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Archival Suspicion and Authorial Desire in *The Dalkey Archive*

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Abstract: The central aim of this article is to explore the politics of the archive and archival mnemonics in Flann O'Brien's last novel, *The Dalkey Archive* (1964). The argumentative axis moves along the relation between archival power and authorial agency, especially in terms of re/imagining alternative histories/archives. Relying on the metaphor of the book as an archive, and the author as an archivist, the article introduces a reading of the novel within the historical context of Ireland's post-independence intellectual and political climate. O'Brien's biting dark humour, which exposes the ideological fictionality of archival constructs and debunks canonical authority, is shown to introduce a critical commentary on many aspects of the relationship between authorship and power.[1]

Keywords:

Flann O'Brien,
The Dalkey Archive,
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Dalkey Arşivi'nde Arşive Dair Şüphe ve Yazarlık Arzusu

Öz: Bu makalenin amacı Flann O'Brien'ın *Dalkey Arşivi* başlıklı (1964) son romanında arşivin ve arşivsel bellek mekanizmasının politikasını mercek altına almaktır. Tartışma ekseni, özellikle alternatif tarihler/arşivler tahayyül etme bakımından arşivsel iktidar ve yazarlık pratiği arasındaki ilişki üzerinde ilerlemektedir. Kitap ile arşiv, yazar ile arşivci arasında kurulan metaforik ilişkinin esas alındığı makalede, romanın eleştirel okuması İrlanda'nın bağımsızlık sonrası entelektüel ve politik iklimini göz önüne alan bir tarihsel bağlam içinde sunulmaktadır. Genel itibariyle, Flann O'Brien'ın, arşive dair tüm inşaların ideolojik kurgusallığını ifşa eden ve kanona dair her türlü otoritenin maskesini düşüren kara mizahının, yazarlık ve iktidar arasındaki ilişkinin pek çok yönünü irdeleyen bir eleştirel evren sunduğu ortaya konulacaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

Flann O'Brien,
Dalkey Arşivi,
Yazarlık, Arşiv, Bellek,
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How and what we remember has a shaping influence on how we take action physically and verbally as social and political animals. That is one reason why authorities and agents of power have always been keen on controlling archives and mnemonic knowledge. The archivists who fashion, control, and guard the archives are the true owners of mnemonic spaces of cultural identity. As in W. B. Yeats's rhetorical question "how can we know the dancer from the dance?", the role of the archivist in forming and preserving cultural memory through archives invokes a question of a critical nature: how can we know the archive from the archivist? The question is hardly irrelevant since all archives are subject to an ideological selection of material that is to be included in or excluded from the archival space. For this very reason, textual or physical archives of all sorts are somehow 'maimed' from the start, 'infected' by the biased ideological choices or preferences of the founders and owners of the archive. It is not surprising that the original French title of Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995) – which was first presented as a lecture at the Freud Museum in London in 1994 – is *Mal d'Archive*, meaning "disease" or "evil" of the archives. Inspired by Derrida's argument on the concept of the archive, this article aims to explore how Flann O'Brien's (1911–1966) *The Dalkey Archive* (1964) opens up a critical path for the reader through the archive metaphor. Diverse representations of the archive, including literary and artistic canons, will be discussed in their potential to raise questions about the politics of storytelling and re/writing, alternative histories, counterfactual authorship, memory and identity. It will be shown that *The Dalkey Archive* is a satire on the politics of remembering in post-independence Ireland, as well as a critical commentary on the fictionality of archival constructs including canons of received narratives that function as mnemonic spaces governed by acts of authorship.

The storyline of *The Dalkey Archive* follows two main tracks, both of which revolve around the protagonist and the narrator, Mick Shaughnessy, a young civil servant with literary pretensions. The novel opens with the parodic salute to a scene in the first episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1920), in which Stephen Dedalus and Buck Mulligan go to the shore for a morning bath in the "snotgreen sea," the "great sweet mother" of the Irish (Joyce 5). Mick Shaughnessy and his friend Hackett, on their way back home from this morning swim, meet an injured man and assist him to his home. This man, De Selby, at first glance seems to Mick and Hackett "a decent sort of segotia" (O'Brien 11) but turns out to be an eccentric and arcane scientist, "a strange bird" (O'Brien 17) who can make magic whiskey which is both "ancient" and "a week old" (O'Brien 15). De Selby, as it turns out, has extraordinary discoveries, including a mysterious chemical substance that enables time travel by the annihilation of oxygen from the air and thus the suspension of the passage of time. With the use of this substance called D.M.P.,[2] he communicates with the Fathers of the Catholic Church in heaven and other biblical figures in order to confirm

