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The Problematics of Disability: Negotiating History through Self-referential Autistic Memory in Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry*

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Abstract:

In *Aesthetic Nervousness* (2007) Ato Quayson claims that the "confrontation between the 'normate' as the nondisabled and the disabled person creates a tension and causes [...] nervousness" (17). To embed the binary of "the disabled and the normate" in the context of the history of Irish wars, especially the Irish War of independence with its social delicacies and politico-cultural bifurcations, unlike Quayson's examination of physiological traits, this article explores the memory as the source that has survived intrapersonal and communal investigations of the past. Memory will be investigated as an autonomous source wherein references to past events are stored and independently reconsidered. The disabled will be examined in this article as central interlocutors who revisit and reevaluate national and political histories through a semantic, timeless memoryscape. As a multidisciplinary research, by examining Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry*, this article treats historical revisionism as reactionary readings channeled through traumatized voices. This article claims that postmodern revisionist texts are artifacts of a timeless historico-cultural memoryscape where autistic verbosity and traumatic self-referential memory reciprocate, producing a polyvalent locus that is not only textually attentive to describing details but also contextually multifaceted in crafting a history that simultaneously flirts with fact and fiction.

Keywords: Diegetic Exuberance, Disability Studies, Memoryscape, Self-Reference Effect, Self-Referential Historical Timescape

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. (Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, 2003)

1. Introduction

In his seminal work on disability studies, *Aesthetic Nervousness* (2007), Ato Quayson finds the disabled to always be accompanied

by fears, embarrassments, and anxieties as a result of physical differences that according to social totalitarianism is regarded as disability and disabling; these fears and anxieties are directly maintained by the non-disabled hegemonic body known as “the normate”, a term Rosemarie Garland-Thomson first used in *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997, 8). Such anxieties can squarely disable the individual, for instance, the fear of marginalization, castration, othering, or simply being judged. Not all disabling fears, in other words, are caused by somatic differences, as some are triggered by hidden social hegemonic tendencies, being superimposed; by the “normate”, demanding a certain form of ontology, the perception and application of which is neither general and systematic nor socio-culturally acknowledged such as traditions. It is the latter, however, that provokes what Quayson calls the “unacknowledged social assumptions” (2007, 21), imposing a state of normalcy explicated through social discourse, only internally stipulating the binary of normal and acceptable and disabled and the other. Such multifaceted reading of disability places it beyond a medical as well as a colonial structuration of the term, emerging as a discourse of historical division and political bifurcation, or in short a historico-political marginalization that, as Quayson claims, “lie[s] on the social margins of society” (2007, 5). By reading Roddy Doyle’s *A Star Called Henry* (1999), set against the backdrop of the problematics of memory specially as debated by Henry as a marginalized, disabled individual this article investigates the ways in which post-millennial narratives such as Doyle’s novel engage with the fourfold of memory, trauma, war and a non-temporal perception of history accounted by othered characters. To accommodate the problematics of traumatized memory and history, this article commits to a fusion of research horizons, and hence reads autism as an independent memory-oriented mechanism that defies its socio-medical context.

2. *Marginalization of the Disabled Individual as well as an Unreliable “Ground”*

Historically, marginalization has proven to be not only the most dominant but also the most inevitable form of fear that, flirting with a Heideggerian conception of the ground [*grund*]¹, emerges as an ontological justification and divides people into those who politically and socially matter and those who do not; it is only the former, on the account of political as well as social significance, that is provided with a voice to historicize their narrative of being and belonging. In this spirit, the normate sympathizes with a branch of elitism that reads history and politics through a dualistic binary of physiological abilities and impairment, and physical presence/absence by stipulating rules that warrant their superiority and at once rebrand any physiological prejudices at the heart of social and political interaction as inevitable paradigms of functionality. The normate, in this respect, will function as an obdurate Heideggerian ground although in his cultural context, appearing as cultural artifacts “connect[ing] the terms of their judgement” of not just history but other socio-cultural as well as political issues that fit their “account” (Heidegger 1974, 210). In other words, the normate and a concomitant mentality function as cultural components of division, being founded on social biases and contextual preconceptions that marginalize anyone who is affected not just by physiological and psychological impairment but also racial, historical differences; moreover, the division extends so that it could include the notorious political binary of absence/presence, stigmatizing those who failed to physically attend national events such as wars and risings as the disabled or simply as the other. Moreover, the normate’s presence is irrevocable and significant since on the one hand they “render” a required foundation of history, or at least a political variety of it, and on the other they define what in

¹ On Heidegger’s conception of ground see Heidegger 1974, 207-222.

Heideggerian understanding is known as the *ratio*, which means the justifying “account”; yet most importantly it also means “vindicating something, calculating it as justified and correct, and securing it by means of such calculation” (Heidegger 1974, 212). It is in the latter sense of the term “account” that the normate appear as the sole authority who can confirm historical and/or political accounts, and judge who matters and why. In non-Heideggerian terms, they emerge as catalysts who unite the historical subject and the object by crafting an account, connecting historical events (as historical objects) and how they were perceived by the people, i.e., the subjects based on a calculated and vindicated reality; hence the history presented and preserved by the normate becomes the only available form of reality. The normate, so it seems, pose as the binding element, albeit essentially hegemonic and totalitarian in nature, required for the confirmation of any national *account*, connecting social and political realities in an anthropocentric rendition of history, and hence singlehandedly becoming the “*rationem*” or “that ground for [...] reality” (207).

