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Trauma and the Irish Experience: The Example of M. J. Hyland's *Carry Me Down*

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The article analyses the philosophical features of M. J. Hyland's novel *Carry Me Down* (2006), spotlighting this text in the epistemological paradigm of post-postmodernism. The analysis considers some of the distinctive features of the Irish novel in the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, such as anticolonial explications and the smashed type of identity of the characters. *Carry Me Down* reveals the post-postmodern tendency of searching for the truth and explaining the nature of human beings as a combination of the humanitarian and the biophysical. The novel's protagonist has a special superpower of detecting lies in the discourses produced by other characters. His inability to accept lies physically may be linked to the post-postmodern tendency of rejecting the hybrid combination of truth and untruth, typical of some kinds of postmodernist writing. The analysis also explores the representation of trauma in Hyland's novel.
Keywords: M. J. Hyland, post-postmodernism, Irish fiction, truth.

Carry Me Down is the second novel of the Irish-British writer Maria Joan Hyland, who usually writes under the name of M. J. Hyland to avoid gender misunderstandings and intolerance in a world that the writer still considers to be sexist. She was born into an Irish family in 1968 and spent her childhood in London and Dublin, "including two years in Dublin's ill-fated Ballymun housing estate" (Gavan). In a biographical sketch accompanying one of her interviews, we further read that "Irish families can seem like incubation chambers for the emotionally diseased, and Hyland was reared in a more self-destructive world than most" (Gavan). However, the writer did not "void the past into deprivation diaries" but succeeded in "mould[ing] her experiences into eviscerating fiction" (Gavan).

Carry Me Down was published in 2006 to a great critical acclaim. It was awarded the Hawthornden Prize and shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Set in Dublin, the novel explores aspects of contemporary Irish society. From a literary-critical perspective, it is also of interest because it illustrates some of the tendencies in the transformation of postmodernism into post-postmodernism in contemporary Irish-British fiction. Such tendencies are in evidence in contemporary texts by both Irish and Northern Irish women authors. According to Caroline Magennis, the period following the Good Friday Agreement (1998) has been characterized by "a marked increase in fiction" by Northern Irish women (190). Magennis further remarks that this new fiction "extends and develops the tradition of Northern Irish women's writing which, since the inception of the state, has offered rich and varied engagement with literary form and subject matter" (190). In addition, women writers have added new themes and perspectives, such as "politics inside and outside the home" and have written "from a variety of political stances: feminist and socialist as well across traditional ethno-sectarian divides" (190).

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Hyland herself comments on the complex interweaving of political and psychological issues in her novel:

> *Carry Me Down* [was] driven by a fascination with lying, fascism, the Oedipus complex and, of course, Sophocles' perfect play. But more: the novel was written while the West was going to "war" with Iraq, and in the cargo-hold there's a theme, enacted in dramatic terms: an attack on absolutism—moral certainty; the arrogance of believing in total certainty. And I was reading Voltaire. But after all that "thinking" what remains on the surface is a story written in "one-dollar words" about a boy in love with his mother who'd do anything to keep her close and who wants his father out of the way and who uses his "gift" for lie detection to deceive and to gain his goal. (Bedell)

Carry Me Down focuses on John Egan, a teenager, who thinks he has "special powers." This is what Geraldine Bedell says about him in her review of the book:

John Egan is huge, gangling and vulnerable, a 12-year-old child-man on the cusp of adolescence, intensely physically aware but almost wilfully emotionally obtuse.

> John believes he has special powers as a lie detector and writes repeatedly to *The Guinness Book of Records* urging them to test his ability to read minds. … John is adept at noticing what his mother calls "white lies," he is often incapable of working out what prompts people to tell them, of joining the dots of their motivations. His grasp of the world is almost autistic, but it seems to be a willed autism, of a boy who can't see much point in growing up.

Significantly, John has a scientist's investigative and curious mind; he explores life and concludes that lies (perhaps "white lies") are an essential part of the reality around him. His portrayal in the novel is marked by a certain degree of novelty. Trauma is also represented in a new way in the text, and this has to do with the protagonist's ability to perceives truth and lies at the biochemical and physiological level.

