In the course of shooting the programme he unexpectedly reveals an incriminating episode from St John's past in front of the crew – that St John was stealing money from the filling station where he used to work – with which he undermines St John's credibility, offering by way of an introduction the following remark, pertinent to the current state of Northern Irish society: 'even though we have put the guns away, or most of them, we haven't stopped fighting here altogether: the past is the new

[18] After the first unequivocal statement, St John's utterances become less stable: claim turns into supposition. St John first tells Craig that Skater Tom 'came across a document, a list of names the IRA had of people *who were being used* to undermine the hunger strikers' cause' (*Rest*, 325, emphasis added). Craig asks incredulously, 'By whom?', and St John replies: 'Well, the document *seemed to suggest* elements within the security forces and some loyalists they were running' (*Rest*, 326, emphasis added).

[19] The bracketed passage could be Craig's silent ironic comment, and thus an instance of focalisation or a formal rendering of St John presenting this dimension by way of an afterthought, downplaying its importance.

[20] It also indirectly causes an irreparable rift in Craig and Maxine's marriage.

frontline and reputation is its cannon fodder: we are all vulnerable [...] you see, the problem with revisiting the past, is that you can't really control it once you start' (*Rest*, 336-37).

As this utterance and his later taciturn reply to his uncomprehending wife, Maxine, suggest, his act was an effort 'to defend' the dead man: 'Alec isn't here to defend himself' (*Rest*, 338). Yet, Craig seems to protect not so much Harrison himself or Harrison's reputation, as his own memory of the dead teacher, which is foundational for his identity, and which St John does not respect (or at least seems to ignore).[21] Craig's unexpected counterattack on St John in the programme starts at the point when having referred to the 'allegations' that Harrison was connected 'to some pretty shadowy people,' St John asks his friend bluntly: 'does it affect at all your memory of him?' (*Rest*, 336). Memory is also highlighted in the setting of their meeting when St John, in an equally blunt manner, first tells Craig about Harrison's supposed connections to the security forces and/or loyalist paramilitaries. The meeting takes place at a *lieu de memoire* par excellence, as Pierre Nora defines it, 'the Garden of Remembrance to the Western flank of the City Hall' (*Rest*, 324) – the biggest World War I memorial in Northern Ireland.[22] The scene creates an ironic contrast between the cenotaph, an objectified, symbolic trace of memory, aiming to inscribe the memory of the dead in a respectful manner, and an A4 envelope whose contents pertain to re-inscribe the living memory of Harrison in an incriminating way.[23] The action around the cenotaph is also significant in this respect: 'A man in fluorescent waterproofs had come out of the City Hall to pick up litter from around the Cenotaph: a conveniently distracting midpoint to which they both addressed the majority of their comments' (*Rest*, 324). The man's effort to keep the collective memory of the dead pure and uncontaminated provides an ironic contrast to what St John is prepared to do to Harrison's memory. St John's lack of respect for Craig's memory of Harrison is also suggested by that he breaks the shocking news to Craig quoting his researcher verbatim: 'and he was mixed up in some kind of shit?' (*Rest*, 325).

Harrison's memory is foundational for Craig's identity, as I have already discussed, but there remains a further crucial aspect to consider. If the allegations concerning Harrison were true, it would invalidate the most important lesson Craig learnt from him concerning history:

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[21] As Patterson has noted in an interview, 'the tyranny of memory is what we have to write against on the one hand, and we also have to try and respect individual memory on the other hand'. See Patterson in Patrick Hicks, 'A Conversation with Glenn Patterson', *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannah Nua* 12.2 (2008): 116. When Craig becomes 'withdrawn' after Harrison's murder, St John 'felt he ought to respect his friend's privacy' (*Rest*, 114); he is not so considerate any more.

[22] It is worth noting that *The Rest Just Follows* was published in 2014, the centenary year of the beginning of World War I, and it also obliquely participates in the ongoing historical and cultural re-visioning of the Great War. In his narrative introduction we see Harrison teaching the events leading up to Partition in Ireland in the context of the Great War: 'the events leading up to Partition [...] had to be considered in the same historical sweep as the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the attrition of the trenches' (*Rest*, 67).