To bring national unity and a mirage of social equality, the normate seek a new flesh and reincarnate as the “average citizen”, namely, a “non-heroic”, even proletariat, individual who advertises normalcy as virtue, and confirms social wholeness and unity as herd efficiency (Quayson 2007, 19). To the “average citizen” social wholeness translates as inclusion, participation, and an unacknowledged social privilege; in other words, an individual must overcome his fears, anxieties, and fascinations, should he require national and historical inclusion. The pretentious advertisement of wholeness invites the individual to either hide their potential differences and disabilities or follow the hegemonic trend only superficially. The result, therefore, is a simulacrum of wholeness, for within this matrix of social unity only a mirage lies, treating polyvalence and multiplicity as signs of deviance, difference, and non-belonging. This is the point, for instance, where the youth either abandon or mask their historical, political, and personal differences and only cosmetically harmonize their perception of national history and historical events with the hegemonic normate and their historical *account* lest they be marked as the socio-politically disabled or the other. The generation that had participated in war, however, completes the other side of the polarity by supporting those who defend wars and risings; these were once young revolutionaries who embraced their differences, understanding war as a resolution or a national grand narrative. This is the very generation whose revolutionary values are either branded as radical conservatism by the othered populace or deemed as national achievement by their peers. While the former results in constant masking of individualities and values, the latter proclaims resistance and war as national treasure, immortalizing such causative differences by baptizing them in sacred taxonomies such as patriotism or nationalism. It is specially the latter state of conservatism that Declan Kiberd famously, in his Fanonian reading, regards as the recourse to “internal colonialism” (2005, 163); this is when the hegemonic normate “asks the people to fall back into the past – and to become drunk on remembrance” (Fanon 1967, 135). Regardless of such generational stratifications, it is the disabling difference that emerges as a dynamic symptom, affecting the othered individual and steering them towards rebellion, revolution, or socio-historical non-conformity. The desired effect, as this paper seeks to identify, is to see the disabled emerge as a cornerstone of differential independence or in Quayson’s words a “marker of sharp otherness”, defying the prescriptive nature of national historiography, rejecting it as all too preconceived and politically too narrow (2007, 38).

Maintained as a chronologically lenient discipline, in this respect, history is curated by the hegemonic average citizen to such an extent that it can justify and vindicate or chastise the binary of war/pacifism, or being drunk on conformity and commemoration or seeking

Tiocfaidh ár lá [our day will come]², or even *up the RA*³. Historical *accounts*, in this respect, can be read as narratives that enable the non-disabled to discipline and punish people and their historically conditioned preunderstandings of delicate concepts such as resistance and war on the one hand, and revisionism or pacifism on the other. In either case, the individual operates as a historiographer whose engagement with history and historical events either produces a rebel or a conformist normate. In such forked accounts, the pacifist is marked as the other who lacks presence due to debilitating physical or mental differences in understanding the underlying objective of war or resistance; on the other hand, a radical or a revolutionary will also be ignored and forgotten by others for jeopardizing national unity and peace as the architectonics of nationhood. In either case, lack of participation is treated as otherness, informing the corporeal margins of a disabling mechanism that commences a counterintuitive engagement with any constructed form of historical truth. The disabled as an image of the other, in this respect, flirts with a Hegelian conception of the other, namely, a transcendental being who gives shape to our reality of being; it is the projection of our image reflected in the mirror of the other that enables us to challenge the pertinence and accuracy of our ever-expanding claim to authority and autonomy.⁴ The disabled individual becomes a catalyst that processes our ontological relevance vis-à-vis historical, political or socio-cultural affairs. To David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder this catalytic function of the disabled is part of its prosthetic features, namely, to “resolve or correct – to ‘prostheticize’”, to amend a false autonomous account by way of providing a resolution that appears alien and foreign at best yet leads to a correctional pattern for other characters (2003, 53). What Mitchell and Snyder, however, have failed to notice, and forms the crux of this article, is that this prosthetic feature is not always corrective for it connects with an understanding of reality that has not been experienced or expressed publicly by the normate as the leading majority. The disability can be a constructed othered object, a concealed personality trait, a physiological difference, or even a psychological deviance that is invested less in realizing normal accounts fomented by the *average perceiver* than in perceiving a reality that reflects the flaws in such constructed and prescriptive histories.

The disabled emerge as the surreptitious other, a dynamic noumenal entity whose uncategorical revision of reality not only contradicts structured conceptions of social and cultural values but also brings balance to such monolithic accounts by introducing metonymic opposition. In short, the disabled provide a contrapuntal reading of historical reality by allowing for the silenced, marginalized variety to be heard and experienced. This othered and alien projection of reality clashes with the normate’s limits of formalistic tolerance and their structured consciousness, hence provoking fear, anxiety or a simple fear of castration for they are introduced to an ontological condition that was previously regarded as invisible, ghostly, or phantasmagoric. The reality envisioned by the disabled, in this respect, is not only that unknown noumenal layer of reality but also that which transcends the very comprehension of normalcy, becoming a non-lenient artifact that, as P.H.N. Wood and E.M. Badley understand, fails “to adapt to the demand of their environment” (1978, 149). While for Wood and Badley this lack of resilience can be read as a manifestation of physiological disability and an explicit actualization of physical limitation, I read it as a sign of resistance. Traditionally, the disabled individual was seen as a prosthetic end, namely, to correct or resolve a social abnormality or an immoral inaccuracy through his narrative, becoming a logical ground and emerging as an object of catharsis for

² On its literary use see Joyce 2004, 179.