Carry Me Down: Beyond Postmodernism

Irish (and British) novels of the first decade of the present century are shaped by a wide range of socio-psychological tendencies represented in their societies and related to the problems of the postcolonial situation and transculturality. In more general terms, the novel becomes more and more a meta-genre phenomenon which incorporates strategies for representing reality borrowed from scientific discourses or from the media and other sources that seek to verbally visualize reality in a way that is as close to the real as possible. In this case, it is useful to talk about the actualization of strategies related to the tradition of literature of fact, and in Hyland's work there are numerous examples of this tendency. At the same time, the contemporary Irish novel contains a complex of philosophical problems, at the core of which we have biological human nature. In addition, post-postmodernism, in a special way, seeks to explain the psychic component of human identity, and is in this respect like modernism, in which the principles of the functioning of the psyche, in particular in terms of perceptions of time, were evoked.

Predictably, post-postmodernism incorporates features of the two previous cultural-historical epochs: modernism and postmodernism. Post-postmodernist fiction implies the use of various techniques and means that are made possible by the very nature of universal post-postmodern thinking for which there is no limit to the knowledge of reality. Reality is conceived as a multiverse of possibilities, a special multilevel and multi-layered entity that cannot be made sense of with only one type of toolkit. In view of this, the post-postmodernist novel employs scientific, metaphysical, and sensory discourses. Cognition of reality seems to be reduced if human thinking is based only on scientific principles or, conversely, if this knowledge has an emotional and sensory basis only. The tools of contemporary sciences, which have made a fundamental qualitative leap in their development over the last century or so, show the multidimensional reality around human beings; therefore, limiting it to knowledge by separate methods would be wrong, as it would not promote human progress in qualitative knowledge about the world and nature. These two problems, knowledge about the world and correlations between the rational and

the emotional in a character, are the keys to post-postmodernist discourse in *Carry Me Down*, in which the protagonist, John, represents the post-postmodern way of perceiving the world which includes both scepticism and naivety and relies on the rational scientific verification of facts no less than on emotional reactions towards the actions of others. Besides, within the context of post-postmodernism, the novel appears as a form not only of the representation of problems but also as an attempt to solve them through alternative realities.

The cognition of truth is an important motif in post-postmodernist works and particularly in *Carry Me Down*. However, this knowledge is a priori doomed to failure because the text's central character does not even have the right tools to understand a phenomenon such as creativity. Speaking about the concept of death, it should be noted that in the perception of post-postmodernist characters, this phenomenon has biophysical and chemical features (see Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, and Hyland's *Carry Me Down*, among others), as well as mysterious/irrational explanations (the phenomenon of the teenage polygraph in *Carry Me Down*). An example is provided by John Egan's perspective that reveals a neo-positivist and sceptical type of worldview. Neurophysiological disorders in post-postmodernism are not seen as problems so much but rather as opportunities for the exploration of reality that can help the representatives of the (seemingly) normal and/or healthy community understand the ways in which human thinking operates, the mechanisms for the formation of social ties are forged, and the causes of conflict in society are generated.

In *Carry Me Down*, the nature of conflict is explained biologically. In his work *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour stresses that the society of the future should adopt the idea of anthropologizing things. It is a matter of fact that external reality must be transformed because meanings are imparted to each object, which is possible when the surrounding reality is anthropologized. Latour offers a conception of world perception, in which there is no barrier between humanitarian and scientific knowledge. Technologies are meaningful for him, to the extent that they allow a more intensive manifestation of human nature, otherwise they become a source of danger, in which technology continues the process of legitimizing the discourse of power. The specific mindset of the characters in *Carry Me Down* and those of Haddon's post-postmodernist novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* reveals a new way of connectedness. The human body is conceived as a system of neurons and neuro-somatic regulations; it appears to be an important factor in the general worldview of reality. Characters do not usually realize how different parts of their bodies function, but the particular features of the processes determine human behaviour, mood, etc. Neuro-somatic regulation is an important factor in social communication, since the ability of one to communicate with others essentially depends on the hormonal balance and features of their neurological nature. Latour distinguishes three phenomena that, in his opinion, are important for the twentieth century: naturalization, socialization, and deconstruction. He relates each of these discourses to the names of researchers whose views had a significant impact on the formation of the discourses mentioned above.