[23] For the distinction between traces of memory and real, living memory, see Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Lieux de Mémoire*', trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (Spring, 1989): 7-24. The scene in *The Rest* also echoes a scene at the end of *Fat Lad*, where Drew Linden visits the grave of Con, a victim of the Troubles, who was buried the same day as one of the dead republican hunger strikers, but who, unlike the other dead man mourned by a community, left but little trace in collective memory. This contrast is succinctly summed up by an old man Drew meets in the cemetery: 'You never saw a pair of funerals like it. One was as small as the other was big' (*Fat*, 303).

> It felt strange – transgressive almost – to be sitting in class discussing the same sets of initials as were heard with dreadful regularity on news bulletins today – IRA, UVF – shorn of all the passion, and the opprobrium, that normally attached to them.
>
> That, said his teacher, was the meaning of 'the vantage point of history', a place above the fray. (*Rest*, 68)[24]

In Craig's memory, Harrison was killed for the essay he published on the hunger strikes,[25] supposedly written from the historian's ideologically non-committed vantage point. But if he was 'used' by security forces and loyalists, as the documents found by St John's researcher seem to suggest, Harrison's historical argument would be fraught with ideology. Actually, certain details in the text could be read as hints that Harrison may well not have been above the fray; however, as in *That Which Was*, the reader will never learn the truth.[26] Thus, should the allegations concerning his allegiances prove to be true, learning where Harrison comes from would produce shame, not pride in Craig, and would challenge his notion of history as well as destabilise his identity in the same sweep.

In addition to the effect on his own identity, a further reason why Craig aborts St John's plan could be the medium itself through which St John intends to interrogate the past. The unsuitability of the media – TV and journalism – to provide nuanced, complex analyses is a recurrent theme in Northern Irish literature, one of the most eloquent examples of which can be found in Deirdre Madden's novel, *One by One in the Darkness* (1996).[27] As we have seen, Craig also contrasts the discourse of history with that of journalism. St John's planned TV show would last an hour; his talk and walk with Craig would take about two and a half minutes. As he finally admits on the programme: 'part of what I'm doing here is trying *to understand* what went on in my own family, with my father in particular' (*Rest*, 336, emphasis added). It is highly questionable, however, that an understanding of a complex situation can be gained in such a short time. St John's original suggestion to Craig that they should revisit Harrison's past together 'to illustrate how fucked up things were' (*Rest*, 326) can be done in two and a half minutes, but that seems to indicate

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[24] Harrison's vision and practice of teaching history form a stark contrast with Mr Craig's sectarian practice of teaching history in *Fat Lad* (*Fat*, 165-66).

[25] After the murder 'Police said it was *possible* that the murder was connected to an article he had recently published …' (*Rest*, 110). By the time Craig works on his MA thesis, possibility metamorphoses into a firmer connection: 'He had taken as his starting point the article that was *supposed to* have got Harrison shot' (*Rest*, 154, emphasis added). Finally, Craig presents possibility as *fact* in St John's documentary: 'Alec had written an article about the hunger strike as a tactic ... and well, they had always had a very tight editorial line, the IRA' (*Rest*, 336).

[26] The most suspicious incident is when one day Harrison takes Craig home from the Washington bar and parking the car 'in a temporary car park on a bomb site at the corner of Sandy Row' he uses the word 'Provos' instead of 'the IRA': '"That's one thing we can thank the Provos for," said Hammy, "cheap parking"' (*Rest*, 72), and Craig silently comments: 'The word – Provos – sounded strange coming from him, as though he was saying it to pass himself. Craig wanted to tell him it was all right, IRA was as acceptable to him out of the classroom as in' (*Rest*, 72). In *That Which Was* the mystery about Larry's participation in a sectarian killing and his supposed memory loss as a result of a surgical intervention seems to be solved, dismissed as a mere delusion, but then, by way of an uncanny punchline, it is restored.

