Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Resisting a Postcolonial Reality in the Modern Irish Novel

SHAHRIYAR MANSOURI
Faculty of Letters and Humanities
Shahid Beheshti University, Iran
s_mansouri@sbu.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

Benedict Anderson claims In Imagined Communities that nationalism and national identity are but fruits of a politicised imagination, and that the nation only acts what the State imagines. A decade later, in Tom Inglis re-examines such an imagination in a postcolonial Irish context, and traces the significance of the land in the process of identity formation. Anderson's and Inglis's understanding of personal identity formation resonate with the Deleuzian reading of a Rhizome-based local identity set against a monolithic backdrop of root-tree system. Where the former variety promises an animate, multifaceted identity, the latter conditions the development of Irishness to a closed system in which values are yet to be pronounced by the governing root, namely, the State. This is where one can draw the very red thin line between personal and national perception of reality (of being). The multilayered and dialectical nature of the modern Irish novel and its critical caliber has created an accurate touchstone that enables the Irish to identify the very two sides of reality. For the Irish, on the one hand, reality emerges as a monolithic, obdurate construct, fabricated and observed by the State; and on the other, it materialises as the nation's memory of economic hardships, political marginalisation, ideological bifurcations, and psychological exiles. By exploring James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) and Flann O'Brien's The Third Policeman (1974), this paper shall answer the question that Anderson and Inglis failed to address: what made the contemporary Irish literature a difficult reflection of postcolonial identity, which neither accepts the State's atavistic nativism nor identifies with neocolonial political mindset?

Keywords: modern Irish novel; memory studies; James Joyce; Flann O'Brien; postcolonial literature

INTRODUCTION

The greatest triumph of human thought was the calculation of Neptune
from the observed vagaries of the orbit of Uranus. Samuel Beckett,
Dream of Fair to Middling Women, 1932, p.221

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which
are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things
which are not seen are eternal.
2 Corinthians 4:18

In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991), Benedict Anderson introduces nationhood and nationalism as the actual fruits of a collective imagination. He identifies a concept as fleeting as nationhood as a sum of 'imagined political communities' in which individuals are not allowed to seek other possible manifestations of communal reality, as in the form of liberal, social, post-colonial, post-republican, post-capitalist communities and so on (p. 6). Nor can they come close to experience what they initially imagined, namely, individual and national identity. The state of nationhood, in this respect, provokes a Deleuzian vision of a monolithic State, be it colonial or postcolonial, as a root-tree structure. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari introduce the concept of rhizome and rhizomatic formation and set it against the backdrop of an arborescent body, namely, a tree-like system. For Deleuze and Guattari, it is the multiplex structure of

rhizome, including a complex matrix of entries and exits that allows for a rhizomatic identity to form and develop a more diverse understanding of society, culture and nationality. On the contrary, the dualistic nature of the root-tree structure considers the government as the root and the original image of nationhood, and the nation as only scattered branches or outer barks without any sense of independence or identity. It is the root that allows for the personal and social assumptions to enter its closed inner body and accumulate as much as need be. Only then this shower of socio-cultural, political and personal data can be distributed through a select number of channels such as institutional pedagogy, or other state-sponsored institutions.

Where the rhizomatic structure enables the nation to maintain transnational identities through cross-cultural interconnection, and thus identify with a dynamic sense of history and culture, the root-tree structure allows for the individual to synthesise and obtain a sense of identity insofar as they follow the governing root. Personal identity, therefore, in light of Anderson's arborescent vision, can be seen as a flat imitation of national identity, being devoid of individual traits. The individual, in such a system, can only *observe* a distorted reality of socio-cultural rootedness in which the State's politics of chastity, namely, the unity of the (mother) land, the State's dominance, and national obedience, suppress the pertinence and significance of individual identity.

A decade after Anderson, in *Local Belonging, Identities and Sense of Place in Contemporary Ireland* (2001) Tom Inglis re-visits the very duality of national and personal identity, and places it in the context of a postcolonial Ireland. Inglis commences his reading of contemporary Irish identity and nationality and its difficult interactions with the world by raising the following ontological question: "what importance does identity with place have in the ongoing construction and redevelopment of personal and social identities?" (2001, p. 2). Inglis's nativist argument, too, invokes Deleuze's arborescent reading of politicised structures and calls for a united Ireland, emphasising the significance of the land as a notable personal and social 'marker' in one's process of understanding the reality of being. However, he like Anderson failed to appreciate the significance of a personal aspect of reality and its undeniable role in confirming or rejecting socio-cultural realities that Giorgio Agamben calls "the governmental paradigm" (2013). For Terrence Brown, quoting Thomas Kilroy, addressing this very politicised paradigm by way of a clever design is in the "DNA" of the modern Irish fiction (2006, p. 205). The design, as Kilroy claims, is neither historically prejudiced nor politically partial; rather, it is externalized as,

> A voice heard over and over again, whatever its accent, a voice in a supreme confidence in its own histrionics, one what shares with its audience a shared ownership of the told tale and all that it implies: a taste for anecdote, an unshakeable belief in the value of human action, a belief that life may be adequately encapsulated into stories that require no reference, no qualifications beyond their own selves. (1972, p. 301)

By exploring the available literature, especially James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), and Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policemen* (1974), [1] this paper seeks to justify the relevance of the modern Irish novel and its anecdotal essence, which has so far allowed the nation to transcend political stratifications. Bearing this very essence, then the paper answers the questions Anderson and Inglis failed to address, namely, what made the contemporary Irish literature a difficult reflection of postcolonial identity, which neither accepts the State's atavistic nativism nor identifies with neocolonial imagery? And, how does a personal definition of reality of being differ from the State's postcolonial vision?

