

Leonie Windt-Wetzel

**Modelling Rural and Urban Place in Post-Ceasefire
and Post-Agreement Northern Irish Narrative Fiction**

Therese Fischer-Seidel, Klaus Stierstorfer (Hg.)

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Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Conceptualising Place and Modelling in the Context of (Northern) Irish Literature	13
2.1	(Northern) Irish Identity and Place	13
2.2	(Northern) Irish Writing and Place	19
2.2.1	The Dynamic Trialectics of Geography, History and Society	20
2.2.2	The Cultural Agency of Imaginative Geographies	28
2.2.3	The Rural and the Urban in the (Northern) Irish Spatial Imagination	33
2.3	Model Theory in Literary Studies	40
2.3.1	What is Model Building and What is its Function?	43
2.3.2	The Workings of Model Building in Literature	45
2.3.3	The Value of Analysing Literary Texts from the Perspective of Model Theory	46
2.4	Literary Mapping as Modelling: Approaching Post-Conflict Northern Irish Narrative Fiction from the Perspective of Model Theory	48
3	Filling the “unwritten page” of the Past and Modelling the Future of Northern Irish Place in Post-Ceasefire Narratives	53
3.1	Robert McLiam Wilson, <i>Eureka Street</i> (1996) – The Utopian Transformation of Belfast from Battlefield to “City of Love”	59
3.1.1	The Power of Names: Re-mapping and the Literary Tradition of Dinnseanchas	61
3.1.2	Michel de Certeau’s Spatial Practices and the Model of the City as Text	67
3.1.3	The Provisionality of Modelling – Relapses into Violence	77
3.1.4	Concluding Remarks: The Dissolution of the Rural/Urban Dichotomy as a Model for Reconciliation?	79
3.2	Deirdre Madden, <i>One by One in the Darkness</i> (1996) – Looking Back and Turning to the Future in Rural Northern Ireland	83
3.2.1	From Rural Idyll to Corrupted Countryside	84

3.2.2	Re-mapping Home – Childhood as a Place to Which One Can Always Return?	92
3.2.3	The Unifying Power of Shared Victimhood – Breaking Down Dichotomies	103
3.2.4	Concluding Remarks: <i>One by One</i> as a Precursor to the Post-Agreement Novel?	107
4	Gothic Re-entries in the Post-Agreement Novel – Traumatic Legacies and Haunted Places	111
4.1	Anna Burns, <i>No Bones</i> (2001) – Diagnosing the “Open Wound” of the Past	116
4.1.1	A Crisis of Representation – From Bildungsroman to Trauma Narrative	118
4.1.2	The Troubles and “Domestic Terrorism:” A Small-Scale Model of History	124
4.1.3	Modelling Fragmentation through Inhibited Processes of Cognitive Mapping	135
4.1.4	Eerie Landscapes and Moments of Emergence	141
4.1.5	Concluding Remarks: Confronting Trauma to Enable Renewal	147
4.2	David Park, <i>The Truth Commissioner</i> (2008) – Closure versus the Present Past	148
4.2.1	The Novel as Testing Ground – Simulating a Truth and Reconciliation Commission	151
4.2.2	The “latent sense of friction”: Overinscribing Predominant Images of Place	164
4.2.3	Concluding Remarks: Accommodating the Past in the Present ...	168
5	Reflection – The Value of Model Theory in the Analysis of Post-Conflict Northern Irish Narrative Fiction	172
6	Conclusion and Outlook – The Challenge of ‘Eutopian’ Models of Northern Irish Place	175
	Works Cited	185
	Appendix	200
	Glossary of Model Terminology	200

1 Introduction

What's past is prologue.

