

**Atatürk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi**  
*Atatürk University Journal of Faculty of Letters*  
**Sayı / Number 65, Aralık/ December 2020, 347-360**

**ON THE VERGE OF COLLAPSE: REPRESENTATION OF BRITISH AND IRISH  
IDENTITY IN J.G. FARRELL'S *TROUBLES*\***

**Çöküşün Kıyısında: J.G. Farrell'ın *Troubles* Adlı Eserinde İngiliz ve İrlandalı Kim-  
liğinin Temsili**

(Makale Geliş Tarihi: 31.08.2020/ Kabul Tarihi: 15.09.2020)

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**Abstract**

This article aims to examine the juxtaposition of individual stories and collective history in J.G. Farrell's *Troubles* to present a nuanced reading of identity politics in Ireland during the Irish War of Independence. Farrell's the Lost Man Booker Prize recipient novel portrays one of the most tumultuous periods of Irish history (1919-1922) focusing on the daily lives of characters rather than the major political actors of the time. The novel, thus, prioritizes the stories and tribulations of ordinary people in a highly polarized society that incessantly urge individuals to define their alliances. This article contends that the novel's representation of the period emphasizes the historical trauma as experienced by the characters rather than presenting a nostalgic glorification of the British or the Irish.

**Keywords:** J.G. Farrell, Irish War of Independence, nation, historical fiction, national identity

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\* This article is the revised and extended version the paper entitled "Defining and Defying Irishness in J.G. Farrell's *Troubles*," presented at "The Congress of Social Sciences (CONGIST '18) Homecoming: Soldier, War and Society in the Centenary of the end of WWI" organized by Istanbul University, Faculty of Letters, Sept. 10-14, 2018.

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## Öz

Bu makale, İrlanda Bağımsızlık Savaşı sırasındaki kimlik politikalarının detaylı bir incelemesini sunmak amacıyla, J.G. Farrell'in *Troubles* adlı romanında bireysel öyküler ve kolektif tarihin bir araya getirilmesini ele almaktadır. Farrell'in Man Booker Ödüllü romanı, İrlanda tarihinin en çalkantılı dönemlerinden birini (1919-1922) betimlerken dönemin önemli politik figürleri yerine roman karakterlerinin günlük yaşamlarını göz önüne sermektedir. Böylelikle yapıt, bireyleri durmadan kendi pozisyonlarını tanımlamak zorunda bırakan son derece kutuplaşmış bir toplumda sıradan insanların öykülerine ve mücadelelerine öncelik verir. Bu çalışma, romandaki dönem tasvirinin İngiliz veya İrlandalı kimliğine dair nostaljik bir yüceltmeden çok karakterlerin yaşadığı dönemseller travmanın altını çizdiğini ileri sürmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** J.G. Farrell, İrlanda Bağımsızlık Savaşı, ulus, tarihi roman, ulusal kimlik

## I. Introduction

James Gordon Farrell, in an interview, remarked, “*the really interesting thing in my lifetime has been the decline of the British Empire.*” (Goodman, 2015: p. 757). Indeed, it is his interest in portraying this decline in different corners of the Empire that led to the emergence of what is generally known as his *Empire Trilogy*; namely the novels *Troubles* (published in 1970 and focusing on the Irish War of Independence 1919-1921), *The Siege of Krishnapur* (published in 1973 and set at the time of Indian Mutiny of 1857) and *The Singapore Grip* (published in 1978 and with the Japanese invasion of Singapore in 1942 as the backdrop). The novel under scrutiny in this article, The Booker Prize recipient *Troubles*, depicts one of the most turbulent periods of Irish history (1919-1922) from the perspective of the First World War veteran Major Brendan Archer. The novel represents the increasing political tension and violence as embodied in the Protestant and Catholic (British and Irish) polarization in Ireland as well as the gradual decline of the British Empire. The loss of collective sense of belonging compels individuals to define and re-define their positions as well as their loyalty in an attempt to establish a sense of national identity.