[2] This abbreviation is never explained by De Selby in the novel, but it is ironically suggested that it might stand for the Dublin Metropolitan Police.

or disconfirm the accuracy of historical or biblical narratives. When De Selby reveals to Mick and Hackett his sinister plan to destroy the entire life on earth by using D.M.P., Mick sets out to find ways to stop him and save the world from an apocalyptic end.

In parallel with this task of a saviour, Mick pursues another important mission. After he learns from a customer in a pub that James Joyce has in fact not died in 1941 but has faked his own death and is living in seclusion in Ireland in a seaside town called Skerries near Dublin, he tracks Joyce down and makes him reveal astonishing facts about his literary career. Joyce's account has little concordance with the canonical Joyce's international reputation as an innovative writer. Mick hopes that his girlfriend, Mary, would write all this counterfactual information about Joyce into an "unprecedented book" (O'Brien 106) and shatter the world of literary criticism by invalidating canonical conceptions of Joyce. All these revolutionary attempts, however, are unexpectedly backfired by the author when the novel surprisingly ends with an earthbound cliché. Mick loses interest in saving the world, aborts his mission and dream of exposing the faces behind the masks of meta-narratives, and agrees to marry his girlfriend Mary when he hears about the news of her unanticipated pregnancy. We are left with the image of Mick as a prospective father with nothing much to hope for and pursue than a conservative Irish life. As Mick's missions are left unaccomplished, the novel remains to be a fragmentary archive of satiric speculations about philosophical, religious, historical, and literary issues.

Such unexpected abortion in the storyline is not untypical of O'Brien who tends to play with the idea of dead ends and subvert the classical notion of progressive vision. Notwithstanding the aborted revolution in the novel, the narrative does not fail to point at significant issues about the burden and nightmare of history, and archive for that matter, placing itself on a line of kinship with several sub-genres of today's postmodern fiction. When O'Brien stated in a letter to Tim O'Keeffe that *The Dalkey Archive* "is not meant to be a novel or anything of the kind but a study in derision, various writers with their styles, and sundry modes, attitudes and cults being the rats in the cage" (Clissmann 293), he obviously did not anticipate the evolution which the novel genre and theories on the novel would undergo in the following decades. Today, *The Dalkey Archive*, as it is, may belong to multiple sub-genres at once, including Menippean satire, revisionist fiction, post-war apocalyptic fiction, or speculative fiction. M. Keith Booker, for example, reads it as an "assault on monologism, mastery, and authoritarianism" in the form of Menippean satire (105), and as "a commentary on the way science's attempts to master life have led to the development of technology that threatens to end life altogether", suggesting that the novel also bears undertones of an apocalyptic post-war fiction "centrally informed by the reality of the threat of nuclear holocaust" (106). In its rejection of grand narratives and its mock-attempt to replace them with alternate histories, *The Dalkey Archive* may find a true home in the world canon of counterfactual fiction.

De Selby and Mick are both sceptical about given narratives and they separately carry out their own excavations in order to uncover alternate histories. Shelly Shapiro defines alternate or counterfactual history, as "an alternative to the history we know and have always thought of as untouchable" (xi); and Andy Duncan designates its most common feature as the "divergence from the historical record" (209). Representing writers of alternate history who take the "roads not taken" probably with "[t]he urge to change history," O'Brien's eccentric characters are passionate about opening portals for "examining how things *didn't* happen" (Shapiro xii, xiv; italics in the original). Rereading, reordering, and maybe reconfiguring a given archive is possible only with the emergence of an archival suspicion, which Irish writers deeply felt in post-independence Ireland. *The Dalkey Archive*, in this respect, overtly announces its main concern in its title, which functions as a signpost guiding us to the heart of the subject matter, namely the archive itself. Maebh Long, for example, describes the novel as "an archival research project" which reveals the "inconsistencies and disorder of the archive, together with the archivist's desire for knowledge, origins and order" (191), and explores the archive metaphor through a psychoanalytical reading of the novel over the subject of the death drive. What Long suggests is somehow related to the politics of authorship, which is problematized in the narratives of late modernist writers as one of the symptomatic traits of Ireland's belated modernity.