FROM REALITY TO VIRTUALITY: CHALLENGING THE STATE'S REALITY WITH VIRTUALITY

The multilayered and dialogical nature of the modern Irish novel and its critical caliber has created an accurate touchstone that enables the Irish to identify the very two sides of reality. On the one hand, reality emerges as a monolithic, obdurate construct, fabricated and observed by the root-tree State; yet on the other, reality manifests itself as the nation's branched memories of economic hardships, political marginalisation, ideological bifurcations, and psychological exiles.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man* (1916), James Joyce initially engages with an introspective examination of the *reality of being*, and only then embarks upon an external deconstruction of such double standards advocated by a supposedly postcolonial State. Stephen's reading of his Irishness is Heideggerian at best. For Stephen Dedalus, the primordial binaries of philosophy, namely, existence and essence on the one hand, and time and non-temporality on the other, can be defined only internally. He, therefore, first questions the binary of a postcolonial existence and a fascist essence, and then pinpoints such concepts in an external postcolonial reality of post-independence Ireland. Only by forming a personal, temporally conscious perception of reality, as Gabriel Ricci maintains, can he understand and find a "cure for overcoming time, [or] the nightmare of history" for the "origins that now occupy time" and a historically conditioned reality are not "cosmogonic but self-constituting" (2002, p. 79). As Ricci argues, a Heideggerian solution to the Irish plights of governmental marginalisation and involvement with a State-sponsored reality informs Stephen's grasp of an Irish problem: "the past"; for it "is never over and done with" for this nation, and is "continuously used over again" (2002, p. 79).

Stephen emerges as a protagonist who not only replaces a Yeatsian hero,[2] by highlighting the self-centered, twentieth-century roots of his artistic perception of reality, but also as Ricci astutely notes, "rises above the prison of his homeland, his religion, and even his language" by way of self-criticism and self-refashioning (2002, p. 15). Joyce's Stephen, I argue, suddenly becomes an Irish reincarnation of what the student in Goethe's *Faust* underwent, namely, he needed to know *what* something is before he could dissect that *something* into separate, intelligible pieces, or in Stephen's words "an object achieves its epiphany" when "its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance" (Joyce 1916, p. 218).

This very stratified conception of the outside world can be seen in Italo Calvino's fastidious understanding of reality, namely, a result of personal intellectual survey of the distorted and the original. In his reading of Carlo Emilio Gadda's *The Awful Mess on the Via Merulana* (1957), Calvino taps into an understanding that introduces reality as a sum of a larger equation: "to know […] what is real" one should "insert something [of one's own perception] into" it and hence "distort reality" (1993, p. 108). What Stephen needed to 'insert' into his young understanding of the outside world to be able to deconstruct a State-sponsored vision of postcolonial reality was neither a concept nor a theoretical matrix. Rather, it was an inscriptive mode of language that could communicate his intrapersonal observations of his nation in flux. In other words, Stephen had to write about what would provoke self-reflexive spontaneity and a sudden rush of fresh socio-cultural examination, which transcends a superfluous mimesis of everyday life, which I shall call an epiphanic écriture. By this, Joyce and his surrogate could not only "destruct", as Kevin Dettmar claims, "every [other] voice, [and] every point of origin" that would stand as political artifacts but create a space, perhaps by way of distortion, in which he could rid the nation of constructed identities

and only then have a fresh look at postcoloniality, especially its Irish variety (1996, p. 127). The result is neither a variety of hyper-reality nor a figment of one's imagination;[3] rather, it emerges as an intimate recreation of objective reality.

Stephen's artistic command of language as a catalyst in his rite of passage, namely, from his time as a mentee in *A Portrait* to becoming a mentor in *Ulysses*, grants him the right to examine, criticise and at once reconstitute his national and personal definition of history as an evident reality in the wake of revolution and independence. To polish his lingual criticism, he inserts another element into his reading of history: Latin, a language that is foreign and at once local, at least religiously. While the question as to why he didn't fully appropriate Gaelic as his lingual alternative remains a mystery, Latin provides a personal and national intimacy for the Irish to communicate their most inner personal states vis-à-vis "lost causes":

> We were always loyal to the lost causes, the professor said. Success for us is the
> death of the intellect and of imagination. We were never loyal to the successful.
> We serve them. I teach the blatant Latin language. I speak the tongue of a race
> the acme of whose mentality is the maxim: time is money. Material domination.
> Dominus! Lord! […] Lord Jesus! Lord Salisbury. A sofa in a westend club.
> (Joyce 1922, p. 298)

What makes Stephen's criticism novel, however, is his inclusion of memory as yet another alternative reservoir of reality, being deeply rooted in one's perception of not only time but events that are bound by the element of time such as the Irish wars of independence. Stephen's epiphanic and hence temporal consciousness resonates with what in *Time and Free Will* (2001) Henri Bergson calls the temporal consciousness, namely, an understanding of the state of things in the backdrop of time, in which time can be viewed and reviewed within a cyclical time-space continuum. Where Bergson introduces time as a mobile, instantly dynamic and fleeting concept, Stephen's epiphanic consciousness introduces memory as an inseparable dimension of perceiving reality wherein one may view and re-view time endlessly and reject the claim which regards the past as a disposable signifier which represents a limited number of concepts within a specific context. For Stephen, I argue, the past as in the form of a memory of an event is not a paralysed phenomenon, a "lifeless thought" as Ricci claims, "which has taken up residence in an attic where old things are stored" (2002, p. 15). Rather, memory is a lingual resource that allows the nation to revisit their past and reconsider their present understanding of what and how things are: "the past is consumed in the present, and the present live only because it gives birth to the future" (Joyce 1916, p. 286).

Joyce's Bergsonian grasp of time in *A Portrait* not only continues until the latter part of his first narrative but matures in *Ulysses* where time is presented as an element which can be measured in light of how events, materials, and especially individuals as both material agents and agents in events are changed and transformed; in Leopold Bloom's words then, "Wonder is there any magnetic influence between the person because that was about the time. Yes, I suppose, at once. Back of everything magnetism. Earth for instance pulling this and being pulled. That causes movement. And time? Well that's the time movement takes" (Joyce 1922, p. 849). For Joyce and his surrogates, the reality of being, I suggest, can be regarded as a confluence of events and materials known as 'movement' conditioned by a cyclical presentation of time whereby individuals may experience temporal transformation in the physical reality, and then re-experience the same phenomena yet only internally as in a mental variety of reality. Where *A Portrait* revisits "once upon a time" by seeking a particular "good time", presenting it as possible time when Stephen's supra-temporal consciousness was

in the forming, *Ulysses* presents time as a memory of Stephen's and Leopold's personal transformation and movement (Joyce 1916, p. 1).