The specific psychological characteristics of the protagonist in Hyland's novel represent remnants of postmodern epistemological doubt that inspire a belief that a human being can identify the "inner world" of other people. By "inner world," I mean the psychological condition of the characters, their intentions, and desires. In the novel, the concept of truth is introduced and identified by John at the physiological level. John Egan is a character who has no doubts about the world around him because of his superhuman abilities, the nature of which is not explained in the novel. Moreover, the end of the story reveals that the character suffers from mental disorders; for instance, he has strong emotions and displays them violently in the form of aggression and other kinds of mental instability. Having the superpower of being a "polygraph" does not imply possession of a super-mind that is resistant to the effects of the world around him.

The following post-postmodernist tendencies take shape in Hyland's text:[1]

1) Historically, the novel was written after 2000, which means that it represents a cultural

[1] I have highlighted them in line with my previous research into post-postmodernist fiction in English that helped develop a theoretical framework of key features of post-postmodernism such as specific ways of thinking, narra-

tendency identified by certain cultural and literary theorists as post-postmodernist (see Dinnen 220 - 21).

2) Psychologically, we have a character who has no doubts about what is true.

3) The narratee conditions narrative patterns that do not give readers any clue that would enable them to verify the constructed reality at the end of the story – whether it is true or whether it is a product of the imagination.

4) The principles of connectedness between the characters define the problematic issues of the novel (constructed stereotypes, living in the reality of simulacrum, religious and faith problems, etc.); the psychological level of the novel (connectedness between John and his family, between John and his classmates, between John, his family, and neighbours, and other people in the street) becomes an important part of the text's reception.

5) In the novel, human identity is explored and portrayed as an interaction of physical and metaphysical processes in which body functions are rediscovered or re-thought. However, they are not explained to the readers and some disorders or superpowers are portrayed in a physical way but with no explanation of how this works on the biochemical or micro- and metaphysical level (religious beliefs, faith, supernatural powers).

It becomes, thus, evident that post-postmodernist texts construct a reality by drawing on actual life and outlining some key social, political, and psychological problems discussed in society. Individual emotions and social stereotypes, misunderstandings and cultural prejudices, religious confrontations and mental disorders make up the map of issues that form the post-postmodernist text's intended focus on the "objective" reality that should be re-thought and discussed.

In the novel, John Egan is a teenager who represents a new type of post-postmodern identity and its narrative articulation. He can say whether statements are true or false. His ability is represented as a superpower; however, this literary representation reveals a traditional concern in Irish fiction. A biographical fact is telling, in this respect: although Hyland was born in London in 1968, she spent her childhood in Ireland, and in the novel, John's father dreams about Dublin's Trinity College. This novel can thus be read as a text concerned with the Irish identity, Irish people, Irish Catholicism, and various other issues connected with Ireland.

The foregrounded inability to tell the truth is intricately linked to this specific cultural context and is perceived as a source of trauma in the novel. This observation necessitates a further explanation of traumatic experience and its relevance to Irish fiction. Here is what Constanza del Río Álvaro says about trauma:

> A traumatic event can be defined as a painful occurrence, but so intense that it exceeds our capacities to experience it in the usual ways. It disrupts time and history, breaks through the categories we use to take in the world, and seems to be registered in our memories in forms unlike those used to register conventional experience. This atypical memory is sometimes called traumatic memory to differentiate it from our usual narrative memory. … The reception of a traumatic event always implies a temporal dislocation since it ruptures the narrative continuity between past and present: that is, at the moment when it occurs, the traumatic event is not actually experienced by the subject. (4)

As several scholars have observed, trauma is an essential part of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Irish fiction. However, Hyland explores a new type of trauma that does not have psychological/mental symptoms only but is primarily physical in nature. As Ruth Leys explains, the horror of trauma reveals a situation when the mind

> cannot register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed. As a result, the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience in normal consciousness; instead, she is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic

tive techniques, and a philosophical background.

> memories. The experience of the trauma, fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented as past, but is perpetually re-experienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present. (2)

In the context of the novel, the "traumatic present" manifests itself in an inability to tell the truth and this inability is represented as a product of Irish history. It is shared by members of John's own family (his father and mother), their neighbours, and even strangers whom John and his father meet in the streets of Dublin. Cruelty is also portrayed as being historically conditioned. For instance, the first dramatic episode in the novel is about the father killing kittens in the bathroom. It shows that cruelty exists in people who otherwise believe in being polite and tolerant. Nevertheless, there is a destructive urge deep inside them. The destructive urge is shown to be part of the identity of forty- and fifty-year-olds who have refrained from telling the truth so often that they have lost the ability to express themselves.