³ As openly shouted in Irish and British courts by IRA defendants.

⁴ On Hegelian alienation of the other see Kain 2005, 39-41.

both the historical narrator and the reader. However, a postmodern variant treats the disabled as a radical entity whose presence is to resist any imposed transcendental form of balance. The first phase of resisting marginalization by the disabled, in my reading, lies in superimposing an idiosyncratic insulation on their interaction with not just various waves of hegemony, such as any authoritative account of history or grounds for political polarization but also the rules and paradigms that indirectly warrant the translation and manifestation of conformity as normalcy in its historical and political polity.

The disabled, in this respect, appear as a volatile formation, representing radically resistant individualities whose difference or ab-normalcy portrays a repressed dimension of socio-historical accounts. Moreover, to borrow from Catherine Malabou, the ontological “plasticity” of the disabled, namely, an ontological passivity that is in a close dialogical relationship with an imminent aggressiveness, rejects any image of historical accounts and cultural norms as sacred affairs, transforming them into debatable daily issues (2005, 7). In other words, the disabled individual materializes as an ontologically plastic entity solely for their ability to oscillate between being a ghostly apparition, or a “marker of sharp otherness” (Quayson 2007, 38) whose presence is avoided by the normate on the one hand, and a radically animate object on the other, who resists accounts of historical and national events that the average citizen or the hegemonic normate had confiscated and vindicated as national grounds. It is by experiencing the latter stage, I argue, that the disabled can reconsider the concept of wholeness by crafting a heterogeneous society wherein historical normalcy is reimagined as a self-referential, multifaceted practice that lacks singularity in its treatment of temporal discipline and historical awareness.

3. Disability as Prostheticization of Historical Accounts

An original understanding of disability and its prostheticizing function adjudges disability as a tool in the hands of the average citizen to remove immoralities and correct impurities; the disabled, in this respect, would be a noticeable yet at once marginalized cultural phenomenon. A radical, more recent engagement with disability, however, sheds light on its noumenal, multifaceted nature, especially in being able to appear in forms that are unacknowledged by the normalizing cultural and historical agents. Such innate radicalism can reconstruct certain modalities of perceiving historical accounts by engaging with a systematic dialectical dialogism. This is when concepts such as Linda Hutcheon’s “trans-contextualization” actualize, allowing for the socio-historical protocols maintained by the non-disabled to be materialized as textual elements that can be analyzed and revisited publicly (2000, 8). History, therefore, is no longer an unknown, transcendental thing-in-itself that lends itself to no revisionist logic. By way of proximity and materialization of past events, the epistemic essence of the disabled as a radical prostheticizing agent or an independent catalyst removes various layers that had previously prohibited any reconsideration of history. A politicized history of a nation will become an attempt at reality, moving away from a metaphysical image. Disability, thus, emerges as an uncharted threshold that moves from a theoretical trans-contextualization towards praxis by not fitting consecrated paradigms previously set by the normate. It is the traumatized, the disabled, the marginalized other, the minor, the autistic, and the mentally anxious who raises our awareness vis-à-vis a flaw in an inherently Cartesian anthropocentric engagement with history, privileging us and marginalizing the disabled others. It is the disabled, moreover, who brave the day and allow us to see through such broken dichotomies, and eventually emerge as odd individuals who had looked through historical realities from both sides without any apparent involvement in prostheticization of history, i.e., correcting or resolving anyone’s accounts. The disabled, in

this respect, becomes a third ground, namely, that which is rooted in an idiosyncratic logic and yet not manipulated by political or historical polarities.

In the context of narrating national conflicts such as wars or revolutions, an account envisioned and expressed by a politically othered, and hence disabled, is not the result of medical deficiency; rather, it is a result of social, cultural, and political reductionist readings of the binary of ability/disability, dictating the fate of the individual as a minority. A person who had not physically participated in wars used to be swiftly branded as disabled, and whose account that was based on other oral historical accounts or even memories of those events would be marked as fictitious. What is generally ignored in this context, however, is the dynamics of memory, and how the retained information will be stored and used to form composite histories of a singular event. Not all the accumulated knowledge does refer to a physical presence; rather, information can be retained and evaluated by individuals based on their interaction with the other disabled individuals as well as the non-disabled, sharing their experience of attending those events. As the event is narrated based on emotional and personal vicissitudes and the ways in which such vicissitudes are remembered, it becomes a universal site that can be revisited and relived by the disabled and the non-disabled alike. This anticipates an inclusive myth of participation and presence in its vast religious, historical and even political commemorative form. In its political context, for instance, mythologizing the dynamics of memory is manifested in *The Wasted Island* (1919), and the ways in which Eimar O'Duffy's and Bulmer Hobson's roles as recounted by O'Duffy's alter ego is grounded in history and yet has not been granted any historical authenticity. Based on O'Duffy's actual participation in the Rising, his account should be granted formal verification and demythologization; whereas it has widely been ignored as either a politico-historical amnesic myth or a personalized historical shortsightedness, and thus treated as an account founded on pure memories. In other words, O'Duffy's historicized narrative like many other memory-oriented accounts appears as an inconsistent process of mythmaking and hence as Quayson notes, "suffers from some form of amnesia", enveloping not just O'Duffy's character-narrator but also the very historical event around which the account is structured (Quayson 2007, 40).

