

“A JOURNEY IS AN HALLUCINATION:”

FLANN O'BRIEN'S *THE THIRD POLICEMAN*

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined
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“A journey is an hallucination:” Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman*

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hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Many thanks go out to two complete strangers: One stranger initiated my interest in the brain and its workings after a severe accident February 2010. The other stranger suggested this book during a class dinner in Dublin, Ireland Summer of 2012. When discussing the potential topic for my thesis, psychological or neurological issues in literature, he responded, “You should read *The Third Policeman*.” Then, he added he worked in mental health and said the book has everything relating to the brain in it “without having to resort to using Joyce, like everyone else.”

Thanks, Mom, for purchasing most of the books I have used in this paper and showing your support for my newfound interest.

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“A journey is an hallucination:” Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman*

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Abstract

Flann O’Brien’s novel, *The Third Policeman*, consists of many seemingly unrealistic events, thus sharing similarities with the fantastic piece, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. The events and characters within O’Brien’s storyline obtain no source of reason, leading to another wonderland. However, if particular components of the novel are studied further, and in relation to the aftereffects of trauma, O’Brien’s work is more realistic and logical than what is fantastically portrayed on the text’s surface.

Dina McPherson

Thesis

Professor Kerwin

6 April 2014

“A journey is an hallucination.” Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman*

Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman* is a fantastic novel. Its level of ridiculousness and absurdity compares to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Within O’Brien’s novel, one character speaks of glasses and celery after receiving a fatal blow to the back of his head, the nameless narrator sees his deceased neighbor years after he had already murdered him, and the person who is incapable of recalling his own name travels to Eternity—which is just a lift away—where one can ask for, and receive, anything he so chooses without being able to carry any of said items out. Such absurd, illogical and preposterous events are, simply put, fantastic. Although, these precise events deserve more attention and consideration than one allows by reading and accepting them as part of a novel’s plot. While absurdities, such as the nameless narrator obtaining no memory of his own name and holding a conversation with a man he killed years prior, create the expected elements of a fictional piece, particular events truly do have the potential of occurring in real life—despite their improbable characteristics. Thus, the narrator’s eerie style in Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman* illustrates his life within a fantastic and inexplicable world; however, this narrative portrays a world reflecting the realities of trauma.

Dissociation and Schizophrenia

The nameless narrator in Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* encounters various seemingly unrealistic events. Although absurd, most of these experiences are the result of the narrator's dissociating himself from the world in which he lives. The nameless narrator decides to collect the much-needed funds after his roommate, John Divney, finally shares the location of the moneybox—the same moneybox they stole from their neighbor, old Phillip Mathers, after murdering him. Finding the black box introduces the narrator to another world, a different, yet familiar, world. After this inexplicable cause of relocation occurs, the narrator wanders the countryside with the hopes of solving the puzzle on his own and learning of his new location.

Both before and after retrieving the black moneybox, the nameless narrator's life consists of one traumatic, sometimes absurd, event after another. When he was young, his "mother and father were gone," and men came to the house to watch over him, calling him a "poor unfortunate little bastard" (O'Brien 8). Losing both of his parents within a short timeframe, in addition to losing his remaining loved one, "Mick the sheepdog," shortly thereafter, the narrator seeks comfort in a new location (8). "I was brought away myself on an outside car and sent to a strange school [...] It was here that I first came to know something of de Selby" (9). With no longer having parents or a farm dog to hold a relationship at home, and relocating to an unusual school, the narrator's new comfort consists of studying this philosopher, de Selby. He introduces de Selby in the beginning pages of the novel, speaking of stealing a book of de Selby's from the school's library before thinking, "Perhaps it is important in the story I am going to tell to remember that it was for de Selby I committed my first serious sin. It was for him that I committed by

greatest sin” (9). The narrator’s deep interest, borderline obsession, in the philosopher’s theories prompts him to commit his first sin, stealing the book from the library.

Additionally, for de Selby, the narrator commits his greatest sin: murder.