Steven Morrison states that “[born] in Liverpool to an Irish mother and an English father and living at various times in both Ireland and England, [J.G. Farrell] could be identified with either nation but with neither exclusively” (Morrison, 2014: p. 55). Indeed, Farrell recounted that “in Ireland he was always regarded as English but in England he was always treated as if he was Irish.” (Binns, 1986: p. 20) This almost compulsory attitude to categorize or label people, in a way forcing them to choose a side or imposing a side on them, lies at the core of the novel as well, inviting both the protagonist and the reader to question the identity politics in Ireland. The novel starts with Major Brendan Archer's arrival at the Majestic Hotel

to meet his fiancée Angela, whose father, Edward Spencer (an Anglo-Irish landowner), owns the hotel. The Major is not even sure if he is actually engaged since he has never proposed to Angela. They met for once during his leave and stayed in touch through letters. Now that the Great War is over, he is anxious to find out the truth. What awaits him at the Majestic is a combination of rather eccentric Spencer family, equally eccentric hotel employees, a group of elderly ladies who have become permanent residents at the hotel along with some local characters in this small Irish town and the hotel itself, once full of grandeur but currently in a dilapidated state. Merritt Moseley has described Farrell's fiction with "*a distinctive style or atmosphere that combines the comic and elegiac, the dreadful and preposterous*" (Moseley, 2011: p. 490). The Major undergoes this experience as he strives to figure out his own future as well as the country's amid at times violent and at times ridiculous situations.

The novel's focus on such an important period of Irish history with its reverberations in daily life brings forth the opportunity to analyze it within the genre of historical fiction. Georg Lukacs' conceptualization of historical novel, despite his focus on 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction, provides important insights to comprehend Farrell's representation and problematization of history. Lukacs discusses the role of wars in creating a new understanding of history in the eyes of ordinary people. When large numbers of people fight in wars, they also start to regard themselves as part of a broader reality experienced by masses (Lukacs, 1937/1989: p. 24). Thus, he states that wars present "*concrete possibilities for men to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned, for them to see in history something which deeply affects their daily lives and immediately concerns them.*" (Lukacs, 1937/1989: p. 24) Farrell's novel takes place right after World War I and during the Irish War of Independence, hence emphasizing the turmoil and destruction felt by millions of people. That the novel refrains from engaging with the broader political questions and political figures of the period indicates the desire to draw attention to the experience of ordinary people in times of crisis. The characters experience and become part of history as much as it permeates into their daily lives in a small Irish town. The Major, still struggling to recover from his experiences in the battlefield, and the locals find themselves striving to understand the increasing tension and potentially violent change in the country.

Farrell's choice of a small town and its rather peculiar people to depict the tumultuous years in Ireland exemplifies a common trope in the post-war British historical novel as described by Margaret Scanlan: "*the contemporary novelist tends to put his or her characters in contact with less well-known, marginal events; or to display the lives of people who live through a great historical event in virtual ignorance of its significance to their lives; or to leave out the event altogether, substituting for it a symbolic, even caricatural or parodic event.*" (Scanlan, 1990: p. 10) In *Troubles*, on the one hand, it is impossible not to notice the gradual polarization

within the society starting with minor incidents and culminating in more serious acts of violence such as the killing of an old man on the street in the middle of the day; on the other hand, life at the Majestic Hotel with all its idiosyncrasies occupies such a central role in the narrative that it pushes everything else to the background. For instance, while the rebellions against the Empire across the world are mentioned in the passing, the war against the cats at the Hotel takes up pages after pages. In a similar manner, the detailed description of elderly ladies' preparation for their journeys to new locations overshadows the cause of their departure, namely the Hotel becoming more dangerous due to the tension between the Sinn Fein and Auxiliary Forces. Although the narrative maintains its focus on the immediate surroundings of the Majestic, it, nonetheless, reminds the reader of other troubles in the rest of the world, paralleling those of Ireland, especially in the territories controlled by British Empire. The presentation of newspaper articles on rebellions, violence and unrest from different parts of the world without any introduction or specific context both interrupts and re-positions the narrative; while it disrupts the ongoing portrayal of life at the Hotel it also connects the microcosmos of this small town with the broader historical reality of the time. The overall portrayal of the Empire's overseas territories, accompanied with the representation of the case of Ireland, reveals the growing fragmentation and loss of sense of collective belonging, underlining the fast approaching end for the Empire.