The Oxford English Dictionary gives the definition of the word "archive" as "a place in which public records or other important historic documents are kept", and as a verb, it denotes the act of placing or storing something in an archive (614). In its conventional conception, the archive is the place where history and memory are stored, and it is considered a reliable source that enables human beings to become "knowers of the past" and "rememberer[s]" (Miller 8). Although the archive is generally identified with remembering and with memory, its very existence is a constant reminder of the possibility of forgetting. As Nicholas Miller notes, "[i]n acts of memory, forgetting must be acknowledged as an instrumental aspect of remembering rather than its opposite; *gaps* make their positive contribution to the forms and images and stories through which the past 'occurs' to the present" (8; italics added). Accordingly, reading the gaps is another form of remembering, and therefore, of giving voice to the unspoken in history. Remembering, in this sense, is a political act that brings itself on par with the act of rewriting.

The archive metaphor is politically significant not only in terms of the politics of remembering but also with regard to the forces that determine what is to be stored "inside" the archive and what is to be left "outside". Derrida in *The Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* argues that

> *arkhe* . . . names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: . . . *there* where things *commence* – physical, historical, or ontological principle – but also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods *command*, *there*

> where authority, social order are exercised, *in this place* from which *order* is given. (1; italics in the original).

The etymological origin of the word "archive" is the Latin *achhivum* or *archium*, which comes from "the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded" (Derrida 2; italics in the original). And *arkhe* in Greek means to command or govern. The Greek origin of the word, therefore, points to a relationship between authority and archive. The archive, as the "place" where "history" is stored, is commanded by an authority that has the right to "interpret" the archive. As Derrida notes,

> [t]he citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house (private house, family house, or employee's house), that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. . . . They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect state the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law. (2; italics in the original)

Archive, then, is not just a repository of the past but a space where archival discourse is produced and may be shaped by political and official agendas. It is the archivist who determines what is to be included in and excluded from the archive. He/she selects archival material, classifies and catalogues them, and, in a way, shapes collective memory and determines cultural heritage by housing a selected and classified version of the past. The archive, in this sense, assumes a political power that shapes the representations of the past. As Wolfgang Ernst notes, the archivist "operates in the *arcane imperii*, the hidden realms of power" (47; italics in the original). Joan M. Schwartz follows a similar line of thought, saying that "archives and records, in their appraisal and management by archivists, always reflect power relationships" (3); because,

> [t]hrough archives, the past is controlled. Certain stories are privileged and others marginalized. And archivists are an integral part of this story-telling. . . . [A]rchivists continually reshape, reinterpret, and reinvent the archive. This represents enormous power over memory and identity, over the fundamental ways in which society seeks evidence of what its core values are and have been, where it has come from, and where it is going. (3)

The archive, in this respect, has multiple connotations associated with narrativization and textualization. It is the space where words and images of and about the past are assembled to form a unified content of a story about bygone events. Written or otherwise, every text is woven with language and discourse, which are by their very nature always political in the sense that they belong to the world of the symbolic, and, therefore, of the law of the father in Julia Kristeva's terms.

The metaphor of the book as an archive, and the author as an archivist, provides us with a perspective from which we can question the archival authority of the author whose

"commandment" is central to narrativization. In Ann Laura Stoler's[3] words, in cultural theory, the archive "may serve as a strong *metaphor* for any corpus of selective forgettings and collections – and, as importantly, for the seductions and longings that such quests for, and accumulations of, the primary, originary, and untouched entail" (94; italics in the original). O'Brien's *The Dalkey Archive* is a textual space of filed information about the past, which is far from being fixed and stable. Affirming Richard Kearney's claim in "Narrative and the Ethics of Remembrance" that "[n]arrative memory is never innocent" and that it is "an ongoing conflict of interpretations: a battlefield of competing meanings" (27), the novel introduces the notion of the "archive" as a metonymy for history, suggesting that our knowledge about historical events and characters are dynamic and susceptible to change. *The Dalkey Archive*, in this sense, raises questions about the archive and the archivist with a capital A. If "[t]here is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory," as Derrida says (4), there is no revolution without counterfactual rewriting of the archive, or without giving voice to the "unspoken" element excluded from the archivist's fabrication of history.