Although O'Duffy's narrator is not affected by any form of disability or impairment, he is politically and historically traumatized as the other, being stigmatized as a legend only in his own myth, or a hero only in his self-made mock epic that will be forgotten after its emotional rupture vanishes. In this respect, O'Duffy's character-narrator as an othered individual lends himself and his resources to a classical treatment of prostheticization by focusing on corrective or resolute objectives whereby other characters can learn a lesson and at once make a dream come true, namely, to actualize the 1916 Rising. This is when the narrator and his narrative become one with an inclusive historical amnesia by producing an account that confirms the dominant, hegemonic tendencies. Such character-narrators are key agents in "memorializ[ing]" the hegemonic normate and at once "peripheralizing" their own historical ground as the socially othered, politically disabled persona even though they are the central narratorial voice of their account (*ibidem*). In this respect, the ontological presence of the character is rejected as being insignificant, allowing him to be at once a central and a peripheral entity whose recognition and remembrance of the event and its outcome serves the grand narrative of nationalistic formation and unity. With contemporary narratives, as I shall discuss in what follows, the narratorial pattern of confirmation and amnesic submission is replaced with a variety that sporadically confirms historical accounts vindicated by the State and at once places the disabled, peripheralized character-narrator on a pedestal as the epicenter of not just the process of memorialization as a historical glorification of the non-disabled but also revisiting history in the form of self-referential reminiscence.

4. *Postmemory and Post-Millennial Narrative: Disability as an Advantage*

Current trends in historical narratives, unlike classical forms, place less stress on the individual and their physical presence as well as social criteria that define and mark them as disabled or otherwise than on their account grounded in the memory of the event that serves as the epistemic structure of their narrative. This is specifically highlighted in Marianne Hirsch's exemplary study of the concept of postmemory, investigating the traditional binary of physical presence versus the confluence of oral historical accounts and cultural imaginations significant in the formation of one's memory of history and concomitant events:

My postmemories of the war were not visual; it was only much later, after leaving Romania and the censored history to which my age-mates and I were exposed there, that I saw images of what I had until then only conjured in my imagination. But neither were my postmemories unmediated. My parents' stories and behaviors, and the way that they reached me, followed a set of conventions that were no doubt shaped by stories we had read and heard, conversations we had had, by fears and fantasies associated with persecution and danger. (2012, 4)

The main objective in contemporary historiographic narratives is to instantly engage in a strategic negotiation of history, assessing it as a product of cultural, political, and most importantly cognitive multiplicity rather than a monolithic artifact. Such epistemological assessments will be achieved by reconsidering platforms that shape one's perception as well as maintenance of history and historical events in a memory-oriented archival depository, or in Maria Beville's words, creating a "dialectic between the subjectivity of memory and the impassive but disputed past" (2018, 23). As Hirsch notes, hearing stories of participation, displacement, relocation, marginalization, and departures will not only traumatize the population, especially the first few generations, but also operate as an agent of disability by stirring severe emotional reactions in individuals, resulting in further political and ideological bifurcation (2018, 242). While the first-generation recounts history as a composite construct of personal experiences and accumulated empirical knowledge, it is the second and later generations that fall under the specific rubric of Hirsch's postmemory community, maintaining an asynchronous connection with a timescape that is distant and at once empirically unknown. The generation of postmemory, in this respect, is in constant struggle with a hegemonic tendency that deals with history through a politically motivated self-referential mythmaking necessary for its survival on the one hand, and a composite memory of events founded on diverse platforms on the other. The postmemory generation, similar to O'Duffy's character-narrator, is torn between memorialization and peripheralization, eventually operating as a politically othered, socially disabled persona whose account will be verified should it only authenticate and hence memorialize the normate's historicized account of, for instance, the inevitability of war without highlighting resistance or political divisions. Under such circumstances the produced accounts are grounded in only what was earlier seen as amnesic mythmaking; and characters are central only by centralizing a confirmed reality, and at once peripheral in alternative facets of an already existing historical reality.

This is the same self-referential historical amnesia that contradicts Beville's reading of memory as mere "subjectivity" and emerges as a self-sufficient agency that envelops Roddy Doyle's Henry Smart as a character-narrator, who relives and revisits history in his severely critical, albeit parodic, capacity; they are the disabled (autistic or contextually traumatized) characters who are central to memorialized histories; and yet at the same time their historicity places them at the center of a critical reading of history rather than peripheralizing them as parodic caricatures. Their differences in remembering a memorialized history, therefore, does