Mariadele Boccardi claims that in the period after World War II, "*the historical novel becomes the genre that reflects upon the rupture in the British sense of the nation and enacts it in its narrative choices and in the unfolding of events in its plots.*" (Boccardi, 2009: p. 31) In the case of *Troubles*, it is the rise of Irish nationalism that creates a rupture both in the daily lives of the characters and their understanding of national consciousness and sense of belonging. Farrell combines individual stories and collective history to delineate the impending end of British rule in Ireland as perceived by various groups with different self-identifications and alliances. In this article, I examine the representation of identity politics as conveyed by three main perspectives, namely that of Major Brendan Archer, of the locals (including Irish and Anglo-Irish), and of the Sinn Fein and Royal Irish Constabulary (R.I.C.) and Auxiliary Forces, and contend that Farrell's depiction of this critical period shies away from nostalgic glorification of the British or the Irish, it rather emphasizes the historical trauma as experienced by ordinary people.

## II. From Trenches to the Majestic Hotel

The beginning of the novel represents the Major as an outsider and a guest who is trying to comprehend the extraordinary atmosphere of the hotel as well as the complicated political situation with its echoes in the daily life. His initial reactions at the hotel such as "*How incredibly Irish it all is*" (Farrell, 2002: p. 24), "*How incredibly... well, Irish*" (Farrell, 2002: p. 36) underline his ignorance about Ireland as well as his proclivity to stereotypical generalizations. As he is overwhelmed with

everything that surrounds him, he is unable to understand and impose meaning on this new environment. Soon after, he comes to the self-realization that “*how very foreign, after all, Ireland was*” (Farrell, 2002: p. 57). Ronald Binns states that “*the reader who knows little about Irish history is likely to share the Major’s bafflement about what exactly is going on.*” (Binns, 1986: p. 52) The Major, who now feels “*only at ease in the company of strangers*” (Farrell, 2002: p. 10), realizes that while the strangers, namely the Spencer family and the hotel residents, are willing to accept him as he is, he is clueless about how to navigate his way in the midst of confusion. His less than formal introduction to Angela’s father Edward and its aftermath foreshadows his disorientation in the rest of the novel:

*A large, fierce-looking man in white flannels stepped from behind a luxuriant fern at which the Major had happened to be looking with drugged eyes. He said: “Quick, you chaps! Some unsavory characters have been spotted lurking in the grounds. Probably Shinnners.” The tea-drinkers googled at him. “Quick!” he repeated, twitching a tennis racket in his right hand. “They’re probably looking for guns. Ripon, Boy, arm yourselves and follow me. You too, Major, delighted to make your acquaintance, I know you’ll want to be in on this.* (Farrell, 2002: p. 22)

The Major has no option other than following Edward in pursuit of the trespassers, which gives him the first glance of daily life in the time of the Troubles.<sup>1</sup> As the pursuit turns into a wild-goose chase, the Major is no longer sure if there were any “*unsavory characters*” in the vicinity at all. This brief episode also indicates the Major’s passivity, which will only become more pronounced during his stay at the Majestic. He is not even able to figure out the status of his engagement to Angela, which constitutes the main purpose of his visit. Indeed, her first remarks in the novel, “*‘Ah, I’ve been dying’ – a fit of weary coughing interrupted her – ‘of boredom,’ she added peevishly*” (Farrell, 2002: p. 18), inadvertently signals the fate of their relationship: she is suffering from leukemia and dies shortly after. Although the Major loses his primary link to the Majestic with her death, he has already developed a certain sense of connection to the hotel, along with people, that makes him come back there after his visit to London. Moseley, on the Major’s insistence in staying at the Majestic until the very end, states that “[*c*]*onsidering everything – his sympathy for the Catholics, the death of his fiancée, his growing disgust – it may be surprising that the major stays on, but he is a passive man, subject to his own kind of paralysis.*”

<sup>1</sup> The Troubles refers to what is generally known as the Northern Ireland Conflict or Irish Conflict in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – originally for the Irish War of Independence and then later from the 1970s till late 1990s. The novel focuses on the period where the separatist Sinn Fein Party, Irish Republicans – IRA (Irish Republican Army) – and the British state and its forces in Ireland – Royal Irish Constabulary and then the Auxiliary Forces sent from England – engaged in a guerrilla warfare, which eventually resulted in the creation of a Free Irish State and the Northern Ireland which remained part of the United Kingdom.