The Dalkey Archive is a novel populated with characters who are bursting to rewrite history for one reason or another. Yet, ironically enough, the novel which accommodates these mock-historian types of characters is itself a rewriting or refabrication of another novel by the same author – *The Third Policeman*. O'Brien plunders, plagiarizes, and even cannibalizes the draft of *The Third Policeman* and incorporates part of its plot into *The Dalkey Archive*. The novel, therefore, reads as a "pilfered pastiche of disparate thematic elements from *The Third Policeman*, recast in a new context" (Hopper 50). Although O'Brien composed *The Third Policeman*, his second novel, in 1940 and 1941, right after the publication of *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), it was rejected by publishers and never saw the light of day until it was discovered in a drawer by his wife and published posthumously.

The mad scientist De Selby, whose life and theories are given as a subtext in the footnotes of the *Third Policeman* (1967), is transferred into the main narrative of *The Dalkey Archive* as one of the main characters. His migration from the footnotes of a novel into the main text of another reminds us of the unnamed narrator's theories of novel writing in O'Brien's debut novel, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, in which he claims that "[t]he entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required, creating only when they failed to find a suitable existing puppet" (33). Another transfer is the fantastic atomic theory which is at work in the surreal hellish setting of *The Third Policeman* and which is responsible for the metamorphosis of men into bicycles and vice versa. The description of the workings of the atomic is almost identical to the passages in *The Third Policeman*. According to the working principles of this atomic theory, the exchange of molecules between men and

[3] The anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler is the scholar who theorized the "archival turn" in the 1990s as a shift in focus from "archive-as-source" to "archive-as-subject."

bicycles as the result of a long-term physical interaction leads to mutual transformation and blurs the boundaries between machine (inorganic) and human (organic). The metaphor of the hybrid form of man-bicycle also suggests that stable and essentialist identity is nothing but an oxymoron in communities that contain multiple forms and ways of existence and that such change is inevitable in the course of any kind of interaction. This suggestion is of course a ridicule and negation of state-imposed nationalist definitions of Irishness in post-independent Ireland which tried to fabricate a uniform and stable national identity for the Irish by founding its discourse on symbolic narratives of a frozen pre-colonial mythic past.

Such implicit critique of fixed and essentialist definitions of identity is juxtaposed in *The Dalkey Archive* with overtly stated suspicions and objections, especially by De Selby, towards unquestioned historical narratives. De Selby introduces his first argument on alternative histories by proposing that Lucifer was in fact the victor of the battle he fought with God:

> — I also accepted as fact the story of the awesome encounter between God and the rebel Lucifer. But I was undecided for many years as to the outcome of that encounter. I had little to corroborate the revelation that God had triumphed and banished Lucifer to hell forever. For if – I repeat *if* – the decision had gone the other way and God had been vanquished, who but Lucifer would be certain to put about the other and opposite story?
>
> — But why should he? Mick asked incredulously.
>
> — The better to snare and damn mankind, De Selby answered. (22)

De Selby has reservations also about the factual details of the Jonas episode. He insists that the "great fish" mentioned in the Biblical story is not a whale but a shark:

> The references in the Bible, in Testaments Old and New, are consistently to a 'great fish'. The whale as such is never mentioned, and in any event the whale is not a fish. Scientists hold, with ample documentation in support, that the whale was formerly a land animal, its organs now modified for sea-living. It is a mammal, suckles its youth, is warm-blooded and must come to the surface for breath, like man himself. It is most unlikely that there were any whales in the sea in the time of Jonas. (76)