not result in instant rejections and marginalizations; rather, as Bjornar Olsen claims in “Material Culture after Text”, their difference as a product of amnesic historical mythmaking is less seen as oppositional than “facilitating collaboration, delegation, and exchange” (2003, 88). Henry’s treatment of history, in this respect, is twofold: on the one hand he deals with history based on events and his participation in the progress of such events; and on the other by provoking a general memory of national phenomena such as the Rising in the mind of his audience, narrating how the event is being retained collectively, he then inserts his catalyst-like presence within its grand narrative and makes historical reassessment a mere possibility. His narrative poses as a self-referential reminiscence wherein an already authenticated past is brought to the critical fore, enabling the disabled and the othered to reassess their traditionally prostheticizing role, emerging as autonomous mediators who restructure and revisit history in light of their archival agency. While Beville’s cartographic object-oriented reading of Enright’s *The Gathering* (2007) places it as “memory in practice” being “devoted to things”, I argue that Doyle’s historiography is less about Brownian “Thing Theory” and the effect of objects on the subject than events as anthropocentric products that underline the autonomous role of the individual in maintaining and reassessing such events by way of reminiscence (Beville 2018, 27). However, one question remains: how can a disabled child like Henry who cannot identify with his present timescape, and who “was never a child”, introduce his traumatized memory-oriented account as a reliable context for historical and political notions such as war, independence, and national unity (Doyle 2000, 3)? Moreover, to which of Quayson’s categorical definition of disability does Henry’s traumatic memoryscape belong? As I shall explain shortly, Henry’s narrative is a temporally fragmented account, succinctly referring to radical temporal jumps such as “I grew” to signify a forgotten rite of passage, which can be scrutinized in light of Quayson’s concept of disability as normality and disability as hermeneutical impasse (Doyle 2000, 43). Henry’s self-reflexive memory-oriented account, I contend, is rooted in not just a temporally dislocated perception of his time but also a fractured cognition of being that as a disabled individual further separates him from a community that finds solace in submission, conformity, and normalization.

5. Autistic Memorialization as Centralization of the Periphery in Henry Smart’s Account

In “Experience of Trauma and PTSD Symptoms in Autistic Adults”, Freya Rumball, Francesca Happé and Nick Grey, citing American Psychiatric Association, consider autism as “a neurodevelopmental condition”, symptomatic of difference and “difficulties”, “characterized by impairments in reciprocal social interaction and social communication across multiple settings, and restricted and repetitive behaviors and interests” (2020, 2122). The condition, the researchers argue, invites “heightened rates of depression”, “elevated rates of anxiety”, and “heightened risk of post-traumatic stress disorder” (*ibidem*). Aside from its medical rootedness, ASD-inflicted depression disseminates silence, isolation, and an eventual form of othering in its cultural and social context, whereas anxiety leads to emotional ruptures and uncertainty in decision making. According to Rumball, Happé and Grey, some of the most notable symptoms of trauma caused by autism are: “re-experiencing the trauma through flashbacks, intrusive memories and nightmares, hyperarousal, negative alterations in mood and cognition” (2020, 2123).

In less technical taxonomy, Autism Spectrum Disorder, ASD, appears as lack of communicational skills in lower-functioning autism or an exaggerated verbosity specially in High-Functioning Autism, HFA, hypersensitivity to light and sound, excessive self-centrism and lack of collective empathy most notably in forming dialogues, resulting in extended monological stories. Moreover, according to Rose A. Cooper and Jon S. Simons, recent research has shown that in

autism lies a pattern of “diminished episodic recollection, in terms of the ability to retrieve and re-experience the specific details and spatial-temporal context of a previous event”, whereas a timeless semantic biographical account of such events remains intact and easily accessible by the individual (2019, 163-164). In other words, while the characters with ASD can retain and revisit history and historically significant events, his perception of history as the confluence of spatial-temporal elements is diluted and self-referential. Considering the problematics of memory as the scope of this article, I shall only examine two apertures out of four through which trauma penetrates the individual’s perception of history: first, “Learning that the traumatic event(s)”, as in “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” had “occurred to a close family member or close friend” (American Psychiatric Association 2013).

The claim that “individuals with ASD see and understand the world differently and often show intense anxiety responses to apparently harmless situations” informs Henry’s account of peripheralization and memorialization (Rumball, Happé, Gray 2020, 2123). Biogra-fiction, as a literary fissure, of not only his life as a traumatized, disabled individual but also national unrest and revolution allows Henry to deal with such personal and socio-cultural stimuli. In this respect, Henry’s biographical account of his personal life tied to political and national upheavals according to Quayson allows for a normalization of disability, or as he calls it “disability as normality”, and at once deepens his peripheral role in his personal life-narrative (2007, 51). By normalizing disability, society imposes a subtle, ignorant rejection of disability as a condition that deserves attention and care, treating the disabled as peripheries whose accounts should be normalized so much so that it could only authenticate the memorialization of the politically central, non-disabled. While Quayson’s critical consideration of autism deals with an apparent absence of communicativeness and narratorial reticence, I investigate the less examined form of HFA narration manifested in literature as pleonasm and diegetic exuberance, namely, a never-ending digressive zeal for description and narration.

Henry is implicitly presented as an individual who struggles with autism, a child whose difficulty in dealing with emotional pain such as a mourning mother and lost siblings is peripheralized by a society that suppresses such hardships and regards them as normal crises; as a result, Henry is portrayed as a reticent child who has embraced uncommunicativeness as the only available solution. Under such suppressive-normalizing conditions, Henry begins his narrative of trauma, fragmented memory by remembering a depressive account of his departed siblings and a mother who mourns for all her lost children as in “little Henry [...] Little Gracie, Lil, Victor, another little Victor. The ones I remember”, instead of appreciating the one who had survived his time, namely, Henry the narrator: “she held me but she looked up at her twinkling boy. Poor me beside her” (Doyle 2000, 1). Eventually, he reaches the climactic moment of namelessness in his narrative, signifying a presence that matters to neither his family nor his friends: “I was Henry but they never called me that. She wouldn’t; he couldn’t [...] So they called me nothing. I was the boy. The lad. Himself. He. The child” (33). His memory of presence is imbued with a consistent traumatic feeling of superfluity, a paradox of individualism and existence as his mother treats him as being unwanted and redundant and at once valued, further confirms his traumatic condition:

She poked me, as if to prove that I was there.

– You’re big, she said.