De Selby, the fabricated philosopher, fits perfectly within O’Brien’s novel with his far-fetched, illogical theories and page-long footnotes elaborating on his studies and beliefs. One footnote, for example, discusses his “investigation of the nature of time and eternity by a system of mirrors,” for “de Selby was obsessed with mirrors and had recourse to them so frequently that he claimed to have two left hands and to be living in a world arbitrarily bounded by a wooden frame” (66). In addition to the mirror discussion, another footnote covers the significance of houses:

De Selby has some interesting to say on the subject of houses. A row of houses he regards as a row of necessary evils. The softening and degeneration of the human race he attributes to its progressive predilection for interiors and waning interest in the art of going out and staying there [...] These structures were of two kinds, roofless ‘houses’ and ‘houses’ without walls. The former had wide open doors and windows with an extremely ungainly superstructure...(22)

Just as the rest of the novel, if read literally, this seems completely absurd. Houses having no walls are not houses, but pavilions in which nobody lives, according to the average person. Houses without roofs, on the other hand, are houses falling apart, many people assume. If read metaphorically, these claims argue the main purpose of houses is to confine their owners within their walls or roofs. Houses close people in from the rest of the world, which is why they can be regarded as “a row of necessary evils” (22).

Philosophers allowing their imagination to fly, just as de Selby does, help make-believe stories take their forms with their illogical comments. However, Anthony Cronin, a friend of Flann O'Brien's (whose name in real life was Brian O'Nolan), claims otherwise. Cronin believes every word O'Brien uses within his text sprouts from known sources—both in the book and about the philosopher:

Again, the sources of the book were many...Some part of the conception of De Selby appears to have come from the portrait of the eccentric recluse and savant, Des Esseintes, the hero of the Huysmans' *A Rebours* which Devlin had lent to Sheridan who had passed it on to Brian. But of course he had always delighted in literary portrayals of dogmatic and eccentric geniuses such as Sherlock Holmes. (103)

Just as Cronin suggests, there were many sources for O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*, and despite the fact the philosopher whom the nameless narrator obsesses over throughout his lifetime seems an absurd man with illogical theories, he was not entirely fabricated by O'Brien. According to Havelock Ellis's introduction to the novel Joris-Karl Huysmans' *Against the Grain*, a work of fiction from 1884, Huysmans' writing style illustrates his "imaginative temperament" (Huysmans). "The whole universe appears to him as a process of living images; he cannot reason in abstractions, cannot *rationalize*" (Huysmans). In other words, Huysmans' writing style shows imagination and lacks logical thinking. O'Brien mimics this style through the use of de Selby's theories, including his lengthy footnotes, within *The Third Policeman*. The character, Des Esseintes, is introduced by describing his house: "This room, where mirrors hung on every wall, reflecting backwards and forwards from one to another" (Huysmans). This

description supports Cronin, who had once helped revise O'Brien's novel, and his claim de Selby came from Huysmans' *A Rebours*, especially in reference to de Selby's aforementioned theory on mirrors (Cronin 103). There are numerous similarities between the two, de Selby and Des Esseintes, showing O'Brien's fictional philosopher from his novel had not been fabricated—he is an elaboration of a previously well-known author's character, and this is but a minuscule example. However, a bulk of the novel, primarily the events its narrator witnesses, are more reasonable and share commonalities with real people, rather than other characters from classic novels, like de Selby and Des Esseintes.

The nameless narrator of O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*, just like de Selby, obtains and encounters many fantasies; however, characteristics of these fantasies are simply the aftereffects of the devastating and traumatic events the narrator had previously suffered in his lifetime. When trauma occurs, people often dissociate, or separate, themselves from the reality of it. Dr. Cathy Caruth, a trauma theorist and Professor of English at Emory University, defines trauma as "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event" (Kaplan 34). In other words, immensely stressful situations cause people to react differently. Hallucinations and dreams are forms of responses to trauma; and just as Caruth states, these may not instantaneously occur following the traumatic event, or events. Instead, these aftereffects may be delayed, or they may come about a long time after the serious event occurs. Traumatic responses such as these cause dissociation, and neuroscientists "show brain mechanisms that support the thesis of trauma producing dissociated selves" (34). Thus, a result of trauma is dissociation, which is defined by *The American Journal*

of Psychology: “Dissociation is defined as ‘a disruption in the usually integrated function of consciousness, memory, identity, or perception of the environment’” (Giesbrecht 337).