(Moseley, 2011: p. 491) However, his decision to stay at the hotel, even when everyone else has left, can also be regarded as a choice, at least hinting at the development of a certain, albeit problematic, kind of bond with the land embodied in the form of the Majestic.

Tijana Parezanovic asserts that “*Troubles deals precisely with the problems of cultural and national identity in a place where defining oneself as either Catholic or Protestant, Nationalist or Unionist, Irish or British, has always been of extreme importance.*” (Parezanovic, 2016: p. 55) In the novel, the presence of the clear-cut boundaries between Protestants and Catholics emerges as the first thing that the Major has to learn to comprehend the broader picture of Ireland. When we take a closer look at the Major, his initial naïve approach to the realities of Ireland and stereotypical perception of the Irish leaves its place to an increasing awareness of the situation in Ireland and his, willing or unwilling, participation in it. At the beginning, his only preoccupation is to ascertain his own future with Angela without paying much attention to the violence around (Lea, 1999: p. 84-85); however, over the course of his stay, he becomes “*both insider and outsider in the local affairs of Kilnalough*” (Rovitt, 1998: p. 634), hence the inevitable transformation in his perspective toward the people and the Irish question. However, it is important to state that the Major does not align himself either with the Unionists (the British) or the Nationalists (Sinn Féin). While the Major occasionally takes part with one side and then the other, the novel, throughout the narrative, takes pains to depict him more of a confused observer rather than a fervent supporter of neither party.

The Major’s early confusion and difficulty in comprehending the Troubles finds a partial explanation in his view of Ireland as a “*peaceful country.*” (Farrell, 2002: p. 100) Having fought in the trenches in France during the Great War and witnessed its devastating effects, the Major is suffering from shellshock and unable to understand the escalating tension and violence between the British and the Irish, considering that they all fought together against the enemy during the war. When did they turn onto each other? When he witnesses the murder of an old man in plain daylight, he thinks, “*it was absurd that in Ireland an old man consulting his watch should be killed. In wartime innocent old people were killed – but Ireland was a peaceful country.*” (Farrell, 2002: p. 100) Yet, it does not take him too long to realize that what is going on in Ireland is “*a war without battles or trenches*” (Farrell, 2002: p. 171), a war that he is not familiar with and an enemy (without a face) that he cannot describe or fight with. Earl Rovitt describes the Major as “*instinctively sympathetic to the traditional loyalties of the Protestant Ascendancy but also receptive to the smoldering grievances of the Catholic farmers and villagers*” (Rovitt, 1998: p. 634), which leaves him in a perpetually in-between situation, trying to find a common ground and reasonable explanations or solutions to the tensions surrounding him.

The novel offers two important instances in which the reader can get a better picture of the Major's perspective toward the Irish question and the responsibility of the British. Early in the novel, right after his arrival to the Majestic, he listens to the conversation about the Irish at the dinner table without sharing his ideas with them:

*[I]t seemed to him that Edward was undoubtedly right. The Irish, as far as he knew, had always had a habit of making trouble. That was in the nature of things. As for the aim of their unruly behavior, self-government for Ireland, that seemed quite absurd. What would be the advantage to the Irish themselves? They were so ill-educated that they could not possibly hope to gain anything from it. The English undoubtedly knew more about running the country. The priests would presumably take over if the English were not there to see fair play. [...] For the important fact was this: the presence of the British signified a moral authority, not just an administrative one, here in Ireland as in India, Africa and elsewhere. (Farrell, 2002: p. 54-55)*