[27] The situation in *The Rest* is reminiscent of what Helen, a lawyer says to David, a journalist, about journalism in Madden's novel: 'The medium is a blunt weapon in itself, that's the problem. It isn't fitted to dealing with complexity, it isn't comfortable with paradox or contradiction and that's the heart of the problem, if you ask me' (*One*, 51).

a foregone conclusion, not an interrogation or an analysis. So, what can be gained by such a representation? Those who are emotionally uninvolved gain a superficial impression, not an understanding, and for those who are emotionally involved, such a procedure simply opens up old wounds.[28]

Thus, by and large, St John's project to revisit the past, and perform an act of truth recovery along the way, is revealed to be generally misconceived as it lacks empathy. St John's effort to stabilise his own identity and enable his own future is unethical as it does not respect Craig's memory and entails destabilising his friend's identity. The situation could indeed be summed up by a slightly modified version of the narrator's bracketed comment in another situation: '(One city's calmer is another city's holy fuck)' (*Rest*, 146).[29] Ironically enough, however, the text does not allow the reader's sympathy to lie with Craig against St John either, as Craig also behaves unethically towards his wife, Maxine. When Maxine, intending to seek reparation with St John, performs an inadvertent act of truth recovery – she discovers that while attending conflict resolution conferences her husband has become engaged in adultery – Craig's reaction is no less blunt than St John's manner in handling Craig's living memory.[30]

Maxine: The Spirit of Belfast (Or: 'They were all bound to come down')

Counterpointing the disastrous developments in the three protagonists' relationships, the novel offers an optimistic, self-reflexive third mode of revisiting the past in its closing scene, focusing on the figure of Maxine, who in the course of the text is repeatedly associated with hope against hope for the future. The scene dramatises a complex, paradoxical vision of moving on by way of returning. After her marriage to Craig and her professional partnership with a woman named Gerry are over, Maxine is looking for a new place in the city centre. Her intention to move on, however, inadvertently brings her back to the place where she ended up in 1979 at the age of seventeen, 'when she was thrown off course' (*Rest*, 56) by her brother, Tommy's, unclarified business with the police. He was arrested, released, and rumours quickly spread that he was a police tout, meriting murals like 'Tommy the tout'; he then disappeared without a trace.

In this final scene, remembering is an involuntary act brought on by the place itself. The eruption of the past into the present, however, is not portrayed as symptomatic of an

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[28] The description of the media's presence at Harrison's funeral is downright sarcastic: 'The funeral was vast. [...] The camera shutters fluttered apologetically taking only what they needed for the front pages, what the ordinary decent newspaper-reading public needed, before withdrawing' (*Rest*, 111), the phrase 'ordinary decent newspaper-reading public' echoing the minister's words denouncing 'the perpetrators as the enemies not just of democracy and free speech but of ordinary human decency' (*Rest*, 111). The irony could target the media or the reading public or both in an equal measure.

[29] In the early 1980s Maxine starts to work for a London-based temping agency 'which has just opened an office in the city, testing the waters, calmer than at any time in the last more-than-decade' (*Rest*, 145). The calm is gone, however, when a bomb goes off nearby 'blowing out the display windows and writing off two-thirds of the showroom stock' (*Rest*, 146). The ensuing bracketed comment is a satirical comment on how Northern Ireland is perceived from England.

[30] When Maxine checks Craig's email in search of a contact number for St John and Craig finds her in front of the computer petrified by the unexpected evidence of his adultery, all he says is: 'you have no right', and their personal past and present is not interrogated further.

unworked-through trauma – as in *Fat Lad*, for instance[31] – but rather as something enabling the future. That the place is the same, yet different – 'Berlin,' the hairdresser's, which functioned as a crucial turning point in Maxine's life is gone, and in Corn Market, where 'Berlin' used to be, 'an enormous steel sculpture, the Spirit of Belfast, had replaced the bandstand that had replaced the fountain' in the middle of the square (*Rest*, 365) – suggests that by returning and starting again from there, Maxine is recovering an alternative future, counterpointing Craig's tortuous desire after the death of Harrison to return to a moment in the past when he and Ros might have altered the course of events.[32] Such a sense of recovering an alternative future is also evoked on a collective level in that the place to which she returns brings back not only personal memories for her, but it is also haunted by memories of (a version of) the city's past. When Maxine first enters the building in 1979, she feels 'like stepping into another city, not Berlin – not yet – but a version of Belfast past' (*Rest*, 58), and her spatial move up the stairs enacts a temporal return to the present through an immersion in the past:

> Doors with frosted glass opened off the first landing – Maxine read 'shipping broker' in passing and something that looked very like 'furrier'. From behind another door she thought she heard the sound of sewing machines. For a mad panicky moment as Max steered her still up she wondered if she had seen the red, white and black sign outside at all, if she hadn't actually been dragged down a wormhole to a previous century, and then they were at the top of the second flight of stairs [. . .] and there she was, there it was, Berlin, as 1979 as Belfast got. (*Rest*, 58)

Thus, Maxine's return to this place at the end of the novel in search of a centre creates a mise-en-abyme structure: her personal return replicates a collective return conjured up by the place itself.[33] This interplay between the collective and the individual, the past and the future on an individual as well as on a collective level is also suggested by the prominent place given in the last pages of the novel to Belfast's recently set up iconic landmark in the middle of Corn Market: 'the giant unravelled spring' of the *Spirit of Belfast*. Unlike the War memorial in the scene from which the irreparable rift between Craig and St John originates, the *Spirit of Belfast* does not intend 'to stop time, to block the work of forgetting [...] to immortalise death', as Nora describes the fundamental purpose of *lieux de mémoire*.[34] Rather, as an instance of public art, it aims to keep the memory of the past alive at the same time as it actively participates in an enabling transformation, re-semiotisation of city space.[35]

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[31] In *Fat Lad* Drew returns to Belfast on business after eight years of living in England, determined to live in the present. Yet, he is thrust back into the past against his will reliving his childhood trauma caused by the father's domestic violence, symptomatic of the communal violence during the Troubles.

[32] Highlighting the ever-changing nature of the cityscape in the scene strongly echoes Ciaran Carson's portrayal of Belfast, most notably in *Belfast Confetti*, a crucial literary influence on Patterson's vision of the city of his birth.

[33] The fact that Maxine's search for a centre is conveyed in a mise-en-abyme structure also conjures up the original meaning of the term 'mise-an-abyme' in heraldry: 'put into the centre'.

[34] See Nora, 19. It must be noted, however, that Nora does not stop here; he continues by arguing that, despite this fundamental purpose, 'it is also clear that *lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, and endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications' (19).

[35] As the New York artist and creator of the *Spirit of Belfast*, Dan George said: 'The *Spirit of Belfast* is the manifestation of our energy as we look to the future as well as a meditation on our past. It is a timepiece that

The most exciting way that the closing scene dramatises an enabling return, however, is through a subtle, multiply-resonant, doubled-up intertextual/intratextual echo of Seamus Heaney's 'Tollund', the last poem in his 1996 collection *The Spirit Level*.[36] Being shown a place close to, but not the city centre proper, from where 'the final barbed wire layer of the peaceline is visible', Maxine tells herself – in her characteristically life-affirming manner – to 'take the optimistic view on the future of the peaceline (it was bound to come down, they were all bound to come down)', and concludes that 'it was actually *not bad*. *Not bad* but not, she said [...] strictly speaking city-centre' (*Rest*, 364-65, emphasis added). Soon after this, before entering the building that will take her on a time travel, the estate agent warns her that there is no lift, 'but the stairs *aren't too bad*' (*Rest*, 367, emphasis added). Through the repetition of the simple phrase 'not bad', the closing scene of the novel enters into a dialogue with the euphoric closing scene of Part III ('Making It'), functioning as a sort of climax of *The Rest*. Set shortly before the signing of the Belfast Agreement, this climactic scene focuses on the three protagonists celebrating together on the top of the Europa Hotel, contemplating that 'there's a whole lot [they] could have done differently', yet considering 'all the things that might have happened' Craig arrives, by way of the Heaney poem, at the conclusion that they have not done 'too bad' at all:[37]

> There were lines in his head, a Heaney poem, from back around the time of the ceasefire, which had troubled him oddly then, but which came into its own now, something about being alive and sinning, 'Ourselves again', something else again, '*not bad*'. Yes. His arms up around the others' shoulders now too, pulling them in until their three foreheads touched. '*We haven't done too bad*, have we?' (*Rest*, 307, emphases added)

In Craig's mind, the appearance of the closing lines of Heaney's poem 'Tollund' – 'to make a new beginning / And make a go of it, alive and sinning / Ourselves again, free-willed again, not bad' – enacts a return, as he recalls the lines from back around the time of the 1994 ceasefire. His mental return to the poem, however, is not static or nostalgic, as it involves a perspective shift, and thus functions as an enabling act of reinterpretation. This, in turn, is resonant with the way Heaney's poem 'Tollund' itself enacts a return. Written shortly after the 1994 ceasefire, it returns to and retunes an earlier poem by Heaney, 'The Tollund

weaves together the strength of steel and the delicacy of light, ocean liners and linen, progress and peace'. See Northern Ireland Executive, '*Spirit of Belfast* Launched as City Centre Landmark', http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/news-dsd/news-dsd-240909-spirit-of-belfast.htm.