Put simply, dissociation interrupts the normal, or average, person’s way of functioning when it comes to memory, consciousness, almost anything to do with understanding and comprehending one’s surroundings using all areas of the brain.

When dissociation occurs, especially because of trauma, specific regions of a person’s brain—the narrator’s brain in this case—are primarily affected as a result.

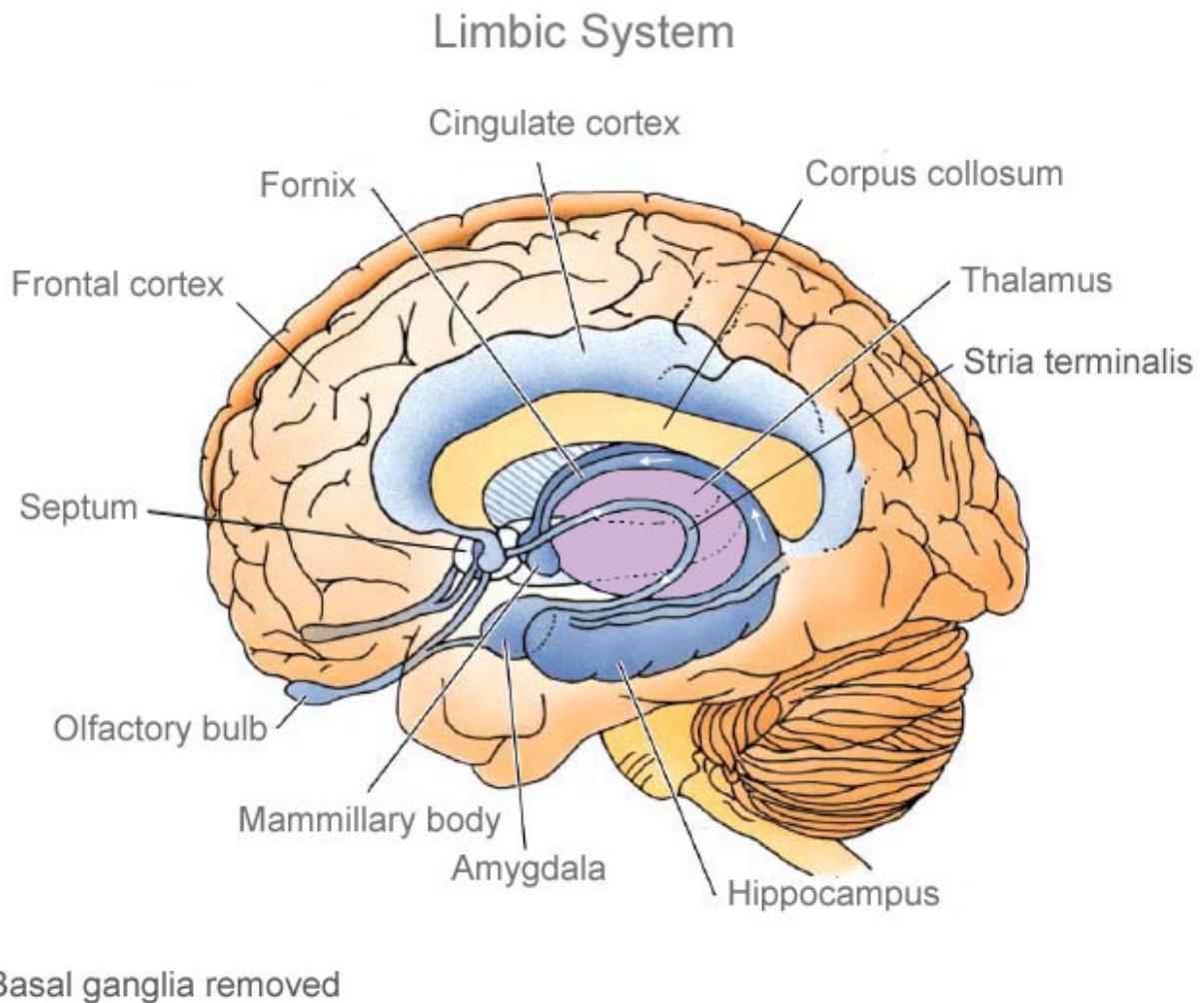
According to Professor of English at State University of New York (SUNY) E. Ann Kaplan and author of *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, Caruth and other trauma theorists claim,