She was accusing me, weighing me, planning to take some of me back. (1-2)

The second phase of exposure to a disabling effect of trauma in Henry’s narrative is what Rumball, Happé and Gray cite as, “witnessing, in person,” as the traumatic event “occurred to

others” (2020, 2123). In the case of Henry, he is a witness to not just his loss of siblings but also his mother, Melody, being deprived of childhood, proper upbringing, and parental attention as he recounts, “what age was she when she learnt the truth, when she found out that her life would have no music? The name was a lie”, and especially as he claims that, “Like me, she was never a child” (Doyle 2000, 3). Grounded in retrospect and pure memories of such traumatic events, Henry’s account vindicates a temporally detached timescape that allows him to not only map the past but also form a perspective, albeit personal and fragmented, of his current state of affairs as a peripheral, disabled individual. Such temporally disconnected timescape, in other words, gives shape to a biographical account that lacks chronological rigor and narratorial order since Henry himself due to his disabling differences in perceiving an orderly function of time also cannot engage with a classic understanding of time-space continuum.

As an individual who struggles with ASD, I contend, Henry’s account poses as a spontaneous narrative of events and presences, registered and stored in his memory. To normalize and hence to benefit from a social sense of belonging, Henry indulges in providing an autobiographical account of his life, set up in an event-based memorialized order, known as self-referential episodic memory. In his Preface to *Elements of Episodic Memory*, Endel Tulving defines episodic memory as one that is “concerned with unique, concrete, personal experiences dated in the rememberer’s past” (1985, v). This is the biographical account manifested in Henry’s narrative. However, the floating, timeless manner in which he inserts his presence in political events resonates with Tulving’s understanding of semantic memory that “refers to a person’s abstract, timeless knowledge of the world that he shares with others” (*ibidem*). In “Exploring the Neurocognitive basis of Episodic recollection in Autism” (2019), Cooper and Simons expand Tulving’s reading of episodic memory, introducing it as a form that “refers to our ability to recall and re-experience specific episodes that have a unique spatial-temporal context and involves ‘autoeotic awareness,’ requiring self-reflection” (164). In light of Cooper’s and Simons’s reading of episodic memory and autism, Henry’s non-temporal, self-referential timescape can be seen as another subtle marker of his autistic difference, the others being his preference for isolation, lack of communication, and becoming street children with his brother Victor instead of joining a larger community of children: “But I loved the street, from the second I landed on it. The action, the noise and smells [...] I was starving for more. I was looking at misery that matched my own. [...] I was there, at home, an instant street arab” (Doyle 2000, 45).

In terms of Quayson’s categorical understanding of disability, Henry’s convoluted timescape combined with his self-referential biographical account can be seen as Disability as Hermeneutical Impasse whereby disability as in Henry’s autism emerges as a simulacrum that covers the reality of an internal perceptual deficiency in its spatio-temporal, communicative, social and sexual dimension. His biographical account, in other words, is only a cover for his shallow and often absent understanding of political events such as the Rising. The more he divulges his historically conditioned account in a self-referential, diegetic exuberant fashion, which will be discussed as a marker of HFA, the more he fails to notice the absence of an epistemic logic behind that which is enveloping his life as a normalized citizen such as revolution, civil war, and a gradual rise of local organized crime such as Ivan and his gang. What Quayson regards as a hermeneutical impasse caused by character’s intensified “capacity for interpretation” (Quayson 2007, 50) and obsessive examination of various elements, a trait that aloofly resembles obsessive-compulsive disorder, I argue is inflicted upon the character as a result of neurological conflict, which erroneously recollects one’s biographical presence in time through the semantic portion of memory instead of reconstructing it based on one’s episodic memory. This conflict of interest can be investigated in light of Sandrine Kalenzaga *et al.* examination of semantic

and hence timeless structure of memory, and its complicated relationship with processes that retain and illicit memory under certain conditions.

In “Episodic memory and Self-reference via Semantic Autobiographical memory: Insights from an fMRI study in younger and older Adults”, Sandrine Kalenzaga, Marco Sperduti, Adèle Anssens, *et al.* (2015) introduce “Self-Reference Effect (SRE)” as an enhanced memory retention mechanism that “gives rise to a mnemonic advantage since this kind of processing promotes organization and elaboration of the material to be remembered” (2). In this respect, to remember an event one can either rely on the episodic memory that functions as a platform founded on temporally curated personal experiences or refer to semantic memory as a non-temporal cornerstone. To remember war and its traumatic effects on Henry and his generation, they can either resort to their personal memories of participation or refer to their understanding vis-à-vis the history of the event based on accounts accumulated through stories narrated by others.