In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994) Jean Baudrillard spearheads a subtle look back at the definitional categories of the real, the symbolic and the unreal by discussing Jorge Luis Borges's one-paragraph short story "On Exactitute in Science" (1961). Borges's allegorical description of the map, namely, the simulacrum and the territorial land, and the way the former as an abstract construct covers and eventually precedes, if not replaces, the latter led Baudrillard to maintain that the land as the original concept no longer includes any sense of superiority of realness over the map; nor does it bear any resemblance to that which we came to know as the real land, namely, the physical kingdom of an empire. The land, in this respect, is not a real, alive concept which actuates existence and can be distinguished from an abstract unreality of the map. Rather, through time the land has become the unreal, the unknown, namely, a *desert* that has lost its significance over the reality of the map.

While Anderson and Inglis anchor national identity and nationhood to the land, I contend that such a perception of nationhood and identity engages with nothing but a precession of simulacra and at once simulation in a democratic trend.[4] While Joyce's *A Portrait* reads as his first attempt at highlighting the start of the process of simulation in a post-colonial Ireland, *Ulysses* (1922) and especially *Finnegans Wake* (1939) provide an inside look at a State-sponsored labyrinth of lost signifiers and misread signified in a post-independence Ireland. The land, as a significant marker in Irishness and modern Irish identity appears as nothing but a path or even a Bergsonian event in *Ulysses* that includes untold stories for Stephen, Celtic myths forgotten in the abyss of *time*, and unraveled narratives of affairs for Bloom and Molly. Dublin as the land loses its significance and emerges as a mere canvas or a bare material which functions only as a container for intentionally unreal references to a bygone past. Dublin, thus, emerges as a forgotten barren *desert* that appears less real and less original than Homer's mythical description of Ithaca, while Odysseus's tales bear a level of reality and can compete with Stephen's and Bloom's narrative of formation in *Ulysses*.

For Baudrillard, lack of distinctive features between simulacra and reality results in a number of anomalies the most notable of which is the emergence of a language which systematically sympathises with the coloniser. This variety of language either heralds the return of the real, namely, an ethos of anti-colonial dissidence mixed with Gaelic as the national language, which is now known by the Irish as an uncanny that had ceased to exist; or itself has been appropriated by the simulacra, and hence used as a means of further dominance and control. My contention is that Stephen once more unbalances such normalised binaries and desired structures by presenting a third form, albeit inscriptive and critical: a dialectical variety of language that sieves through the nation's memories in search of personal, historical and national artifacts. Stephen's epiphanic écriture, functions as a mouthpiece that discusses the possibilities of the return of the repressed real, namely, a long coveted return to the Celtic history of bravery, unity and Yeatsian Heroism. However, the language also warns the nation against an Irish desert of postcoloniality by engaging with their subjective, personal consciousness rather than their national conscience, the latter appears to be severely affected by a zeitgeist of paralysis and indifference as especially seen in *Dubliners* (1914).[5]

Joyce portrays such a subliminal epiphanic interaction with the nation's subjective consciousness in *A Portrait*. In the "pull out his eyes" moment, Joyce depicts two adults, representing the tree system, who try to invite a recalcitrant Stephen, representing a younger Ireland, to submit to their will by installing a sense of

guilt in him (1916, p. 8). Not only does the tactic fail to activate and instill guilt in Stephen, but it unconsciously triggers an innate sense of resistance, making him turn inward and defy their coercive pretentious theatricality. This very sense of resistance continues the tale of a modern consciousness in the formation which Joyce had already begun in the first lines of *A Portrait*. In other words, one can say that Stephen comes to being in a time of coercion and enforced compliance. Stephen as the subject of coercion and subordination, I argue, transforms into a subject of resistannce and autonomy. From being an anonymous audience, remembering and revisiting his father's moocow bedtime story, Stephen's epiphanic consciousness, albeit still embryonic and immature, transforms him into an idiosyncratic 'I', being rooted in his first memory of his childhood. Stephen's epiphanic relevance, I argue, can be read as an internalised rhizomatic response, albeit unconscious to him at this stage, to the arborescent rules that governed such an invitation: an autonomous, egoistic call that would resist a monolithic invitation of submission.

As Sharon Kim confirms in *Literary Epiphany* (2012), Joyce discusses the presence of yet another contradiction at the heart of a Post-independence, Postcolonial Irish society: forming any personal vision is punishable by a Deleuzian paternal law, placing the individual at the end of the triangle of daddy-mommy-me.[6] In the first epiphany, the eagles will take out the eyes of the bad child should he fail to apologise, the threat associates eyes as something quite personal with guilt, the latter being an even more personal concept that is rooted in the individual's inner perception of right and wrong. As Stephen resists the adults' cartoonish urge to submit and apologise, he reaches a threshold of autonomy and critical understanding that is early for his age yet at once necessary for the formation and continuity of his famous Dedalus – eque epiphanic consciousness. The eyes, in this respect, transcend the basic duality of *submission and belonging* or *resistance and exile*, here an Apollonian punishment. The eye, a Joycean pun, form the very infrastructure of individualism and individualistic understanding of the outer reality, a prime function of the eyes that introduce the world. As the novel unravels, Stephen heavily relies on his vision to understand not only the basics of individual identity but art and aesthetic reasoning. First, Kim argues, Stephen understands that the punishing eagles are "fair envoys from the courts of life" and yet a moment later, in another epiphanic moment when confronted with the girl who made fun of his name, he realises that his name Dedalus contains a hidden notion of flying, art and punishment as well (2012, p. 37). Throughout his narrative, Stephen toys with such dichotomies and contradictions in the form of images such as birds and wings, prison and the altar, which tend to hide, if not replace, the original outer reality.