The quest for truth as a post-postmodernist motif is explained in David Shields's manifesto *Reality Hunger* (2010). In the chapter "Autobiografiction" in *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*, Timothy C. Baker analyses Shields's manifesto drawing readers' attention to the fact that what is real in fiction is not as important as what can cause the experience of "authenticity" (48). Shields speaks of a new artistic tendency characterized by "deliberate unartiness" and "a blurring (to the point of invisibility) of any distinction between fiction and nonfiction" (qtd. in Baker 48). Baker further quotes James Wood's comment in a review of Sheila Heti's *How Should a Person Be?* (2012). According to Wood, "[r]ealism is perpetually hungry … because no bound manuscript can ever be 'real' enough" (48). For Baker contemporary writers constantly "renegotiate the value of the 'real'" (48) and they do so "in a variety of forms, ranging from romans á clef and fictional autobiographies to fiction presented in the form of autobiographies, diaries, and memoirs, as well as texts that problematize all categorical distinctions" (48).

Sophie Vlacos, the author of the chapter "Realisms" in *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*, discusses the concept of "Object Oriented Ontology" (101) as a new vector for a literary realistic paradigm of post-postmodernist fiction. The ontological mode of reality becomes an essence in the post-postmodernist literary paradigm in contemporary literary fiction. The ontological mode explores the connections between the characters and Anthropocene phenomena considering the concept of "inner interior" which means the deeper bonds between things and human beings. This is what Vlacos says about "contemporary realisms":

> Granted the diversity of approaches and mediums covered by this general inclination to think beyond the subject, 'contemporary realisms' seems an appropriate flexible term through which to explore their commonality and their literary repercussions. The suitability of this ambidextrous term is confirmed by the rise of a philosophically incongruous and yet historically consistent wave of literary humanism of 'New Sincerity', a mode of literary realism devoted to the material and phenomenological reality of human experience impelled by a similar fatigue with poststructuralist preoccupations. (101)

Vlacos's words put one in mind of Olga Tokarczuk's Nobel lecture. The Polish author mentions the term "parable realism" in her Stockholm speech (December 2019). Moreover, another point of reference is Rudy Rucker's "A Transrealist Manifesto" in which the American scholar also approaches the issue of "contemporary realisms." [2] On the whole, the term "contemporary realisms" can be said to play a key role in contemporary fiction.

In her chapter, Vlacos dwells on Bill Brown's text "Thing Theory" (2001) and remarks that "eighteen years since the publication of Brown's essay, discussions and events centred upon materiality and thingly agency have proliferated" (100). All this points to the presence of a specific kind of realism in post-postmodernist fiction.

Displacement is yet another popular motif in contemporary Anglophone fiction. In her contribution to *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*, Emily Hogg has drawn attention to the multiple meanings of the word and their interaction:

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2 For details, see http://www.rudyrucker.com/pdf/transrealistmanifesto.pdf.

> The term "displacement" can name an affective state, a psychological mechanism and a physical experience. The interaction between these meanings of the word produces much of its richness and perhaps explains the frequency with which it occurs in contemporary scholarship attempting to grapple with the movement of people around the globe today, and with the legacy of the migrations of the past, both of which have involved violence, coercion and exploitation as well as hope, human ingenuity and the creation of new bonds, communities and cultures. (239)

This is a highly evocative definition, which can of course be unpacked and developed further. In her chapter Hogg also remarks on the experience of displacement as a sense of "being out of place geographically" (239). Displacement problematizes the idea of home as a place of security and reliability but the condition of homelessness that may result from displacement is not simply "a negative experience to be avoided" but one that "permeate[s] human existence, and home itself is frequently a site of displaced experience" (Hogg 239). To illustrate the complex dialectic between displacement and the idea of home and shed light on other related issues, Hogg analyses several contemporary novels, starting with *Dust* (2014) by Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor and moving on to Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017), *Signs Preceding the End of the World* by Yuri Herrara (2015), and *Black Mamba Boy* by Nadifa Mohamed (2010). Through her insightful readings the critic expresses her conviction that "literature has a crucial role to play in illuminating the creative and generative potential of the experience of displacement" (239). That experience is part of the diverse stories of migration that figure in numerous Anglophone novels produced in the twenty-first century. Some of those novels can be placed under the heading of post-postmodernism.