His ideas are marked with the initial stereotypical generalizations about the Irish as exemplified before. His assumed superiority as a member of the British reveals itself in his judgments about the Irish as troublemakers with unruly behavior without adequate experience in governing themselves. In his opinion, British rule in Ireland is for the good of everyone. More importantly, he draws attention to the "moral authority" of the British presence in not only Ireland but the colonies in general, hence assigning a greater responsibility on the British that should ensure a just and fair treatment of the subjects of the Empire. However, in Kilnalough, he witnesses the "degeneration of British justice" with possibly chaotic consequences: "Once an impartial and objective justice was abandoned in every faction of Ireland, every person in Ireland, was free to invent his own version of it." (Farrell, 2002: p. 248) The Major no longer has any illusions about the British moral authority; in fact, he has come to the realization that that has never existed. As he recovers from the shock and disappointment, he adopts an indifferent attitude: "After all, if one lot was as bad as the other why should anyone care? 'Let them sort it out for themselves.'" (Farrell, 2002: p. 248-249) Despite the Major's disillusionment with both the British and Irish, he nevertheless cannot remain completely indifferent to the fate of the people he has grown fond of and the crumbling hotel that he has come to perceive as almost his home. He remains at the Majestic even after everyone has left, only to witness the great fire that destroys the hotel and consumes what it symbolically represents.

### III. The Locals of Kilnalough

Morrison describes the primary concern of the novel as “*the Anglo-Irish experience of the Irish War of Independence, those years during which a sense of natural privilege and entitlement deriving from centuries of rule gave way to dispossession and near powerlessness.*” (Morrison, 2015: p. 56) Some critics note that the Anglo-Irish perspective dominates the novel’s portrayal of the period, not giving sufficient space to the perspective of the Irish. Given that the Major, the primary point of view in the novel, stays at the Majestic and socializes mostly with the Anglo-Irish with the exception of Sarah, whom I will discuss at length below, it is no surprise that the novel predominantly presents the Anglo-Irish perspective, which is also diverse, to the incidents. Furthermore, there is no claim for the objective – if possible at all – representation of the historical period in the novel; Lea, commenting on Farrell’s conception of history, notes that “[h]istory can only ever be perceived by the individual in a fractured and incomplete way. A person’s involvement in, and understanding of, world-historical events are always compromised by limited or partial knowledge of a situation.” (Lea, 1999: p. 80) Hence, the narrative’s nuanced portrayal of the characters underlines their subjective, at times biased, opinions of the existing circumstances. In this section, I will mainly focus on Edward Spencer and Sarah Devlin, the two characters who come forward as the (willing or unwilling) voice of the Anglo-Irish and Irish identity respectively, to examine the representation of effects of broader political and religious framework on personal level and daily life.

If the Major is the affable yet confused observer of the novel, it is Edward Spencer who represents the Anglo-Irish legacy and perspective toward the Troubles with an alarming intensity. Moseley describes Edward as “*close to a caricature of the purblind Protestant – manic in his denunciation of the Sinn Feiners*” (Moseley, 2011: p. 490) and Morrison underlines “*the force of Edward’s intransigence and bigotry*” (Morrison, 2015: p. 64). So long as the Major strives to avoid any emotional or ideological commitment in the charged atmosphere of pre-independence Ireland (Lea, 1999: p. 80), it is Edward who inevitably draws him to the middle of it – to the extent that, at the end of the novel the Major is the only one staying and keeping an eye on the hotel. Edward’s status as a landlord to surrounding farms also proves useful to elaborate on the daily repercussions of the politics at large. Edward’s tenants, the descendants of the landowners whose land were confiscated by the British in the past, are required to pledge their loyalty to the King: “*‘You know what I did to ‘aggravate my tenants,’ as old Ryan says? I asked them to sign a piece of paper saying that they were loyal not to me, mind you, not to me but to the King... and that they wouldn’t get mixed up in any of these Sinn Fein goings-on. Is that so terrible? Is it aggravating them to ask them to abide by the law?’*” (Farrell, 2002: p. 64-65) Edwards’s desire to impose control over the tenants is closely linked to the overall waning of British authority in Ireland. His stubbornness toward them reaches to the point that the tenants are not able to cultivate the land and ultimately burn the fields at the cost of their own starvation.