Trauma is a special form of memory, they stated that in trauma the event has affect only, not meaning. It produces emotions—terror, fear, shock—but perhaps above all disruption of the normal feeling of comfort. (Kaplan 34)

This repeats the same information stated in *The American Journal of Psychology*’s definition, that trauma causes a disruption, or dissociation, of normalcy when it comes to comfort, thought processes, memory, or any form of normal cognition. Additionally, this disconnect leads to a separation between two important regions of the brain, the amygdala and the cerebral cortex (34). The *Cognitive Neuroscience: The Biology of the Mind* textbook describes the amygdala as “groups of neurons anterior to the hippocampus in the medial temporal lobe that are involved in emotional processing” (*Cognitive Neuroscience* G-1). Put simply, the amygdala is the emotional part of the brain. The cerebral cortex, on the other hand, is defined as “the layered sheet of neurons that

overlies the forebrain” and “consists of neuronal subdivisions (areas) interconnected with other cortical areas, subcortical structures, and the cerebellum and spinal cord” (G-3). In other words, this is the area responsible for rational, reasonable thought. As Caruth describes, it is the “meaning-making one (in the sense of rational thought, cognitive processing)” (Kaplan 34). Therefore, this holds opposite responsibilities of the emotional amygdala.

The image below provides a snapshot of the anatomy of the brain and its different components to better understand the workings (“The Amygdala”).



Auditory Hallucinations

The nameless narrator in *The Third Policeman* suffers from dissociation, which causes his logical and emotional self to separate from one another, as a result of his traumatic life. Rather, he separates himself from his self. When narrating the returning journey towards the home of old Mathers, descriptive words both prompt and express emotions. For example, when he begins describing his surroundings is the moment prompting de Selby's opinion on houses: "A row of houses, he regards as a row of necessary evils," and they are more comparable to coffins, confining residents within (O'Brien 22). By remembering the philosopher's observation of houses, this in particular, the narrator conveys his own emotions associated with the journey's beginning as evil, or foreboding. The nameless narrator continues by describing the gloom, strange, and frightening characteristics of his neighbor's home. Afterwards, though, he claims he lacked feelings, saying,

I did not feel that I was about to end successfully a plan I had worked unrelentingly at night and day for three years. I felt no glow of pleasure and was unexcited at the prospect of becoming rich. I was occupied only with the mechanical task of finding a black box. (23)

While this statement, completely void of feelings, acknowledges his focus solely on his emotions, rather than the logic of his situation at hand, it presents uncertainty. His plan he "had worked unrelentingly at night and day for three years," to obtain the hidden money from Divney's hiding place since the murder, is about to become his reality (23). The trust between the two roommates, as a result of the hidden money, is nonexistent, resulting in the narrator never leaving Divney's side. This closeness prevents Divney

from retrieving the box, and allows the narrator to reach his goal by making his “company unbearably close and unrelenting” (19). Within these three years from the night of the murder, the narrator “took care to sleep with him as usual” (20). In other words, the two being together at all times, even sleeping together, ensures neither can redeem the money without the other. When Divney directs the narrator to the house of Mathers alone, the narrator reaches for the box while thinking of his uncertain situation. The story then takes a shift:

I cannot hope to describe what it was but it had frightened me very much long before I had understood it even slightly. It was some change which came upon me or upon the room, indescribably subtle, yet momentous, ineffable...as if the daylight had changed with unnatural suddenness, as if the temperature of the evening had altered greatly in an instant...perhaps all of these and other things happened together for all my senses were bewildered all at once and could give me no explanation. (24)