[36] Seamus Heaney, 'Tollund', *The Spirit Level* (London: Faber, 1996), 69.

[37] The three protagonists are together for the last time before the cataclysms breaking friendships and marriage set in. The sense of transcendence associated with the top of the Europa Hotel resonates with a scene in Robert McLiam Wilson's *Eureka Street.* Jake, one of the protagonists comments on the place in the following way: 'I loved this roof. [...] The hotel was one of the tallest buildings in this flat, flat town and I could see all Belfast from up there. [...] from up there the streets smelt sweet and Belfast was made of cardboard in the mild and cooling air'. See Robert McLIam Wilson, *Eureka Street* (London: Vintage, 1996), 160. Associating transcendence with the Europa Hotel also suggests a perspective shift (and is haunted by irony), since during the Troubles the building became notorious as a frequent target of sectarian violence, 'the most bombed hotel in Europe', as locals would say. The negative reputation of the hotel is also evoked in *Eureka Street* (101) as well as in Patterson's fiction.

Man' from the early 1970s.[38] As Michael Parker has noted, 'Tollund' 'captures a very different scene and music to that of "The Tollund Man"'.[39] Most importantly, Heaney's poetic return enacts a perspective shift with respect to the notion of 'home'. While 'The Tollund Man' describes feeling at home in terms of being 'lost' and 'unhappy', 'Tollund' envisions 'a new beginning' by being 'at home beyond the tribe'.[40]

As for the last two words of the poem, which return in the form of a double echo in the closing scene of Patterson's novel, they express, as Parker has noted, 'a modest desire for something better, and contrast with the more expansive aspirations embodied in the idea of "a new beginning"'.[41] In the references to being 'alive and sinning' and a restored free-will – the latter evoked through an involuntary ellipsis by Craig – in turn, Parker detects 'a longing to regain that sense of alternative possibilities fostered in the mid-1960s, when the younger generation to which the couple [Heaney and his wife] belonged enjoyed briefly their release from the stifling political and religious orthodoxies that had dominated their lives thus far'.[42]

Through the double echo of 'not bad', then, the closing scene of Patterson's novel expands/deepens further its complex mise-en-abyme structure, staging a return within a return within a return, which, however – like the multiple giant steel curves of the *Spirit of Belfast* that return but not to the same place – enact or conjure up enabling shifts of perspective, and alternative possibilities along the way. As in Heaney's Tollund poems, the notion of 'home' is crucial for the closing scene, since Maxine is in search of a home which, in retrospect, also renders her earlier description – 'thrown off course' – Homerically motivated. Significantly, the first echo of 'a modest desire for something better' in Heaney's poem appears in connection with what euphemistically, and quite ironically, have become called 'peacelines', or 'peace walls', which are a reminder of a troubled past and remain a contentious issue in Northern Ireland to this day. The name of the hairdresser's – 'Berlin' – gains symbolic significance in this respect, just like Maxine's thought back in 1979, as she

[38] Seamus Heaney, 'The Tollund Man', *Wintering Out* (1972; London: Faber, 1989), 47-8.

[39] Parker, 171.

[40] As Parker has observed in connection with the whole *The Spirit Level* collection, it 'suggested that home had at last been liberated from its inverted commas' (271).

[41] Parker, 271. The phrase 'not bad' expressing 'a modest desire for something better' in 'Tollund' can also be read as enacting a perspective shift. Rosie Lavan called my attention to Heaney's article 'Belfast's Black Christmas', published in the *Listener* in December 1971, in which he writes: 'People kept asking what it's like to be living in Belfast and I've found myself saying that things aren't too bad in our part of the town: a throwaway consolation meaning that we don't expect to be caught in crossfire if we step out into the street. It's a shorthand that evades unravelling the weary twisted emotions that are rolled like a ball of hooks and sinkers in the heart'. See Rose Lavan, '"Heaney in Limboland": The Grammar of Belonging', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 21.2 (2015): 308.