Edward's outspoken attitude against Irish nationalism and the Sinn Fein affects the atmosphere at the hotel as well and provides the environment for the dissemination of rumors. While the absurdity of some of these rumors is self-evident, the characters' solemnity about them hints the reader power of these rumors in the creation of the image of Sinn Fein as the enemy. The arrival of the Auxiliary Forces from England to help the R.I.C. constitutes a turning point for the life at the Majestic. When the members of the Auxiliary Force become guests at the hotel, Edward starts receiving threats for being a traitor (Farrell, 2002: p. 164) and petty disturbances on his property become more frequent. Although these remain quite insignificant compared to the violence in all over the country, they create a powerful effect on Edward, eventually leading him to put up a sign on the Queen Victoria statue in front of the hotel: "*TRESPASSERS FOUND TAMPERING WITH THE STATUE OF QUEEN VICTORIA WILL BE SHOT ON SIGHT. BY ORDER*" (Farrell, 2002: p. 404) The notice, as the Major predicts, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy with a young man trying to blow the statue and being shot by Edward. The passage right after this incident discloses not only Edward's bigotry but also the Major's gradually developed awareness about the Irish question: "*What you don't realize is that we're at war... If people come and blow things up they must take the consequences! They must be taught a lesson!*" "*Oh, Edward, these are our own people! They aren't the Germans or Bolsheviks... This is their country as much as it is ours... more than it is ours!*" (Farrell, 2002: p. 427)

Sarah Devlin, Angela's close friend plays a crucial role in the Major's understanding of the social and political dynamics in Ireland. In their first encounter, Sarah demarcates the lines that divide people in Ireland quite bluntly:

*'The fact that I'm a Catholic. Yes, I can see that she [Angela] told you but that you regard it as a fact too shameful to mention. Or perhaps you regard it as good manners not to mention such an affliction.'*

*'What absolute nonsense!'*

*'Pay no attention, Sarah got out of bed the wrong side as usual'*

*[Ripon says]*

*'Be quiet, Ripon! It's not nonsense at all. Ripon's father calls us 'fish-eaters' and 'Holy Romans' and so on. So does Ripon. So will you, Major, when you're among the 'quality.' In fact, you'll become a member of the 'quality' yourself, high and mighty, too good for the rest of us.'*

*'I hope not to be so bigoted,' said the Major smiling. 'Surely there's no need to abandon one's reason simply because one is in Ireland.'*

*'In Ireland, you must choose your tribe. Reason has nothing to do with it.'*

(Farrell, 2002: p. 30-31)

In this passage, Sarah strikes the reader as quite frank, almost accusatory toward the Major. As a newcomer, he has an illusionary view of the land and people that he will eventually lose with the realization that reason has indeed nothing to do

with the life in Ireland. For Sarah, the Major, as a British, automatically falls into a certain category – that of the quality, namely the Anglo-Irish who have held the power and looked down upon the Irish for centuries. Her categorization of the Major is similar to his aforementioned generalizations about the Irish: in both cases, the judgements are based on biases. In the case of Sarah, her hasty judgement will undergo change as she gets to know the Major more personally. Nevertheless, her statement, “*In Ireland, you must choose your tribe*” (Farrell, 2002: p. 31), indicates the impossibility of remaining neutral in a land of escalating tension and violence. Although Sarah’s first appearance highlights her “*romantic patriotism*” (Scanlan, 1990: p. 58), her behaviors are too erratic to maintain that patriotism. She flirts with the Major after Angela’s death, has an affair with Edward later, and finally elopes with an officer from the Auxiliary Forces. Her apparent dislike for the Anglo-Irish and British dissipates when the occasion suits her. In a way, reason has nothing to do with what she purports and what she actually does. This discrepancy becomes more noteworthy for the reader since she is “*the Irish Catholic with whom the Major has the longest and most consequential relationship*” (Scanlan, 1990: p. 58), hence attaining an almost representative role for the Irish in the eyes of the Major, who predominantly holds the narrative point of view in the novel.