The redemption of the moneybox, just as the narrator suggests, brings about an unexpected surprise, a change. Indescribable, uncertain and puzzling, this adjustment does not take the narrator to another location. Rather, it sets the stage for the narrator’s journey through his unknown, yet familiar world, beginning with him hearing a cough from his neighbor, Mathers. Reiterating Caruth’s claim, this traumatic event prompts a disconnect between his cortex, the rationalizing component of his brain, and his amygdala, the emotional component of his brain. From this moment of the change onward, the nameless narrator focuses more on emotions than he previously done within

the novel's beginning. Thus, O'Brien acknowledges his emotional separation from his logical self, paving the way towards to his newfound logical self, Joe.

Dissociation causes sufferers to experience various abnormal, seemingly psychotic side effects, just as the narrator witnesses with hallucinations. O'Brien's book is considered as fantastic as Lewis Carroll's work, relating to the psychotic. Although, simply because something obtains seemingly fantastic characteristics, describing it as psychotic is not always the case. For example, being told of a schizophrenic's hearing voices does not always mean the sufferer is what some would consider psychotic. Instead, hearing voices, or auditory hallucinations, should be better understood as what E. Ann Kaplan suggests, "A dissociative experience and not a psychotic symptom," despite being one of many characteristics of the disorder (Kaplan 36). The narrator does obtain characteristics of schizophrenia: visual hallucinations, delusions, and his fragmented and bizarre thought process is prevalent throughout the novel. Auditory hallucinations factor into these characteristics when the narrator introduces Joe. After attempting to retrieve the moneybox and while speaking with the neighbor the narrator had previously murdered, Mathers, is when the dissociation becomes apparent . (Italics are Joe's words)

In my distress I thought to myself that perhaps it was his twin brother but at once I hear someone say: *Scarcely. If you look carefully at the left-hand side of his neck you will notice that there is sticking plaster or a bandage there. His throat and chin are also bandaged.* (26).

The narrator does as he is told by Joe, prompting the realization of the appropriately placed bandages for the wounds previously caused by Divney and the narrator. Upon this realization, the narrator accepts he had been conversing with a murdered man. "But who

had uttered these words?” the narrator asks himself (26). As a result of the dissociation, Joe represents the nameless narrator’s sense of logic, or a part of the brain referred to as the cortex, while the mind of the narrator plays the emotional role. According to Julian Jaynes in *Journal of Psychological Trauma*, “until a few thousand years ago, humans did not possess self-reflective consciousness, and heard voices [...] which guided their decision-making” (Moskowitz 38). Therefore, these auditory hallucinations are considered “dissociative disorders,” which are common in schizophrenics (50). “Dissociative symptoms are strongly related to traumatic [...] or highly stressful experiences,” and they can be described, in the simplest terms, the real person dissociates himself from the ongoings within his world (50). Jaynes discusses a study which had been done, stating its participants who heard voices claimed they heard a “comforting or advising” kind of voice (46). In *The Third Policeman*, the reasonable voice of comfort is Joe, meaning the nameless narrator’s emotions are being consoled by his logical explanations for exciting events and persons.

Whether a result of schizophrenia or dissociation, the nameless narrator does suffer from hallucinations, the result of emotional trauma. Traumatic events increase a person’s stress levels, thus resulting in further emotional trauma. In the beginning of the novel, he recalls de Selby’s statement, “Of all the many striking statements made by de Selby, I do not think that any of them can rival his assertion that ‘a journey is an hallucination’” (O’Brien 52). Instead of a journey truly occurring, de Selby believes it is solely an hallucination. Similarly, Oscar Wilde once said, “It is because Humanity has never known where it was going that it has been able to find its way” (LeDoux 303). Both statements claim people are unaware of their chosen paths, just as the narrator’s