Neither does he find the story of the Flood convincing: "The story of [the] Flood is just silly. We are told that it was caused by a deluge of forty nights. All this water must have existed on earth before the rain started, for more cannot come down than was taken up. Common sense tells me that this is childish nonsense" (19–20). According to Ernst, "[i]f there are pieces missing in the archive, these gaps are filled with human imagination" (49). De Selby's reading of the Bible, the canonical text of Catholicism, is subjected to a similar process of filling in the gaps or reading between the lines. In Val Nolan's words, "[t]he evidence of *The Dalkey Archive* in particular suggests that O'Brien regarded the institution of the Church as another kind of narrative, a fantasy spun – like Saint Patrick – from the fragments of historical record" (188–89). The Bible is considered a fictional text which lacks integrity and can be archaeologically excavated and rewritten. The archivist's

task is not to simply store given material according to a given order but to revise the archive; and since the archive has a mnemonic function, just like memory it is reconstructed at every and each instance of remembering. The process of textual remembering, in this sense, involves the stages of filling in the missing information or gaps by assumptions or imagination, similar to the cognitive process in the workings of the human brain.

Like De Selby, Hackett too has anarchic attempts to rewrite authorized texts. Hackett believes Judas Iscariot to be a "decent man that was taken in and made a gobshite out of" (O'Brien 65), and describes him as an "intellectual type" who "knew what he was doing" while betraying Jesus (66). Referring to the "Case of the Missing Witness," he suggests that Judas "may have had a good and honourable intention" (66). In firm belief in the idea that Judas has been misrepresented and his story has been twisted in the Bible, he aims to "rehabilitate" Judas, to "have the record amended," and to "have part of the Bible rewritten" in order to ensure that "the Bible contains the Gospel according to Saint Judas" (67). Like De Selby, who suspects historical narratives and seeks first-hand information from the dead, Hackett trusts only the word of Judas who can be the sole source of truth about his intentions in betraying his master. When Mick points at the impossibility of knowing what Judas actually thought and intended, saying that he "left no record," Hackett confronts him on the grounds that "[t]he Roman Church's Bible has a great lot of material called Apocrypha. There have been apocryphal Gospels according to Peter, Thomas, Barnabas, John, Judas Iscariot and many others" (67). In order to prove his case, he aims to "retrieve, clarify and establish the Iscariot Gospel" (67). Hackett's commitment to bring an apocryphal text to daylight is revolutionary enough to alter the Biblical canon, and the excavation of a canonical archive to unearth a concealed text is similar to De Selby's endeavour to resurrect the dead to make them speak.

De Selby and Hackett thus disaffirm the existing order of things, invalidate the factuality of official records and the reliability of the archive of history, and introduce counter-narratives. Most importantly, they consider archives "as epistemological experiments rather than as sources", and implicitly define the archive "not as sites of knowledge retrieval but of knowledge production" (Stoler 87, 90). O'Brien's engagement with archival knowledge as such shares a tendency similar to that observed in post/colonial studies, which unveil concealed histories by "rereading . . . archives and doing oral histories with people who lived those archived events to comment on colonial narratives of them" (Stoler 89). Likewise, Hackett seeks unfiltered first-hand information to be obtained from the lost record of Judas Iscariot. De Selby receives first-hand information from the "dead," communicating with them through a peculiar kind of time travel which enables him to speak directly with the past, without the intermediation of the archive. By releasing an experimental gas called "D.M.P," De Selby removes the oxygen from the atmosphere, as a result of which "a deoxygenated atmosphere cancels the apparently serial nature of time and confronts us with true time and simultaneously with all things and creatures that time has ever contained or will contain, provided we evoke

them" (O'Brien 22). He thus gains "access to what is 'classified' and 'confidential'" (Stoler 90).

De Selby's sources of first-hand information about Biblical history include John the Baptist and Saint Augustine of Hippo. His conversation with St. Augustine is a bravado performance of satire towards orthodox theology and its philosophical pillars of religious authority. In this conversation, De Selby's main concern is to determine the factuality and truthfulness of Augustine's accounts in his *Confessions*. Since he has serious reservations about Augustine's fidelity to truth in this autobiographical account, De Selby aims to hear evidential confessions from him to prove that he is indeed a liar. Besides his personal disclosures, Augustine utters astonishing confessions about the founders of the Society of Jesus, including Francis Xavier whom he accuses of spending his time "womanizing in the slums of Paris . . . in warrens full of rats, vermin, sycophants, and syphilis" and "consorting with Buddhist monkeys" (O'Brien 36). He also provides De Selby with insider information from heaven, stating that there are in fact more than two Saint Patricks, contrary to the information circulated around on earth: "We have *four* of the buggers in our place and they'd make you sick with their shamrocks and shenanigans and bullshit" (O'Brien 37; italics in the original). His counterfactual declarations are not limited to key figures of the Catholic Church. He accuses Descartes of stealing the maxim *cogito ergo sum* from his own works and claims that Descartes "have established nothing new, nor even a system of pursuing knowledge that was novel" and that he "spent far too much time in bed subject to the persistent hallucination that he was thinking" (O'Brien 40). His challenging views on Descartes align with De Selby's degrading comments on the founding fathers of science and philosophy, including Newton, Spinoza, Bergson, "poor Descartes," and Einstein who came up with "postulates of the Relativity nonsense" (O'Brien 14, 15).