[42] Parker, 271. Heaney's 'The Tollund Man' haunts Patterson's novel in further ways: Bea – one of St John's sisters and a one-time girlfriend of Craig's – dying of cancer, tries to joke about being scooped up at an excavation if she misses out on the resurrection, as the crematorium is on the site of an Iron Age rath (*Rest*, 352). Coughing interferes with her intention, but Craig imagines her finishing the joke as he is standing by her grave (*Rest*, 356). The idea of resurrection, archaeology and memory are also associated in the description of Christmas 1984 in the Nimmo family, in which one of the most crucial motifs is a trumpet, a Christmas decoration that the mother bought in the United States for the first Christmas of their marriage: 'The trumpet [...] pre-dated all of them. […] Mo took the trumpet in the palm of her hand looking at it as though at a bone fragment from which the whole creature of the past might be reconstructed' (*Rest*, 164).

entered the building leading up to it: 'not Berlin – *not yet* – but a version of Belfast past' (*Rest*, 58, emphasis added).[43]

The second, more distant echo of Heaney's poem, in turn, seems to point in the direction of how to realise that "something better" in a further subtle way. At the end of Part III, the mood of euphoria, a sense of transcending/leaving behind the fray is reflected in the three protagonists' sudden spatial elevation to the top of the Europa Hotel by means of a lift:

> The lift doors opened. St John's finger lit the topmost light. They concentrated on their stomachs as the lift ascended, lest they should overtake the rest of them, and when the doors opened again – oh, fuck, Maxine whispered[44] – it was onto a vast window looking west to east across the city. They tripped forward like communicants to the altar.
>
> The black clouds had cleared and in their wake the new day was mustering in pink and mauve. (*Rest*, 307)

In the closing scene of the novel, by contrast, the estate agent apologetically remarks about the building where 'Berlin' used to be that there's 'No lift [...] but the stairs aren't too bad'. As Maxine's climbing up towards the flat available for rent 'on the other side of the dividing wall' where 'Berlin' used to be suggests, reaching 'home beyond the tribe' is a gradual and fraught process, and cannot be brought about by sudden change, but rather by creating and encountering environments of memory, more or less public forms of art, amongst other things, that aid remembering in alternative ways.[45]

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[43] Maxine is looking for the sign 'Berlin' leaning out of the window of the adjacent flat and cannot find it: 'The sign was gone, but the bracket, tantalisingly, remained. She would see about having it moved over ten or twelve feet. Or perhaps just leave it where it was, *fix an arrow to it angled from there to here*' (*Rest*, 368, emphasis added). The Berlin Wall plays a prominent role in a scene in Patterson's third novel, *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain*. A German woman, Ilse Klein, one of the two captives in the novel's central hostage scenario, narrates to her American captor and her fellow-hostage from Belfast how at some stage in her life she moved to an apartment 'almost on top of the Wall', how she felt that 'here at the edge, neither East, nor true West [...] some mixture was possible, some other way," and how "when the Wall came down" she stepped "over into the other side' turning her head 'to the left and to the right, like one released from a surgical collar'. See Patterson, *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* (London: Minerva, 1996), 125-28.

[44] When Maxine has her first haircut in 'Berlin', signifying a crucial turning point in her life, her reaction is described as: '"Oh, fuck," she said and started to cry. [...] She was beautiful' (*Rest*, 62).

[45] Pierre Nora contrasts *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) with *milieux de mémoire* (environments of memory). In Deirdre Madden's *One by One in the Darkness,* Cate and Sally, two sisters revisiting their old school together contemplate a future when the Troubles are over and Cate envisions a memorial that could function as a genuine environment of memory, as it would be 'a place which afforded dignity to memory, where you could bring your anger, as well as your grief', but significantly, the sky (suggesting a sense of transcendence) would be incorporated into the design. When after envisioning such a place Cate, who lives in London, suggests that 'things could suddenly change', Sally, who lives in Northern Ireland gives voice to her scepticism: 'I wish I could believe it. Living here you see too much to expect anything to change quickly' (*One*, 149).

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