misdirected journey in *The Third Policeman*. This journey, or hallucination, of his maintains one purpose: to obtain the moneybox, but it is filled with many emotional and stressful events along the way. New York University's Professor of Neural Science Joseph LeDoux began studying the emotional workings of the brain in 1970, claiming "The projections of the amygdala to the cortex are considerably greater than the projections from the cortex to the amygdala" (284). In other words, the emotional component of the brain is directly linked to the cortical area, the logical area. Fear, or any emotion, reaches "the amygdala quickly" before alerting the cortical region, meaning emotional responses are faster than logical thoughts (Kandel 185). For example, when the narrator speaks with old Mathers, Joe calling attention to the facts comes much later. According to Dr. Eric Kandel, a Nobel Prize winning Neuropsychiatrist, people with schizophrenia "are not able to interpret reality correctly...unable to examine their beliefs and perceptions realistically or to compare them to what is actually occurring in the world around them" (Kandel 352). What Kandel means by this is the link between amygdala and cortex is either nonexistent or takes time for the acknowledgement of logic *and* emotion. Schizophrenia's characteristics are similar to Caruth's description of dissociation sufferers. Dr. Martin Dorahy and colleagues compiled research for a study printed in *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* in 2009, and this study composed of children who heard voices as a result of dissociation, or schizophrenia, with the goal of learning the differences between the two: schizophrenia and dissociation. While the outcome of the study, that dissociation in the young hear two or more auditory hallucinations and overlaps with characteristics of schizophrenia, may not conclusively separate the two, it does shed light on the differences (Dorahy 897). "Auditory

hallucinations (i.e., voices) characterize several of the first rank symptoms (e.g., voices conversing or passing comment)” and can be found in both dissociation and schizophrenia (892). In other words, suffering from auditory hallucinations is just one of many characteristics of schizophrenics and one of a few for those with dissociative identity disorder, or DID; and this overlaps both disorders.

Hallucinations by famous neuroscientist Oliver Sacks acknowledges the impact hallucinations, as well as their causes, have on reality. The historical component is fairly recent. According to Sacks, it was not until 1973 that David Rosenham performed a study on society’s perception of people who suffer from auditory hallucinations (Sacks 53). Eight people, all with no mental illnesses listed on their medical histories, went to various hospitals around the States, claiming they heard voices and sounds (53). No other complaints existed within the conversations, yet “all of them were diagnosed as schizophrenic (except one, who was diagnosed with ‘manic-depressive psychosis’)” (53). During the time spent in the hospitals, the treatment of the patients mirrored that of the patients with schizophrenia, receiving medication (which they did not take) and participating therapies. This study’s results, published in Rosenbam’s article “On Being Sane in Insane Places,” sprouted “immediate furor” upon *Science* magazine’s distribution (53). As a result, this study proves more attention must be provided to those patients who truly suffer from the disorder and all its characteristics, rather than solely one component.

Rosenbam’s study illustrates even the average person hears voices within his head from time to time. This particular voice, in the words of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, is known to many as an “inner speech,” or a

prerequisite of all voluntary activity. I talk to myself, as many of us do, for much of the day—admonishing myself (“You fool! Where did you leave your glasses?”), encouraging myself (“You can do it!”), complaining (“Why is that car in my lane?”), and, more rarely, congratulating myself (“It’s done!”). Those voices are not externalized. (60-1)

People speak to themselves, just as Vygotsky says, constantly keeping themselves in check, giving praise, internalizing complaints, and providing motivational support—not hallucinating. Joe is the narrator’s “inner speech,” who provides all logical reminders, thus preventing the narrator from externalizing complaints or praises. Similarly, one patient of Sacks, whose name is Joe, ironically enough, heard voices after he suffered from a climbing accident in the Andes, which caused his broken leg (61). Joe claims he heard a voice “encouraging and directing” him,

as if there were two minds within me arguing the toss. The *voice* was clean and sharp and commanding. It was always right, and I listened to it when it spoke and acted on its decisions. The other mind rambled out a disconnected series of images, and memories and hopes, which I attended to in a daydream state as I set about obeying the orders of the *voice*...So long as I obeyed the *voice*, then I would be all right. (61-2)