To practice inclusion, Henry treats his biographical account as a historically efficient, temporally reliable ground, open to revisions. In other words, the chronological order and the narratorial authority intrinsic only seemingly in an autobiography will normalize Henry’s otherwise fragmented perception of, for instance, a chaos-oriented realm of war. In his participatorial account, however, Henry treats war and his adventures of being a “street arab” equally as though he was “playing being [a] soldier”, still pursuing his objectives of freedom and carelessness in a freewheeling spirit of childhood (Doyle 2000, 102). Such an account is symptomatic of an autistic recollection of not only personal timescape but also national historical moments wherein games and war appear as mere analogous wordplays in which only “process-specific alliances” will be recognized by the individual, that according to Cooper and Simons will “give rise to altered episodic recollection in people with ASD” (2019, 174). Such neurocognitive alteration of memory, especially in grouping games and war into “process-specific” or in short event-oriented “alliance” is manifested in Henry’s recollection of war that lends itself to a hysterical portrayal of hide and seek:

The Vickers guns and snipers were [...] impossible to find. They were playing hide-and-seek with the men on the roof, using and vacating all the vantage points around. The spray of lead coming from the Anzacs on the roof of Trinity and other shifting points was constant now and nearing all the time. (Doyle 2000, 121)

Henry’s perceptual deficit is never addressed or resolved completely in his self-referenced account but rather transformed into a mature descriptive form, resisting the removal of hermeneutical impasse. The transformation takes place at both neurocognitive and linguistic front, where in the former it is manifested as a shift from episodic to semantic memory, allowing for his act of remembrance to be structured less on temporality than on events. While in the latter front, his ecstatic pleonasm in identifying-remembering events and characters are gradually replaced with a mature descriptive mechanism as his narrative unfolds. Such a shift in one’s timescape, moving away from episodic to semantic, is confirmed by Kalenzaga, Sperduti, Anssens, *et. al.* regarding Self-Referential memory Effect (SRE) as the only residue the existence of which was spared by various traumatic and non-traumatic life crises. In this regard, since “the semantic component” was the only survival, it is automatically tethered to SRE during one’s reminiscence. For Kalenzaga *et al.* “SRE via autobiographical processing” appears to be more “effective if it is based on semantic autobiographical memories” (2015, 3). Therefore, the only lingual feature that remains intact and survives Henry’s memory-oriented narratorial transformation is his exuberance in narrativizing his memories by pleading with words to help

him “writ[e] the history of [his] nation [...]”, acting like “the gods here” (186). According to Kalenzaga, Sperduti, Anssens, *et al.* Self-Referential memory Effect (SRE) that uses “nouns is typically [...] promoting autobiographical memory retrieval, while the SRE using adjectives” allows the individual to “describe their personality” (2015, 2). In Henry’s account an excessive use of nouns appears in the first part of the narrative, cementing its autobiographical ground, enabling him to freely divulge the peripheralized accounts of Granny Nash, his mother, his father with whom he shares the disabling effect of trauma, and his traumatic attachment to Ms. O’Shea as his school teacher turned love object, which according to Rumball, Happé, Gray appears as the other sign of Henry’s traumatic formation as an ASD, namely, “sexual abuse”(2020, 2127)⁵. Yet in the latter half, specifically from the middle of Chapter 5 where he understands that being “handsome and filthy and bursting out of [...] rags [...] wasn’t enough” as he was “itching for more”, and that to “better [them]selves” Victor and Henry should attend “the national school behind the big railings”, the narrative heralds not just a discursive but also a perspectival evolution in Henry’s personality and perception of history as a spatial-temporal register, especially as he sees through the foggy ocean of trauma, autism, and peripheralization and eventually crafts a personality that is temporally independent of all the traumatic departures (Doyle 2000). This internalized discursive metamorphosis in Henry’s narrative, replacing biographical account of events with a descriptive variant, flirts with Michael Riffaterre’s understanding of a hidden interdependence between diegesis and mimesis, as “It seems therefore logical to employ the term to indicate the discursive and textual actualization of narrative structures, and actualization in which the syntax is narrative and the lexicon descriptive [...] far from being a means to the narrative end, description generates the narrative” (1986, 281-282).

In this respect, Henry’s yielding to an attributive nature of description complements the biographical segment of his narrative and follows one objective: to include as many fragments of memories as possible from his memoryscape so that his account appears as an accurate representation of reality. The reality Henry braves to depict constructs a dialogue founded on a non-binary of historical inclusion and social normalization; in this respect, Henry’s semantic timescape informs a reality that is highly demanded by the hegemonic normate, and by narrativizing this reality it will warrant his social and historical inclusion. Although Henry’s fragmented account had awarded him inclusion and presence, the account is a mere act of presenting “disability as normality” (Quayson 2007, 51). This is where a peripheralized individual such as Henry is required by the hegemonic normate to hide his disabling difference so that, as Quayson claims, “it becomes almost impossible to detect signs of [...] disability from [his] writing” (*ibidem*). Nevertheless, his seemingly normalized account, which suffers from excessive digressions, extensive focus on the self and of course numerous temporal inconsistencies, should be regarded as another marker for his disability. In HFA, extensive attention is paid to one’s self, for instance, in the form of a diegesis that only reflects one’s memories of presence and participation. According to Simon Baron-Cohen, in HFA conversations are “hijacked” due to speaker’s lack of empathy, confiscating the topic and then modifying it so that it would fit their needs of self-expression:

Talking ‘at’ a person is not real communication. It is a monologue. If you talk for significantly more than 50% of the time [...] it is not a conversation. It is venting, or storytelling [...], or controlling, [...] or filling silence. There is a risk in any conversation [...] that one party will hijack the topic [where] the speaker [...] is only fulfilling his or her *own* needs, not the listeners’. (2005, 169)

⁵ On nouns as markers of (auto)biographical accounts see Wolfe 1960, 16-21.