Although it is not my intention to portray and analyze Edward and Sarah as the representative of each “*tribe*” in the small seaside town, their representation through the Major’s perspective initially creates their image as such. However, on closer scrutiny, their characterization reveals to be more complex and less than ideal for them to be the embodiment of the Anglo-Irish and Irish identity respectively. Neither Edward nor Sarah is idealized; the novel rather emphasizes their eccentricity, erratic behaviors and at times unstable state of mind. Farrell chooses to portray the crisis of the ordinary people as the country undergoes a difficult phase. In doing so, his depiction of Edward and Sarah not only discloses the prevalent lack of reason, and meaning, in people’s lives but also the competing dynamics in the creation of sense of identity in a polarized land. While Edward and Sarah as well as those around the Major, in general, stay away from active involvement in politics and strive to maintain their routine, they are nevertheless affected by the conflict between the R.I.C (along with the Auxiliary Forces) and the Sinn Fein. The following section will investigate the representation of military or armed actors in the novel in terms of their contribution to the rupture in the society and the identity politics.

#### IV. The Unwelcome Guests

The novel’s delineation of the Sinn Fein and the R.I.C. along with the Auxiliary Forces discloses a kind of complexity similar to that of Edward and Sarah’s portrayal: instead of glorifying the deeds of one side over the other, the narrative, through the Major’s perspective, exposes the human condition in the midst of turmoil. Similar to the criticism above, the novel can be regarded as giving more space to the portrayal of the Auxiliaries rather than the Sinn Fein; however, as it will be

shown below, this portrayal is far from being sympathetic toward the British military presence in Ireland. If the Sinn Fein is presented as the elusive enemy, the Auxiliaries become the immediate troublemakers not only toward the Sinn Fein but for those at the Majestic as well.

While the novel abounds with rumors and stories about the Sinn Fein, the actual members are never identified. They remain faceless and nameless, which complicates the matters on two grounds. On the one hand, it is not possible to identify any single individual as a “*Shinner*,” as Edward calls them, and as an enemy; on the other, the anonymity brings up the possibility of having members of the Sinn Fein anywhere and everywhere. As the Major strives to understand the situation, he is baffled to comprehend “*a war without battles or trenches*” (Farrell, 2002: p. 171). While more stories about harassment toward the Anglo-Irish and the R.I.C reach the Majestic, the image of the Sinn Fein becomes more sinister in the eyes of Edward and the Anglo-Irish residents of the hotel. Nevertheless, Farrell’s description of the Sinn Fein is not driven by an attempt to demonize its supporters. What the narrative lacks is the voice of the Irish nationalists since they always remain in the shadows. In other words, although the novel does not depict the Sinn Fein as the ultimate enemy, it falls short of giving voice to those who support it with the ideal of Free Ireland. Thus, it is the image of Irish nationalism and the Sinn Fein created and represented by the Anglo-Irish and British that controls the narrative.

Farrell, in a similar vein, does not portray the R.I.C and the Auxiliaries as the expected saviors. In fact, he problematizes the foreignness of the presence of British in Ireland through his representation of the Auxiliaries that have come to aid the R.I.C. The arrival of the British ex-army officers upsets the life in the hotel as well as in the local circles. As the men from the trenches who have come to maintain law and order in Ireland, they do not feel the need to comply with the social conventions of the locals and sometimes disrupt them quite self-consciously. Given their attitude toward the elderly ladies at the Majestic and in the town club, the Major “*is disturbed by his encounters with the Auxiliaries, and by the realization that the categories of ‘officer’ and ‘gentleman’ have become decoupled*” (Prescott, 2003: p.171). The novel compels the reader to question the contradiction in their mission to bring stability to Ireland and their foreignness to the reality of Ireland. As it depicts Officer Bolton’s view of the Irish, this discrepancy becomes more evident: “*I never cared much for the Irish even before all this. An uncouth lot. More like animals than human beings...*” (Farrell, 2002: p. 275). The Major’s premonitory remark on the deployment of the Auxiliaries to Ireland to neutralize the volatile environment proves accurate: “*[T]he cure may be as bad as the disease*” (Farrell, 2002: p. 175). The tension escalates with the arrival of the Auxiliaries, with both parties becoming more arbitrary and severe in their actions.