Stephen Dedalus, in this respect, emerges as the zenith of Joycean, postmodern yet at once postcolonial, if not anti-colonial, characterisation, who not only attacks the foundation of the State as in the trio of the Church, the nation and family but questions a postcolonial Simulacra imposed by a parochial State. Joyce leads such an attack by highlighting Stephen's lack of confidence and trust in the chapel of the college, where they received the controversial sermon on yet another Simulacra, namely, the fall of Adam and Eve, and Satan's infamous *non serviam*. Excited by a romanticised sublimation of the sermon, Stephen approaches the priest for a confession, yet what stops him is neither the bulk of his sins nor a lack of self-confidence. Rather, it is the birth of a new reality being wedded to an internal desire that not only stops him from confessing his puerile sins but also provides him with a leeway to reflect on the veracity of the image misused by the Church: the fall.

> Father, I …
> The thought slid like a cold shining rapier into his tender flesh: *confession*. But
> not there in the chapel of the college. He would confess all, every sin of deed and
> thought, sincerely; but not there […]. Far away from there in some dark place he
> would murmur his own shame; and he besought God humbly not to be offended
> with him if he did not dare to confess in the college chapel and in utter abjection
> of spirit he craved forgiveness mutely of the boyish hearts about him.
> (Joyce 1916, p. 144)

For recalcitrant characters like Stephen, confession and such Foucauldian self-cancelling deeds appear as barren realities that rid the individual of their inner 'I', namely, the most independent feature that shapes one's identity.

> A flame began to flutter again on Stephen's cheek as he heard in this proud
> address an echo of his own proud musings […] How often had he seen himself as
> a priest wielding calmly and humbly the awful power of which angels and saints
> stood in reverence! His soul had loved to muse in secret on this desire.
> (Joyce 1916, p. 180)

For Joyce and his fictional surrogate, the many faces of reality can be appreciated and dissected only internally and within the boundaries of one's self-centered, dialectical perception, presented either comically or sardonically. This is when the individual can compare the State's definition of reality with the nation's memories of socio-political plights and marginalisation. In other words, for critics such as Joyce, reality is a mere reflection of their individual conscious memories, collected and curated through years of civil and national wars, and internal colonisation after the rise of the State: "side by side with his memory of the deeds of prowess of his uncle Mat Davin, the athlete, the young peasant worshipped the sorrowful legend of Ireland" (Joyce 1916, p. 205).

In his discussion of Irish history as a selectively forgetful national Irish memory, James Smith claims that the modern Irish novel bears a level of reality that the State has emphatically labeled as pure fiction and thus negligible.[7] However, I suggest that these stark illustrations of Irish society and Irishness in the modern Irish novel seek one objective: to defy the State's politics of confinement by highlighting the unforgettables.[8] As Paul Ricoeur notes, "fiction gives eyes to the horrified narrator. Eyes to see and to weep" (1996, p. 180). The modern Irish novel, in this regard, emerges as a radical form that challenges the historical memory of the State and those official narratives that were formed to control the nation and the Irish identity, and at the same time transforms into a form that reveals what the State deemed to be forgotten.

The confluence of Irish radicalism and modern Irishness forms a resistant dialogism that targets the nostalgic, retrograde discourse used by the national narrative.[9] The voice then appears in the form of an Irishness in crisis, which at once defies the State and the concomitant sense of nationalism as its *cheap* product;[10] it then dislikes British ideals, admonishes the apparent limits of nationalism, and yet seeks affinity with the radical men of 1916.

Such a critically dialectical and at once personalised perception of reality can also be read in light of Gilles Deleuze's definition of reality and virtuality. In *Dialogues II* (1987), discussing "The Actual and the Virtual", Deleuze engages with the concept of multiplicity as a self-contained, introverted nucleus which functions as the essential base for every event and formation. In other words, Deleuze's multiplicity can be seen as a hermaphroditic manifestation of Baudrillard's Simulacra and Simulation wherein the copied and the process of reality-making converge over one shared concept. In this respect, physical reality for critics like Deleuze is reduced to a

variety of reality that is sensible in terms of tangible, factual incidents which shape at least the façade of reality. At the heart of the concept of multiplicity, Deleuze argues, sits the binary of virtuality and actuality, namely, a duality that decides on the fate of events and formations. However, for Deleuze and his specificity of multiplicity, "purely actual objects do not exist. Every actual surrounds itself with a cloud of virtual images. This cloud is composed of a series of more or less extensive coexisting circuits, along which the virtual images are distributed" (1987, p. 148).

By this definition, a Deleuzian reality is nothing but a series of mental data that interconnects with a physical phenomenon, a conceptual image, or a memory of an event. In this light, one can read the virtual as memories linked closely with the physical phenomenon. However, what distances virtuality from actuality in Deleuzian definition is threefold: the virtual is a *memory* that is quite lucid yet at once forgettable; the virtual emerges as an impeccable mental copy of the physical phenomenon that at times replaces the actual; and finally the instantaneous replaceability of data regarding a virtual nucleus in the individual's mind.

> These virtuals vary in kind as well as in their degree of proximity from the actual particles by which they are both emitted and absorbed. They are called virtual in so for as their emission and absorption, creation and destruction, occur in a period of time shorter than the shortest continuous period imaginable; it is this very brevity that [in spite of their accurate point of reference to the actual / physical world] keeps them subject to a principle of uncertainty or indetermination […] These are memories of different sorts, but they are still called virtual images in that their speed or brevity subjects them too to a principle of the unconsciousness. (Deleuze 1987, pp. 148-49)

According to Deleuze, memory functions as an indefinite reservoir of virtuals which surround and simultaneously define the actual, namely, the real. Combined with a ceaseless stream of data vis-à-vis an *actual event* as well as the individual's conscious analysis of the real, memory emerges as the very catalyst that enables a nation to challenge, question or defy a politicised variety of their historical reality. In this light, for Deleuze virtuality stands as a more real ground than reality due to the very assumption that the former incorporates the individual's faculty as well as their analytical prowess in having a multidimensional examination of a static physical reality.