In Henry's case, there are numerous instances of venting, storytelling or filling the silences, especially when he remembers his libidinal time at school with Ms. O'Shea, his General Post Office (GPO) war memories, and as his post-school time as a young soldier on the path of becoming "private Smart" (Doyle 2000, 128). However, even as a sign of HFA narration this changes specially in Chapter 6 and onwards when Henry not only historicizes his memoryscape but also embeds it in a personalized structure of morality, camaraderie and collective consciousness so that it would fit the criterion of inclusion and normalcy by moving away from autistic self-centrism. For instance, as he remembers his peers, like the seventeen-year-old O'Toole, his account reflects a move towards nationalistic stoicism and selflessness: "Good man, O'Toole. The fuckin' eejit. [...] he was one of the Christian Brothers' boys, here to die for Ireland, dying to please his betters [...] I was ready to die myself - I was banking on it" (89); whereas his memory of the Connolly, Pearse and Clarke reading the earlier draft of the Declaration is imbued with a detached selfless participation: "my part. My contribution. My present to Victor. Only the night before" (96). Although Henry's disabling autistic perception of historical presence and political radicalism introduces it as a mere redecoration of semantic memoryscape, selflessness as a mere oddity vis-à-vis autistic self-centrism allows for such memories to be translated as the return of a classical role in the disability studies for the disabled, namely, the prostheticization of the disabled as a catalyst for the normate. Henry in his renewed function, therefore, still appears as a socio-culturally conscious catalyst whose presence will memorialize the ruling historical and political normate such as the likes of Connolly, Pearse, Collins, and Clarke even though his self-referenced reinsertion into history will appear as a modern variety, enabling him to revisit and address historical uncertainties and political departures for generations to come.

Quayson's understanding of prostheticization treats it as a "fail[ed]" endeavor "not because of the difficulties in erasing the effects of disability in the real world, but because the aesthetic domain itself is short-circuited upon the encounter with disability" (2007, 26). Nevertheless, I argue that the failure of classical conception of prostheticization falls less on a confrontational encounter between the aesthetic domain and the disabled than on the narratorial integrity of the narrator who authoritatively reimagines his nation at the time of crisis out of pure memory and at once consciously peripheralizes his fundamental capacity in such revisions, the latter ironically becoming a norm in post-millennial historiographies. Henry's memory-oriented task in reimagining his national history confirms such a failure without inviting the normate to hold him accountable as a disabled narrator. While his account is diluted with autistic self-centrism and trauma, presenting it as only a simulated and self-referential variety of history, his amnesic presence in his narrative autonomously defies an instrumentalization of prostheticization by the hegemonic normate. In other words, his role as a disabled character-narrator both confirms his function as a catalyst and at once defies such fixed categorizations. He emerges as a hybrid stuck in a third space, oscillating between mythmaking and revisionism or as Maria Grever and Tina van der Vlies claim, "national revisionism", familiarizing "the masses" with "war by providing myths and distorted interpretations of the past" (2020, 132). Henry's semantic, and hence temporally amnesic memoryscape, on the one hand serves the larger canvas of the hegemonic political normate who find mythmaking and nationalism as covered stimuli for the progress of revisionism, by "producing national narratives" (*ibidem*); and on the other combats the normate as the history-making machine by exercising his narratorial agency and autonomy, challenging particular varieties of national history as laid out by the normate. For instance, the monumental moment when he masquerades as a mythical representative of his generation, Henry at once revisits national history and at the same time hellenizes it with his historically asynchronous non-conformist presence remembered through a vague, amnesic account:

- Connolly, Pearse and Clarke went out. [...]
- He's reading it, I whispered.
 - Reading what?
 - *The Sacred Heart Messenger*, said Paddy Swanzy.
- [...]
- Here, son. Have a read of that and tell me what you think.
- I read it, the first man after Connolly and Pearse to do so. *The Proclamation of Independence*.
- [...]
- What do you think? he asked.
 - It's the stuff, I said.
 - Is it perfect?
 - Well, I said.
 - Go on, said Connolly.
 - There should be something in there about the rights of children.
- He looked at me. He saw my pain, and the pain of millions of others. And his own.
- You're right, he said. - Where, though?
 - Here, I said. - Between that there and the bit about the alien government. That's where it would fit.
 - Good, he said. - I'll suggest that, so. (Doyle 2000, 95-97)

6. Conclusion

The confluence of mythmaking and an amnesic revisionism poses as an inseparable element in Henry's account, reintroducing disability as a ground that can reconstruct unacknowledged modalities of history and historical narratives by engaging in systematic dialectical dialogism. While Quayson regards mythmaking and amnesia as peripheralizing artifacts, conversely in Henry's case they emerge as the only uplifting poles that award him historical agency and cultural presence in his seemingly supra-individualistic examination of national history and war by forgiving his disabling differences. Moreover, although wars and risings, as Grever and van der Vlies understand, emerge "as major sources for producing national narratives" by creating a context in which the disabled and the non-disabled can practice agency and ontological relevance, it is the perception, accumulation, and retention of national phenomena in participants' memories that function as a vehicle for memorialization and recognition rather than the war itself, regardless of its disabling impacts on the masses (2020, 132). In narratives of war and rising as sources of trauma, the hegemonic normate appear as the ruling "interlocutor", establishing the conceptual paradigms, or simply put, the grounds of the account while treating the disabled as the periphery (Quayson 2007, 151). In Henry's treatment of history, however, his semantic timescape shrouded in historical awareness creates a revisionist rift that provides not just him as the main interlocutor but also other peripheralized characters with centrality and recognition and, as Walter Benjamin claims, allows them to remember history by seizing "hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (2003, 391). The seized memory, therefore, contradicts Quayson's intended aesthetics nervousness, masquerading as a historical and interlocutory variety.

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