After Mick and Hackett witness the conversation between De Selby and Saint Augustine, their suspicions about De Selby's madness dissolve, yet due to his ambivalent character they remain doubtful about his good intentions. As another liminal figure in the gallery of portraits in O'Brien's *oeuvre*, De Selby's ambivalence in the novel partly derives from his foreign name, which definitely does not sound Irish. Hackett utters his suspicion about the possibility that De Selby might "be a spy" because his name "sounds foreign" (O'Brien 58). Although Mick contradicts Hackett on the grounds that "the way [De Selby] talks is [a] sign he's native of [their] beloved Ireland" and that "he doesn't like Ireland" like many native Irish (58), Hackett's suspicion hangs in the air throughout the novel, without any definitive revelation about De Selby's origin.

O'Brien's debunking critique of canonical figures is not limited to those above but extends to one of his literary fathers. James Joyce, the "defrocked high-priest of modernism" (Hopper 51), is included by O'Brien into the cast of ambitious rewriters of Biblical history and reformers of the canon. This fictional Joyce, despite his piety, does not blindly embrace the Christian dogma and introduces his own speculative theory about the Holy Ghost. In order to restore truth, Joyce wants to enter the Jesuit Order, become a

priest, and devote his time and energy to his mission of repairing the canon of Christianity. Ironically, however, all he is offered by the Order is the position of a servant boy "in charge of the maintenance and repair of the Fathers' underclothes in all the Dublin residential establishments" (O'Brien 195). Anticipating Harold Bloom's view in *The Anxiety of Influence* that "strong poets keep returning from the dead" (140) and "peers in the mirror of his fallen precursor" (147), Joyce is brought back to life in *The Dalkey Archive*. O'Brien resurrects his literary father; and he drags Joyce, Ireland's prodigal son, back into the tedious and enclosed setting of Ireland, and rewrites the fate of "poor Jimmy Joyce" so as to exorcize the demons of his obsession. This mock-faced resurrection may be read as O'Brien's way of addressing his personal intellectual archive as a writer.

O'Brien re-writes the authorly destiny of Joyce (or the archive, for that matter) and creates an alternative history for the master. In the novel, James Joyce appears as a minor character, some sort of a pious hermit who has faked his death and now living in Skerries, a little seaside resort in the north of Dublin. This fictional Joyce is the complete opposite of the cult image of the real Joyce in the literary canon, reduced to a caricature of "silence, exile and cunning." O'Brien's Joyce is an intellectually impoverished oldster who works as a bartender in a small public house, and who is completely ignorant of the extraordinary international reputation surrounding his name. As we learn from his interview with the protagonist, Mick Shaughnessy, he has escaped from the havoc of the Second World War in Europe, and he is embarrassed by the attention his early writings once received. Mick is so baffled by the difference between the cult image of the real Joyce and this secluded persona that "he thinks this must be either an imposter, or a Joyce who has become deranged with the passage of time" (Clissmann 307).