Virginia Woolf entertains the same connection between mental reality and actual reality. For Woolf, the inextricable interconnectedness between memory as the reservoir of the virtual reality and one's mental analytical faculties provides a more lucid reality compared to a static, physical reality. In "Modern Fiction" (1925), discussing her methodology in collecting and combining data for describing fictional realities, Woolf expresses her complex understanding of the superiority of virtual or mental reality over physical reality as follows:

> Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad
> [of] impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel.
> From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, […]
> they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday.   (p.175)

Not only is the Woolfian definition of mental reality relevant to the current discussion of the postcolonial duality of a politicised reality and a national reality, but it also confirms the existence of a divide between an individual and a national perception of reality. The former leads to the formation of a State-sponsored national literature while the latter, as Italo Calvino suggests, causes the emergence of "the novel as an encyclopedia" that resonates with a Deleuzian concept of multiplicity and individual

mental reality (1993, p. 105). It is the multi-layered nature of the latter that materialises as a variation of the Deleuzian minor literature and defies a normalised definition of reality by introducing the personal as more real than national. In a Žižekian reading, the real presented by the authoritative State emerges as nothing but a barren *desert* covered by glamorous simulacra, namely, grand commemorations and centenaries, while personal reality emerges as an accurate account of national hardships.

The conflict between a State-sponsored, normalised reality and the nation's socio-politically conscious memory of the plights that plagued the Irish in the wake of the rise of a postcolonial State makes the crux of the modern Irish novel. It is the latter reality, namely, the people's memories of physical events that shape a resistant body of knowledge or a "network of connections between the events, the people, and the things of the world" (Calvino 1992, p. 105). Such a resistant and at once prismatic vision of reality in the form of a network of memories can be found in a plethora of modern Irish novels, especially those of Samuel Beckett, Flann O'Brien and even contemporaries such as Colm Tóibín and Patrick McCabe.[11] In what follows, however, we will focus on the red thin line between the vagaries, if not the dualities, of reality in a personal and national sense in Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* (1974).

A PRISMATIC LOOK AT REALITY IN *THE THIRD POLICEMAN*

On February 14th 1940 Flann O'Brien wrote to William Saroyan, explaining not only his new novel, *The Third Policeman*, but what made it "pretty new" with great excitement:

> I've just finished another book. The only thing good about it is the plot and I've been wondering whether I could make a crazy … play out of it. When you get to the end of this book you realise that my hero or main character (he's a heel and a killer) has been dead throughout the book. […] I think the idea of a man being dead all the time is pretty new. When you are writing about the world of the dead – and the damned – where none of the rules and laws (not even the law of gravity) holds good.
>
> (Southern Illinois University File No. p. 187)

However, the element that made *The Third Policeman* genuinely different was neither its plot nor its portrayal of 'a man being dead all the time'. Whether O'Brien hadn't heard about Máirtín ÓCadhan's *An Broan Brogach* (1948) or his masterpiece *Cré na Cille* (1949) [translated as *The Dirty Dust* by Alan Titley in 2015 and *The Graveyard Dust* by Liam Mac Con Iomaire and Tim Robinson in 2016] or had been too busy crafting his own pièce de résistance remains a mystery, especially that *The Third Policeman* wasn't officially published until 1967. The novelty of *The Third Policeman* lies in a conscious awakening that captures the narrator, albeit 'repetitive and interminable', and transmogrifies his perception of the real. In other words, for the narrator the concept of the real changes from that which he had already experienced to what can be 're-experienced' by unlearning any previously offered sense of reality; or in the narrator's words by way of "fresh-forgetting of the unremembered" (O'Brien 1974, p. 173). This prismatic, textual manifestation of reality, albeit removed in later revisions from the novel, appears when the dead voice discusses how 'Joe' also known as John Divney has spearheaded a new beginning for not only him but the bewildered reader to re-examine an uncanny dimension of reality:

> Joe had been explaining things in the meantime. He said it was again the
> beginning of the unfinished, the re-discovery of the familiar, the re-experience of
> the already suffered, the fresh-forgetting of the unremembered. Hell goes round
> and round. In shape it is circular and by nature it is interminable, repetitive.
>
> (O'Brien 1974, p.173)

The real for O'Brien's narrator excitingly resembles that of Máirtín ÓCadhan as for both reality is inseparably tied with a microcosmic vision of the outside world. In a lecture delivered to Cumann Merriam in 1970, a year before he passed away, ÓCadhan explains a personal definition of reality, its relation to literature, and how the confluence these would result in a cosmogonic literature:

> The most important thing now in literature is to reveal the mind, that part of a
> person on which the camera cannot be directed. Speech is much more capable of
> this than observations about his cloth his complexion…. It is not what covers a
> person's skin that is important, or even the skin, but that which he is walking
> about with inside his head. We know more about the stars in the firmament than
> about what's going on under that small skull beside you.
>
> (2016, p. 50)

EPISODIC MEMORY, EPISODIC REALITY

It is by mental examination of the physical parameters that one can understand and then compare their own version of reality with what actually has been materialised. Where Beckett understands "the greatest triumph of human thought" to be "the calculation of Neptune from the observed vagaries of the orbit of Uranus" in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932, p. 221), and indirectly distinguishes between individual reality and anything else, O'Brien's narrator in *The Third Policeman* ushers a new path to roam and 'reveal the mind'. For O'Brien's narrator reality can been understood only internally vis-à-vis through one's mind. Therefore, the means to reveal the mind, I argue, for him is twofold: an episodic memory and only then understanding time in a non-linear, rather 'circular' fashion. The latter resonates with Stephen Dedalus's epiphanic consciousness and thus can be read in light of Bergson's 'temporal consciousness.' In this respect, time appears to the narrator as an acceptably circular, "repetitive, and very nearly unbearable" loop which he can review and re-experience (O'Brien 1974, p. 173).