The process of shifting cultural patterns and experiences, as well as the interaction of different, often incompatible identities, is also part of post-postmodernist fiction in English. This process is represented in Hyland's novel. Some of its characters develop the negotiation of otherness. The discourse of otherness is essential to the unfolding of questions of transculturalism in contemporary Anglophone fiction. The process of transculturation involves interchange and enrichment for all participants in the space of contacts. Connectedness is yet another important feature of post-postmodernist fiction. Post-postmodernism may be said to explore how encountering otherness provides an opportunity for both parts of the transcultural situation to share in it in a wholesome way, even if it is painful and unpleasant mentally or emotionally. For many reasons the concept of connectedness is associated with the post-postmodernist discourses, which seek to depict the deep pain and feeling of loss and disorientation that fictional characters experience and express because of the disordered world to which they belong and that a priori cannot be their home as a comfortable place of safety.

Traumatic Truth and Lies

Hyland unpacks the idea of the multifaceted nature of Irish identity which is also developed in other fictional texts. Here is a relevant commentary on the contemporary Irish novel:

> The contemporary Irish novel registers a … dialectic between remembrance and forgetting, between disclosure and silence. In the opening lines of Anne Enright's *The Gathering* (winner of the Man Booker Prize for Fiction 2007), the protagonist narrator states: 'I need to bear witness to an uncertain event'. And bear witness she does, thus joining other fictional voices in many Irish novels that have recently testified to insanity, dysfunctional families, endemic poverty, sexual abuse, incest, rape or vicious sectarian violence. (Río Álvaro 7)

In her contribution to *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*, Magennis draws attention to the point that, for example, in Jan Carson's story "Settling," intimacy is a key issue. At first glance "Settling" is nothing but a "traditional emigrant narrative of a Northern Irish couple who move to England for work" (194). However, soon we see that "the story has a complex engage-

ment with intimacy of the past and present" (194). In "Settling" we encounter characters who believe in maintaining "the imagined boundaries between public and private" (194) but the narrative problematizes those boundaries.

Carry Me Down is also concerned with the historically conditioned suppression of the self. This suppression has marginalized the necessity of telling the truth. The inability to speak it causes breakdowns and failures in John's communication and the impossibility of a revival in an Irish society that still lives in the paradigm of the "untold" and "hidden" that generates aggression and miscommunication between people. In addition, people that the protagonist encounters (passing strangers in the street, for instance) tend to be cruel to him because of his own and his father's physical characteristics. His father is short, and for this reason often becomes the target of teasing and ridicule.

In her chapter, Magennis comments on the interrelation between private and public in contemporary Northern Irish fiction. According to the critic, "[a] political engagement is expected of texts from countries with a recent history of violent conflict … [and] [t]his is understandable as the private and the public have been tied to each other in complex, ambiguous ways in Northern Irish culture" (192). Underlying this tendency is the characters' desire to live in a country of truth where people are entitled to equal rights of freedom of speech. In this way, John's physical inability to accept falsehood can be explained hermeneutically in that he is a person of the "new era" and he has a "new" way of thinking. For him, telling the truth is an essential part of creating a society of healthy and happy people.

Moreover, the episode of John's confrontation with his mother is a representation of an agony motif determined by the lack of truth in the society portrayed in the novel. His mother, who is one of the closest people to John (genetically) is represented as an outsider to his personal (psychological) environment.

The social circumstances in the novel engender the problem of miscommunication and the trauma of physical pain that it causes. For the first time in contemporary Irish fiction, the phenomenological matter of truth and lie is represented in a post-postmodernist manner that relates to the tendency to medicalize the representation of human beings as biochemical entities. On the other hand, the quest for truthfulness represents a major motif in contemporary Irish fiction. For example, it takes shape in Jennifer Johnston's work in which Irish characters are portrayed as having multifaceted identities. Having been controlled and colonized by the centre of the Empire (England) for many years, as Johnston demonstrates, Irish characters tend to have "three faces": they speak in one way, think in another, and react in a third way.