Celebrated beyond his knowledge as "Dublin's incomparable archivist", this secluded Joyce complains about the labels attached to his name: "I've had things imputed to me which – ah – I've had nothing to do with" (O'Brien 125); "I am a man who is much misunderstood – I will say maligned, traduced, libelled and slandered. From what I've heard, certain ignorant men in America have made a laugh of me. . . . A fellow named Gorman wrote that 'he always wore a monocle in one eye'" (149). He attributes *Dubliners* to an unpleasant collaboration between Oliver St. John Gogarty and himself. He calls *Ulysses* a "dirty book" and "literary vomit," and denies authorship of this embarrassing "collection of smut" (174, 177). He claims that its fragmented pieces were written by "[v]arious low, dirty-minded ruffians who has been paid to put his material together" (176). This crew of ruffians, who authored this "pornography and filth and literary vomit, enough to make even a Dublin cabman blush" (177) included "muck-rakers, obscene poets, carnal pimps, sodomous pedlars of the coloured lusts of fallen humanity" (176–77). The only ambition of this wholly defeated fictional Joyce is to "translate and decontaminate great French literature so that it could be an inspiration to the Irish, besotted with Dickens, Cardinal Newman, Walter Scott and Kickham" (192–93), and to enter the priesthood and work in the service of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly the Society of Jesus, in order to reform it. As he confides to the priest towards the end of

the novel, he wants to "serve the Almighty deliberately and directly" and to "come into one of the Society's houses and . . . work there" (192). However, the only position the Jesuits can offer him is that of a "houseboy" who "should be in charge of the maintenance and repair of the Fathers' underclothes in all the Dublin residential establishments" (195). Wounded and shocked upon this offer and the rejection of his wish to become a priest in the Order, the fictional Joyce remains "unnaturally still in his chair, as if dead" (195), and then he is lost to view and the novel ends without any clue whatsoever about his fate. *The Dalkey Archive* thus portrays a tamed and demystified Joyce who is denied authorship and who is bereft of creative talents, ignorant of his reputation, embarrassed by his writings, and debased by the Church.

Caricaturing of reputable canonical figures like Joyce and Augustine raises questions about the authority of literary canon and scholarship, which shape our conceptions of writers and texts. It leads us to approach received canonical categories with suspicion, and warns us about the made-up or constructed nature of all canons determined by agents of control and power. The canon, after all, is a kind of archive in which some texts are given priority and privilege over others, and it shapes the collective literary memory to be passed on to the next generations. Edward W. Said in *Beginnings* defines the critic as "a revolutionist destroying the canon in order to replace it with his own" (8). Since common cultural values are preserved and transferred by the canon, it possesses some kind of authority and its archival status is crucial for the politics of building and maintaining tradition and national identity. The criteria used in judging the value of a present text is derived from the value system established by tradition which is stored in the archival space of the canon in the long run of history.

Mnemonic excavations of the past, and thus the archive, with the urge to *refashion* the present, are politically oriented in a specific sense, especially in postcolonial countries like Ireland. In postcolonial cultures, to rewrite the archive means a politically significant shift in the positions of the subject and object of the historical gaze. As Miller observes in *Modernism, Ireland and the Erotics of Memory*, "as a nation Ireland has been defined from the 'outside' for most of its existence" (9), and "self-fashioning" (8) requires autonomy which enables the passive object of the observing/defining gaze to become the active subject of self-definition. In this respect, rewriting of the archive as counterfactual authorship, as a necessary means of "self-fashioning," is informed with a liberating potential and promises emancipation from historically misrepresented codes of identity.

In *The Dalkey Archive*, however, this potential on the symbolic level is unexpectedly undercut at the end of the novel. The revolutionary ventures of counterfactual authorship, personified in Mick Shaughnessy, do not reach fruition and are prematurely abandoned. Promised revolution falls into silenced dissent and the novel ultimately closes as "a repository of failed writers, aborted projects and an archive distrustful of archivization" (Long 192). The novel's ending somehow reflects O'Brien's own sense of authorship. For O'Brien, authorship was not only an intellectual practice against authority *per se*, but also

an attempt to manifest, if not to annihilate, the tension and anxiety created by the ghostly presence of history and tradition as well as literary fathers or models. This haunting presence of archives of many sorts is juxtaposed with the anxiety of ambivalence created by the political and social order imposed by the Irish State, and by Ireland's problematic relation to modernity and modernization. In *The Dalkey Archive*, as in his other novels, we do not see an urge to overcome this tension and anxiety. Rather, his narrative universe becomes the embodiment of this anxiety, suggesting the vainness of order. However anarchic his narrative techniques and themes may be, O'Brien's narratives always end with a sense of dilemmatic vicious circle or disillusioned anarchy, reflecting the futility of anarchic resistance and rebellion within the strictly sealed borders of Irish intellectual life and the labyrinth of literary tradition.

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