However, it is the former, namely, understanding O'Brien's fantastic narrative in light of an episodic consciousness that not only pushes the modern literature, especially its Irish variation beyond a Proustian legacy of temporal consciousness and involuntary memory but works in tandem with the narrator's Bergsonian grasp of time as a circular element. The result, I argue, is an unprecedented personalised command of reality which is neither solipsistic nor contra-materialistic. Rather, it is essentially mental and naturally dynamic in illustrating the harsh unjustness of the outside reality, especially in allowing the narrator to not just re-live but question the validity of his past and present actions. "I did not go home direct from school. I spend some months in other places broadening my mind […]. In one of the places where I was broadening my mind I met one night with a bad accident", reveals the narrator, re-visiting his past in an episodic, fragmented attempt (O'Brien 1974, p. 9).

The next episode reveals a belated consciousness that had eventually appeared to him: "I broke my left leg (or, if you like, it was broken for me) in six places" (O'Brien 1974, p. 9). Not only is the narrator unsure as to how he has broken his leg while 'broadening his mind' or was it broken for him, but he leaves the last stage of his understanding to the last statement: "when I was well enough again to go my way I had one leg made of wood, the left one" (O'Brien 1974, p. 9). The narrator's attempts at

recreating and revisiting a past that is vague at best is not just limited to retrieving sensibly accurate references from his memory; rather, he merges such representational episodes with other fragmented memories insofar as they allow him to complete a significant puzzle: "I had long-since got to know how I was situated in the world" (ibid). In other words, the narrator struggles to recreate knowledge by reexamining past memories rather than re-fabricating and retelling old fantasies. In this respect, reality for O'Brien's narrator, which I shall call episodic reality, is as virtual, personal and mental as Stephen's epiphanic consciousness, and as resistant to any prescriptiveness of the physical reality as Deleuze's rhizomatic virtuality.

In "Précis of Elements of Episodic Memory" (1984), Endel Tulving introduces the concept of episodic memory as a significant module of declarative memory. For Tulving declarative memory draws a thin line between knowing, namely, semantic memory, and remembering. Where knowing consists of acquiring knowledge and applying it to a more physical reality, remembering, Tulving argues, is structured around previously experienced knowledge and only reviewing it psychologically. The latter crafts a mental reality that shares its founding attributes such as having an expandable and modular reality based on memory with a Deleuzian specificity of virtuality. In Tulving's system, remembering is seen as a process of retrieval and decoding, leaving the concept of re-discovering the past to either semantic memory or other fields of science. The narrator's recollection of losing his leg and suddenly having a wood leg, I argue, is beyond Tulving's basic yet fundamental specificity of memory functions. While the narrator apparently struggles to remember the 'bad accident', his recollection of how he came to possess a copy of de Sylby's *Golden Hours* "with two last pages missing" is astonishingly lucid as he could "remember it more readily than [he did his] birthday" (O'Brien 1974, p. 8). The narrator is revealed to remember 'accidents' and turning points in his life in a certain order as though decoding a certain bundle of data retained for "later" use: "All this and a lot more I understood clearly later" (ibid).

The novel reveals the other harsh episodic reality within the first pages of the narrative: the narrator's internal struggle with the loss of his family, beginning with his mother, which appears to him in the form of an indefinite senselessness, if not coma:

> "Then a certain year came […] and when the year was gone my father and mother were gone also. I was young and foolish and did not know properly why these people had all left me […] My mother was the first to go and I can remember a fat man [...] telling my father that there was no doubt where she was, that he could be as sure of that as he could of anything else in this vale of tears".
> (O'Brien 1974, p. 8)

While these losses obviously come from an external, physical reality they are archived, reviewed, re-examined only internally, creating a hellish personal virtuality that is more devastating than the stimulus itself. To escape this 'circular' hell, the narrator indulges in narrativizing his traumatic present in a fashion that follows that of Ó Cadhan's *Cré na Cille* and is repeated by other literary giants such as Beckett in *Malone Dies* (1953): re-examining their past by creating a "fresh-forgetting of the unremembered", namely, crafting a new internal microcosm based on an already experienced macrocosm (O'Brien 1974, p. 173). What O'Brien's narrator shares with Ó Cadhan's dead voices and Beckett's almost dying Malone is a convoluted number of stories presented in spoken language, which as Maebh Long accurately identifies "fails to anchor or aid memory" (2014, p. 196).

The novelty of *The Third Policeman*, however, unlike Beckett's and Ó Cadhan's narratives lies in its unforgiving effort to introduce its episodic reality as

factual as possible, verging on the basics of semantic memory. "The server shock", assuredly claims O'Brien's dead narrator, "which I encountered soon after re-entry to the barrack with the Sergeant set me thinking afterwards of the immense consolations which philosophy and religion can offer in adversity" (1974, p. 80). The argument sounds quite personal yet at once rather persuasive and promising, that while philosophy offers mental solidity and strength, religion soothes the wounds, for "they seem to lighten dark places and give strength to bear the unaccustomed load" (O'Brien 1974, p. 80). The narrator unlike any far or immediate predecessor further expands his argument and "terms" such qualities as "therapeutic", applying his understanding of the use of philosophy and religion to a poignant external reality (Ibid). It is this very moment that differentiates between O'Brien's episodic reality in *The Third Policeman* and for instance, Ó Cadhan's fragmented, colloquial recollection of past lives in the form of monologues and soliloquies in *Cré na Cille*, or Malone's various macabre tales which allow him to "live beyond the grave" (Beckett 1953, p. 236). In other words, the reality O'Brien's protagonist presents is neither fictitious nor hallucinated; rather, it can be read as a place where all mental responses to external stimuli converge.