Hyland constructs her protagonist according to the tendencies that demonstrate the transformation of postmodern sincerity into post-postmodern sincerity revealing the model of "new sincerity" as a philosophical and socio-psychological phenomenon. For John Egan, knowing the truth is a physical necessity: when he hears statements that are untrue, he vomits, providing a physical response to what is happening around him. The inability to accept truth has a physical and psychological impact, as the confrontation with reality shows when other characters lie and make John pay a psychic toll and experience mental disorder as the result of his inability to understand why people lie. Even his grandmother, whose function in the novel is to maintain order in the family, lies, and this seriously upsets Egan and makes him feel sick.

Carry Me Down provides a medicalized look at the character's mind as linked to his body. Being a polygraph-teenager, John feels a constant physical pain that cannot be explained through a rational medical paradigm; however, it is nevertheless a medical problem. Significantly, in some interviews, Hyland explains that rather than aiming at producing a quintessentially Irish character, she wanted to create a "universal" character and a novel with no particular memory, geography, location, or cultural connections:

> I wanted both *Carry Me Down* (2006) and *This Is How* (2009) to seem not to have been written at all. Instead, stories that might have come from the cave: written in a single voice belonging to no fixed era, place, gender, or race. If this approach works, the voice should ring as a universal—perhaps timeless—voice; a truthful voice emptying its guts and giving up its woes. (Bedell)

As already remarked, *Carry Me Down* can be read as an example of post-postmodernist fiction. Among other things, it demonstrates that fictional characters are not satisfied with living in a reality based on absolute relativity insofar as such a reality may generate lies. The reality around John hurts him and makes his body feel pain. On the other hand, readers cannot be absolutely sure whether what happens between the son and his mother in the text is a crime or simply the result of mental disorder, due to which John's mind generates the new kind of reality that replaces the "real" one.

At the end of the novel, we notice the realization of the displacement motif represented as a psychological phenomenon that makes it difficult to verify which kind of reality is truly "real." In this way, we see one of the key features of the post-postmodernist narrative that I have investigated in my previous research: the epistemological inability to distinguish real and unreal when even the "real" reality exists in a character's perception.[3]

John reveals the kind of superhuman mind that is able to explore reality and distinguish truth from falsehood. This ability correlates with other cases in Anglophone fiction in which we have characters who perceive reality rationally concentrating only on facts. Christopher, the protagonist of the novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) by Mark Haddon, for instance, states that only mathematics can provide total understanding of reality; however, the teenager (with Asperger's syndrome) does not neglect the possibility of God's existence. Besides, his fanatical and exaggerated faith in mathematics makes him a character of the post-postmodernist kind: for him, it is important to know the truth and he cannot understand the behaviour of his family and neighbours who always lie to him. Lying is represented in both novels as an essential component of the discourse generally used in society; however, the new characters who have minds of a special type (autistic or lie-detecting) find the communication considered normal by society unsatisfactory.

John Egan as an Alien

Hyland uses grotesque techniques to widen the gaps between John and his environment: he is an "alien" at home and at college. Religious Catholic education in the novel is based on hypocrisy, as the students need to comply with the restrictions and obligations regardless of their inner needs. In this way, the author shows how schools and the college system in general support the idea of falsity as a state policy: from childhood, boys and girls are supposed to not be themselves but inhabit social identities demanded by the rules. John feels pain and physical discomfort when speaking to his schoolmates.

Hyland is critical of Irish Catholic education demonstrating that this way of teaching is outdated; it does not fit the needs of the new generations who are the "children of the pragmatic age." College students do not really demonstrate a deep understanding of faith and religious belief, for they are aggressive, cunning, lazy, and pragmatic. The new generation of young men and women live in a world of pragmatism and have little in common with the spiritual life of their parents and older generations. However, people who have gone through a "proper" Catholic education may also be cruel and violent. For example, John's father does not understand that his actions, in fact, amount to murder: taking the kittens' lives. John's grandmother, who is generally nice to John, does not understand his needs either and he can only express his inner life in his personal writing: "The Diary of a Lie." Every single day John identifies all instances of lying he encounters in his daily life, and the diary becomes the repository of the scholar's mind that explores reality and summarizes the results of the experiment. John's experiments relate to the idea of whether a person can live without lying, and John's answer is mainly negative as all the people around him accept and produce lies as part of their daily routine. For John, existential and religious solitude represents a form of identity construction that does not take place on the intersections with collective identity but on another, more personal level.