With this quote from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a play set on an island during a storm, Simon Coveney, Deputy Prime Minister of Ireland, underlines the legacy of the past in Northern Irish society in his speech at the event "Building Peace" at Queen's University Belfast, as part of the twenty year anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement on 10 April 2018.¹ The Good Friday or Belfast Agreement is an international treaty between the governments of Ireland and Great Britain as well as the parties of Northern Ireland. It regulates the status and form of government in Northern Ireland as well as strategies of transition after the Northern Ireland conflict, a twenty-five year period of violence between members of the Protestant and the Catholic communities in Northern Ireland as well as the police force and British troops in the years 1969 to 1994.

The armed conflict officially ended with the with IRA ceasefire declared on 31 August 1994.² The following years were marked by a mixture of hope for lasting peace and fear of a renewed outbreak of violence. Despite the ceasefire there still occurred a number of Troubles-related deaths and punishment beatings. The country was in a state of suspension, waiting for opposing political parties with diverging plans for the future of Northern Ireland to reach mutual consent on the introduction of a devolved government. The peace talks, considerably shaped by Northern Irish politicians Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness (Sinn Féin),³ John Hume (Social Democratic and Labour Party) and David Trimble (Ulster Unionist

1 The event was organised by the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice at Queen's University Belfast and brought together key figures involved in negotiating the Good Friday Agreement. Recordings of the events, including Simon Coveney's speech, can be watched on the QUB website: www.qub.ac.uk/Research/GRI/mitchell-institute/good-friday-agreement-20-years-on/. Accessed 13 Aug. 2018.

2 The Irish Republican Army (IRA) was the major paramilitary group fighting on the Catholic nationalist side. While the conflict started as a protest against Catholic discrimination in Northern Ireland, the ultimate aim of the IRA was to enforce a reunion with the Republic of Ireland.

3 For detailed information on Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness († 2017) and the history of Sinn Féin, see Brendan O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin* [1993] (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse UP, 1999).

Party)⁴ as well as leading Irish, British and American politicians ultimately resulted in the Good Friday Agreement or Belfast Agreement of 1998.⁵

As a key aspect, the Agreement sets down that the current and future status of Northern Ireland as either part of the British Union or as part of a sovereign United Ireland depends on the communal wish of the majority of the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Currently, the majority of people in Northern Ireland wish to maintain the Union with Britain. Should there be reason to believe that this has changed, a new referendum can be called. Moreover, it is laid out that all people of Northern Ireland have the right to hold Irish citizenship, British citizenship or both, and that this would not be affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland. The next paragraphs describe how the future power-sharing government will be structured and which issues will be addressed by the different institutions involved in this government. While the Agreement, due to these liberal, future-oriented and pragmatic regulations gained overwhelming approval in the referenda about its implementation held in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on 22 May 1998, other central concerns of post-conflict societies, such as investigations into paramilitary and state crimes, connected jurisdiction or coping with bereavement and trauma, are neglected. Overall, the Agreement is strongly geared to transition and the future. Except for a few short acknowledgements of “the tragedies of the past,”⁶ the violence of the Troubles and its ongoing effect on people or concrete measures of dealing with traumatic experiences caused by the conflict are not seriously taken up in the Agreement.

There is a need for many people in Northern Irish society, however, to actively engage with the past, to recover the truth about the murders of their relatives and to keep remembrance alive. This is also pointed out in the speeches of Simon Coveney and other members of the panel discussions at the “Building Peace” event such as Bill Clinton, George J. Mitchell, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern.⁷

4 For more information on the achievements of David Trimble, see Frank Millar, *David Trimble: The Price of Peace* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2004). An extensive overview of John Hume’s political life and his most influential speeches is provided in a recent collection edited by Séan Farren, *John Hume – In His Own Words* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2015).

5 The full text of the Agreement is available here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement. Accessed 13 Aug. 2018.

6 See article 2 of “The Declaration of Support.” *The Belfast Agreement. GOV.UK*, 10 Apr. 1998, www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement. Accessed 13 Aug. 2018.

7 Bill Clinton (as President of the US), George J. Mitchell (as United States Special Envoy for Northern Ireland), Tony Blair (as Prime Minister of the United King-