In other instances, the narrator is shown defending his mental vision of reality as being factual and beyond psychological imagery and data retrieval. To win such a bold assertion, in one instance, the narrator connects physical reality with his virtual, mental variety by comparing the 'therapeutic' effect of "liquors" on physical and "spiritual tissue" and de Selby's "heart-lift[ing]" prose:

> "Golden Hours […] have a heart-lifted effect more usually associated with spirituous liquors, reviving and quietly restoring the spiritual tissue. This benign property of his prose is not […] to be attributed to the reason noticed by the eccentric du Garbandier, who said 'the beauty of reading a page of de Selby is that it leads one inescapably to the happy conviction that one is not, of all nincompoops, the greatest".   (O'Brien 1974, p.80)

For the narrator the reality of life is as "illusory" and mental as life itself, corroborating and affirming de Selby's hypotheses that, "holding that the usual processes of living were illusory, it is natural that he did not pay much attention to life's adversaries and he does not in fact offer much suggestion as to how they should be met" (O'Brien 1974, p. 80). For the narrator and his mentor, de Selby, difficulties and hardships that pertain to external, physical reality can only be resisted and then solved should one understand the pointlessness of life and physical reality. To confirm the ineffectiveness of the physical reality and life the narrator offers his understanding in the form of a recalled memory vis-à-vis how de Selby helped a young lady overcome a mundane problem. In this oral story within story, de Selby draws the attention of the young lady "to some fifty imponderable propositions each of which raised difficulties which spanned many eternities", which in turn "dwarfed the conundrum of the young lady to nothingness" (O'Brien 1974, p. 82). In other words, to 'dwarf' the significance of the physical reality and at once to highlight the relevance and vastness of one's virtual, internal reality, the narrator like his mentor creates a structure, underpinned by excessive footnotes and information overexposure. This will allow him to pinpoint his progress in not only excavating memories but polishing them with seemingly factual references such as making a mockery of du Garbandier's effort to make "great play" out of a "fact" about how the "*Atlas* (Watkins)" was published, all in a cumbersome footnote (O'Brien 1974, p. 81).

This crafted 'fact out of fiction' matrix, in other words, allows the narrator to find his place in a world of fantasy and at once a more physical reality of everyday-life by "re-discover[ing] the familiar", and by enabling him to look at objects and

experiences from both internal-psychological and external-objective perspectives (O'Brien 1974, p. 173). This is very same internalisation of reality that Carl Jung discusses in *Psychological Reflections* (1973). For Jung one's understanding of reality is just as real as their "love experience", which "is the real experience of a real fact. Whether its object be of a physical, a psychic, or a metaphysical nature does not concern us. It is psychic reality, having the same dignity as the physical" (1973, pp.178-179). Such a semi-Jungian perception and the way O'Brien's narrator looks back at his unrequited love affair with the 'already suffered' experiences can be explained in light of post-Hegelian phenomenology.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A 'DEAD MAN' IN IRELAND?

In a Hegelian phenomenology of the mind, we are allowed to understand mental visions as in mental reality through the lens of consciousness. To understand the external reality is to allow this consciousness to look at itself from within and to be looked at from the without, namely, through the experiences of others. In so doing, Hegel introduced 'pure looking at' (reines zusehen). If, in the Hegelian dialectic, the consciousness looks at reality the way it has been set by a governing system such as the State or society, it will just observe conventional objects which have been territorialised not only socially and politically but linguistically. However, it is through introspection and looking at one's self from within and then externalising the observed varieties as in the form of re-visiting and re-imagining such realities that one can draw that thin line between what an object appears to be in the physical reality and what it can be when it is looked at from an internal perspective. Reality in this light resonates with what the individual might be observing yet from a personal dimension.

In the context of a post-independence Ireland, where literature and especially the novel reflects the nation's historical, social and political plights of formation under a postist regime, what emerges as the real greatly differs in terms of semantics and function from what has been experienced. The definition, in this instance, is twofold: national and personal.[12] A national definition appears as an agrarian vision, heralding a postcolonial, independent Ireland, which complicates and at once contradicts the psychology of recalcitrant characters such as Stephen Dedalus and a large number of O'Brien's fictional troupe such as the narrator in *The Third Policeman* or Finbarr and Manus in *The Hard Life* (1961) and De Selby in *The Dalkey Archive* (1964). The personal definition, however, has perhaps been best articulated by the narrator in *The Third Policeman* as, "an unusual experience to wake […] slowly, to let the brain climb lazily out of a deep sleep and shake itself and yet have no encounter with the light to guarantee that the sleep is really over" (O'Brien 1974, p. 144).

In *This Strange Institution Called Literature* (1992), Jacques Derrida introduces poetico-literary performativity as yet another dimension of the text. Under this specificity, the text describes and at once critiques itself as it unravels its various parts. *The Third Policeman* can too be read as an example of poetico-literary performativity where not only reality but the text itself is constantly being described and critiqued. Not only does not the text close in on itself in completing its descriptiveness and simultaneous self-criticism, but it depends on what Woolf regarded as "an incessant shower of innumerable atoms" in the form of memories, be their conscious or unconscious, and reflexive autogenous definitions (Woolf 1925, p. 175). Although *The Third Policeman* is structured around a certain number of experiences and memories, it invents footnotes and invests heavily on it as an unexplored space where that 'incessant shower of atoms' can take place and help the narrator to describe, criticise and only then reuse such virtuals as a collective, reliable basis for his excavation of realities.

This self-induced contextual consciousness, namely, re-exploring a cartoonish variety of their world through the lens of a 'dead man', I argue, can be seen as a subtle and unique aspect of O'Brien's novel, providing an unexplored leeway for the Irish to re-experience what informs their national tradition of receiv[ing] [their] old tradition of nationhood" and unity from "the dead generations".[13] 'What can be seen' by the nation as a postcolonial reality is only a fruitless, 'temporal' and poignant mirage, whereas the reality they internalise based on their past experiences before the rise of a postist State can't be policed by the State is 'eternal'. Markers such as the land as noted by Anderson, or the significance of social and political identities in one's recreation of reality, in this respect, not only lose their relevance but become disposable, replaceable atoms in one's shower of virtuality.