In *Carry Me Down*, the central character does not accept most of the rules, ethics, and conventions of the world in which he lives. John does not understand why everyone around him lies, and especially

[3] For details, see my articles "Postmodernism Versus Post-Postmodernism" (2019), "The Psychological Identity of the Characters of the British Post-Postmodernist Novels" (2019), and "Philosophical and Genological Features of the English Post-Postmodernist Novel" (2019).

why even the relatives who care about him do it. The teenage "polygraph" is a post-postmodern version of identity construction that visualizes several new problems. The first of those is related to the new type of communication favoured by postmodernist characters. Meetings with others are traumatic and suggest that polygraph characters like John live in a world of their own in which personal reflections and quests demonstrate their own aims, values, aspirations, and impulses. Such characters like John do not need people from the outside world to fulfil their aspirations. The world around John is built on simulacra (lies), rather than facts, real emotions, and sincere feelings. Taking down meetings, phrases, and the behaviour of other people in the daybook (diary) enables John to understand the outside world as a reality of lies. John's "The Diary of a Lie" is his attempt to construct a world as realistically as possible.

Post-postmodernist characters like John (willing to know reality as it is and mistrusting the positive role of epistemological doubt and ambiguity) avoid emotional impulses. John seeks to perceive reality as mechanistically as possible, which enables him to understand reality as an objective entity. His surroundings push the protagonist towards the loss of his inner mental equilibrium. In post-postmodernist novels, time is devoid of emotional designation.

John needs to accumulate experience, each element of which he places in his diary, designating a particular box for people and objects. In the post-postmodernist novel, inanimate objects play an important role insofar as they give characters a greater focus on self-discovery rather than on communication with other characters. Intimacy is apparently avoided insofar as it "can be a disruptive force … from the smaller ruptures of awkward lovemaking to the larger problems of abuse and violence meted out by trusted partner or family member" (Magennis 191).

John's existential and religious loneliness arises because of connections between faith, the church, college, and ideas of God formed in the bosom of the Catholic Church in a regime of seeming "sincerity." Existential loneliness is the starting point for knowledge of reality as a potentially multiple phenomenon in which we observe the interaction of the physical and metaphysical. Significantly, John does believe in the Supreme Being, but nevertheless asks why God made this world so mendacious. On the whole, Hyland is very critical of Roman Catholicism in this novel.

Conclusion

Carry Me Down suggests new directions of thinking about literature, primarily related to the portrayal of the individual identity of the characters. The present article approaches the novel as a text that possesses features showing the transformation of postmodernism into a new cultural phenomenon that goes beyond it. The protagonist of the story is endowed with superpower that helps him seek truth and identify lies. John perceives truth as a biochemical psychical process that is hard to explain. However, his ability to identify truth results in more problems related to communication and self-understanding. John also has problems with religious faith because he does not understand how God could have created a world based on lies.

Hyland uses narrative techniques of shifting between real and imagined entities, so that at the end of the novel, after the conflict between John and his mother, readers can see the outcome either as a result of John's psychological displacement or an example of his mental resistance to understanding what really happened. The character who lives without any epistemological doubts about the truth (he is a human being with polygraphic abilities) becomes mentally ill and confused for lack of understanding that leads to a powerful emotional clash and confrontation with his family and other people in the plot.

The protagonist of the narrative under discussion does not need a sense of community to come to terms with his own identity; instead, forms of communicative interaction with various others are often a factor in the imbalance of John's worldview and a source of psychological and physical pain. The main character's existing neurophysiological features and neurological disorder give grounds for claiming that there is a special type of narrative identity in *Carry Me Down*. John seeks to understand reality as a system of clear laws without lies. He produces a diary in which he collects a vast number of stories about lies and lying, his aim being to assemble a database of instances of falsity in society. His extraordinary ability does not make the protagonist happy and does not help him establish a harmonious coexistence

between his world and the ambient reality. What is more, his power becomes self-destructive because the collective identity of the people in the novel implies the existence of lies. John understands that the world is based on simulacra and false statements, but he cannot change this. Besides, his unique ability of the character results in the destruction of religious belief and lack of faith because he understands that this world does not imply God as a Being who does not lie. Truth is portrayed as a factor capable of creating a new kind of society in the future. However, Irish society is not ready for such drastic transformations because its everyday "agenda" is based on prejudices and stereotypes, created in the past. *Carry Me Down* discusses the historically determined Irish inability to be sincere in a highly critical way but also recognizes the reasons for the failing.

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