Although the novel imparts a rather skeptical view of the English bringing stability to Ireland, it nonetheless offers moments to get a more detailed picture of the situation from the perspective of the officers. In other words, the voice denied to the Sinn Fein members is given to the Auxiliaries especially through Bolton's dialogues with the Major. When the Major says that innocent people's houses are burned down – the implication is that the R.I.C. and Auxiliaries are responsible for the fires – Bolton responds, "*There are no innocent people in Ireland these days, Major. If you put on a uniform like this, you'll find that everyone's your enemy.*" (Farrell, 2002: p. 274) Despite the Major's previous description of the Troubles as "*a war without battles or trenches,*" and the anonymity of the Sinn Fein in general, the R.I.C. and the Auxiliaries' uniform constitutes a visible marker that determines people's initial reaction toward them. In other words, for some, their status as the enemy is established at first sight and has nothing to do with the character of an individual officer. This is reminiscent of Sarah's initial impression of the Major belonging to "*the quality;*" again, it had nothing to do with the Major's character, her assessment was based on him being a British. Bolton also points to the privileged position of the Major and Edward: "*[P]eople like you and Edward can afford to have fine feelings because you have someone like me to do your dirty work for you. I become a little upset when people who rely on me to stop them being murdered in their beds start giving themselves superior moral airs.*" (Farrell, 2002: p. 276-277) The Major and Edward, despite the latter's occasional frenzied moments as in the case of the statue, endeavor to avoid direct involvement and maintain their lives with a relative detachment from the engulfing violence. The Majestic may not be in perfect shape; yet, it provides a haven for a long time. Bolton's remark indicates their complicity; they may not be actively participating in or approving the actions of the R.I.C. and Auxiliaries, but still they benefit from their presence in Ireland. Hence, Bolton simply draws attention to the fact that no matter how much distance the Major would like to put between himself and the officer, they are inevitably linked during their stay in Ireland.

In illustrating the opposite parties in Ireland, Farrell avoids tackling the broader political questions and beliefs embraced by the Irish nationalists and the British along with the Anglo-Irish. His attention is directed toward the daily repercussions of the decisions made by the politicians and bureaucrats. While the absence of the voice of Irish nationalist leads to mostly British-influenced representation of the Irish question, the bleak portrayal of the British military in Ireland also raises suspicions about their potential success as expressed by Dr. Ryan, the Anglo-Irish doctor on the verge of senility, "*The English are fools; they'll lose Ireland if they go on like this. Do they even want it? Do they even know what they want?*" (Farrell, 2002: p. 78) It is perhaps no coincidence that the most crucial question is posed by a man losing his grip on reality while those – seemingly – in their right mind abandon reason in the midst of turmoil.

## V. Conclusion

Margaret Scanlan remarks that majority of the post-war British historical novels “are more likely to evoke defeats than victories, stupidity and arrogance than heroism. All concern themselves with the question of how private lives and consciousness intersect with public events; how it is that we experience our history.” (Scanlan, 1990: p. 7) This study has investigated Farrell’s *Troubles* through its attempt to depict the human condition when rationality does not function any longer and when the center no longer holds. Farrell, by pushing aside the political agenda and processes, wrote about the anxieties, disappointments, dilemmas of the ordinary people who realize that the time as they have known does not exist anymore, and they will eventually have to confront the reality in front of them. In my analysis, examination of the sense of personal and collective identity from three different angles has served to illustrate the loss of collective sense of belonging and the notion of shared destiny. *Troubles* is part of the oeuvre that invites the reader to ponder upon the reasons for and the consequences of the decline of the British Empire. In its portrayal of such a critical time in Irish history, the novel prioritizes the ordinary characters’ experience of such a traumatic period instead of political agendas of various groups, thus reminding us that historical fiction chronicles not only the lives of major figures but more importantly people like us who are very much part of history as well.

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