CONCLUSION

For M. Keith Booker and Seamus Deane postcolonial literatures like *The Third Policeman* appear when a decolonising "globalism" clashes with a postcolonial "localism", eventually bursting a "fake" postist bubble and revealing the naked harsh reality of what is it like to have no "personal identity", as in being dead (Deane 1997, p. 162). For these critics, especially Deane, the rise of a postist regime and postcoloniality replaced the authenticity and authority of Stephen's 'non serviam' as a sign of rebellion with either conformity or escapist, fantastic narration. The latter, especially manifests itself in the oeuvre of authors whose Joycean tenets clash with the State's politics of submission or exile, producing a body of literature that seeks resistance and at once solace in the phantasmagoric sub-reality of their stories.

Unlike other critics, I find Stephen and O'Brien's narrator as neither a static, ignorant *lost generation* nor a pessimistically empty *caricature* of the reality of formation under a postist State between the 1930s and the 1960s. Rather, they should be regarded as what I call the generation of *in-betweeners*, namely, an ambitious generation extended between the dualistic extremes of their forefathers and a static State, and their non-conformist vision, which sought liberation in building an Ireland that was neither politically territorial nor socially narrow. In *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Robert J. C. Young (1995) analyses the very zeitgeist that encapsulates the generation of *in-betweeners*. According to Young, this generation was meant to be lulled by the State's politics of hybridity: forming a nation who would feel paralysed and could no longer resist the State's demands. The paralysis, Young claims, occurs due to close and sympathetic ties with the Other, namely, between the State as a worried father, defending the motherland and the othered young revolutionaries as the children of the land. The State's vision, I content, is accurately in line with the Deleuzian desire of territorialisation whereby an even larger crowd could be controlled and normalised by way of socio-political stratification.

The ideological riots and social oppositional movements advocated by Stephen and his generation should not be discarded as a byproduct of an immature and at once ambitious psyche. Rather, it resonates with what Franz Fanon introduces in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) as the "oppositional interaction" between the extreme poles of (post) coloniality, namely, the politically conscious dissidents and the static, (neo)colonial State (p. 143). Fanon regards postcolonial stasis as a result of the rise of the neocolonial ideology rather than a postcolonial ethos. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, by analysing the individuality and personal identity of Africans and the concomitant

clash with the dominant white State, Fanon explores the consequential roots of an oppositional interaction:

> A normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world. This statement may not be immediately understandable. […] What do we see in the case of the black man? Unless we make use of that frightening postulate—which so destroys our balance— offered by Jung, the collective unconscious, we can understand absolutely nothing. A drama is enacted every day in colonised countries. How is one to explain, for example, that a Negro who has passed his baccalaureate and has gone to the Sorbonne to study to become a teacher of philosophy is already on guard before any conflictual elements have coalesced round him? René Ménil accounted for this reaction in Hegelian terms. In his view it was "the consequence of the replacement of the repressed [African] spirit in the consciousness of the slave by an authority symbol representing the Master, a symbol implanted in the subsoil of the collective group and charged with maintaining order in it as a garrison controls a conquered city.
>
> (1952, pp. 111-112)

In the case of Irish characters such as Joyce's Stephen or the narrator in *The Third Policeman*, the divide has not been caused by a biological difference in their skin color; rather, it is the color and the intensity of their definition of anti-colonial reality and their critique of a gradual rise of neocolonial simulacrum that resulted in their exile to marginalia, and the divide between realities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ENDNOTE

[1] All references to Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* (1967) in this study are based on the first Picador edition published in 1974.

[2] On Yeatsian hero see John Byars. Yeats's Introduction of the Heroic Type. *Modern Drama. Vol. 8*(4), 1966, 408-418.

[3] On the conception of hyperreal see Pouria Torkamaneh and Ali Taghizadeh. Paul Auster's The Locked Room as a Critique of the Hyperreal. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies. Vol. 22*(2), 199- 207.

[4] On democracy as simulacrum see Seyed Javad Habibi. Democracy as Simulacrum: Incredulity towards the Metanarrative of Emancipation in Ian McEwan's *Saturday. 3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies . Vol. 19*(3), 127- 140.

[5] On paralysis in Dubliners see Trevor L. Williams (1989). Resistance to Paralysis in Dubliners. *Modern Fiction Studies. Vol. 35(*3), 437-457.

[6] On the emergence of a Deleuzian politics and society in post-independence Ireland see Mansouri Shahriyar (2015). The Lie of the Land: Irish Modernism in a Nativist Ireland. *Studi Irlandesi: A Journal of Irish Studies. Vol. 5,* 183-205.

[7] See James Smith. Remembering Ireland's Architecture of Containment: 'Telling' Stories in The Butcher Boy and States of Fear. *Eire-Ireland: Journal of Irish Studies. Vol.* 5.

[8] Such as the tragic fire at St. Joseph Industrial School in Cavan on February 23rd 1943, with 35 young girls in casualties; a heartbreaking tragedy that was silenced by the State. See Tom Geraghty and Trevor Whitehead, *The Dublin Fire Brigade: a History of the Brigade, the Fires and the Emergencies*, Dublin City Council Series: Jeremy Mills Publishing. pp. 236. Retrieved 20-12-2011.

[9] In their discussions of Irish socio-historical memory, Richard Kearney and James Smith separate the novel from the novelistic narratives of national formation supported by the rightists. See James Smith (2001).

[10] According to Arthur Schopenhauer, nationalism as in the form of national pride is simply the cheapest sort of pride. See Arthur Schopenhauer *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer: The Wisdom of Life*, especially "Chapter IV: Position, or A Man's Place in Estimation of Others", Section 2: Pride. (eBooks@Adelaide: University of Adelaide, 2011). http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/schopenhauer/arthur/wisdom/chapter4.html.

[11] On the engagement with versions of reality see Tóibín's *The Heather Blazing* (1995) and McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* (1992) and *The Dead School* (1995).

[12] On the divide between a national and a personal perception of literature and reality in postindependence Ireland see Shahriyar Mansouri. A Portrait of the Rebel as an Artist: Deconstructing Postcoloniality in Francis Stuart's *Black List, Section H. Estudios Irlandeses: Journal of Irish Studies. Vol. 11,* 3-107.

[13] From the first paragraph of *Poblacht na H Eireann* (the Easter Declaration).

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