Joe, while suffering and on the brink of death in the Andes, heard voices, one more fantastic than the other, realistic one. The illogical one sprouted from his mind, discussing various scenes, events, and memories from his life. Contrastingly, the other voice, the logical one, provided commands and motivation for the other to survive. Similarly, the narrator in *The Third Policeman* represents the real Joe’s fantastic mind

while Joe, the logical voice in the novel, represents the real Joe's commanding voice. Charles Foran discusses this separation in his review, "*The Third Policeman* by Flann O'Brien," stating, "*The Third Policeman* is about how our subconscious propels us where our conscious selves wisely refuse to go" (Foran 66). The subconscious, in this case the narrator, takes the initiative to lead his conscious and logical self, Joe, towards something unsafe, or a place unfamiliar, thus prompting the discussion amongst the two separate "selves."

Joe, the nameless narrator's sense of logic, follows him throughout his journey, or in de Selby's words, "A journey is an hallucination" (52). Whether the narrator's hallucinations meet the proper diagnosis for schizophrenia or DID, it is no matter. What is apparent, however, is his suffering from auditory hallucinations, Joe, which characterizes both DID and schizophrenia. The narrator acknowledges, even, he is the only one hearing Joe when speaking with Mathers. At this time, the two talk about potential names for the nameless narrator, Joe being the one making suggestions, before the narrator thinks to himself, "Fortunately these remarks were not audible in the ordinary sense of the word" (33). By thinking of the benefits of hearing Joe, the narrator accepts, and appreciates, him having a voice of logic in his emotional world.

Visual Hallucinations

In addition to auditory hallucinations, the nameless narrator experiences visual hallucinations; however, these hallucinations are simply the result of the various traumatic events he experiences within his lifetime: stress, emotional detachment, and the

logic of using one's imagination. Before de Selby's claim about hallucinations, the nameless narrator witnesses what the novel's readers would consider a visual hallucination, the first of many to come. First, the readers learn of the nameless narrator's conversation with someone he had previously murdered, Mathers. Then, he finds himself walking towards a strange house, which he resides in for the bulk of the novel before, finally, he learns part of the ceiling in the barracks, luckily enough, serves as a map of the bizarre countryside, leading him to Mathers' house once more.

After searching for the black box in the novel's introduction, a traumatic event, or change, takes place, initiating the narrator's hallucinations. Following this change, his senses become disarranged and heightened, and the cough he hears coming from old Mathers seems to cause "some more awful alteration in everything, just as if it had held the universe standstill for an instant" (O'Brien 25). The nameless narrator then realizes the man coughing is old Mathers, resulting in his astonishment and uncertainty of everything: time, space, location, life, everything. Light "vanished from my sight, the dusty floor was like nothingness beneath me and my whole body dissolved away" (25). His emotions fade for a moment and allow him to look at Mathers more logically. He looks at his "horrible" eyes, which give him the sense "that they were not genuine eyes at all but mechanical dummies animated by electricity or the like, with a tiny pinhole in the centre of the 'pupil' through which the real eye gazed out secretively and with great coldness" (26). These eyes, the eyes of old Mathers, cause much discomfort in the narrator, and seeing the deceased man there prompts thoughts of the body, especially his eyes, being fake. The narrator, then, conveys his own perception on his thought process:

Such a conception, possibly with no foundation at all in fact, disturbed me agonizingly and gave rise in my mind to interminable speculations as to the colour and quality of the real eye and as to whether, indeed, it was real at all or merely another dummy with its pinhole on the same plane as the first one so that the real eye, possibly behind thousands of these absurd disguises, gazed out through a barrel of serries peep-holes. (26)

The nameless narrator, despite not knowing his own identity, feels as if the identity of the man sitting in front of him is an hallucination, or as if he is an imposter. The eyes cause him to believe the actual person sitting in front of him is not *the* actual person. Whether it is because far back in his jumbled memory, he knows the man is dead, or if he is simply sure the too mechanical eyes show lifelessness, it is uncertain. Whatever the reason, the narrator believes him a dummy with the real person, whose eyes are hidden through “peep-holes,” behind the mask (26). While this internal response to a person seems false, or an hallucination, there have been many cases illustrating similar circumstances.

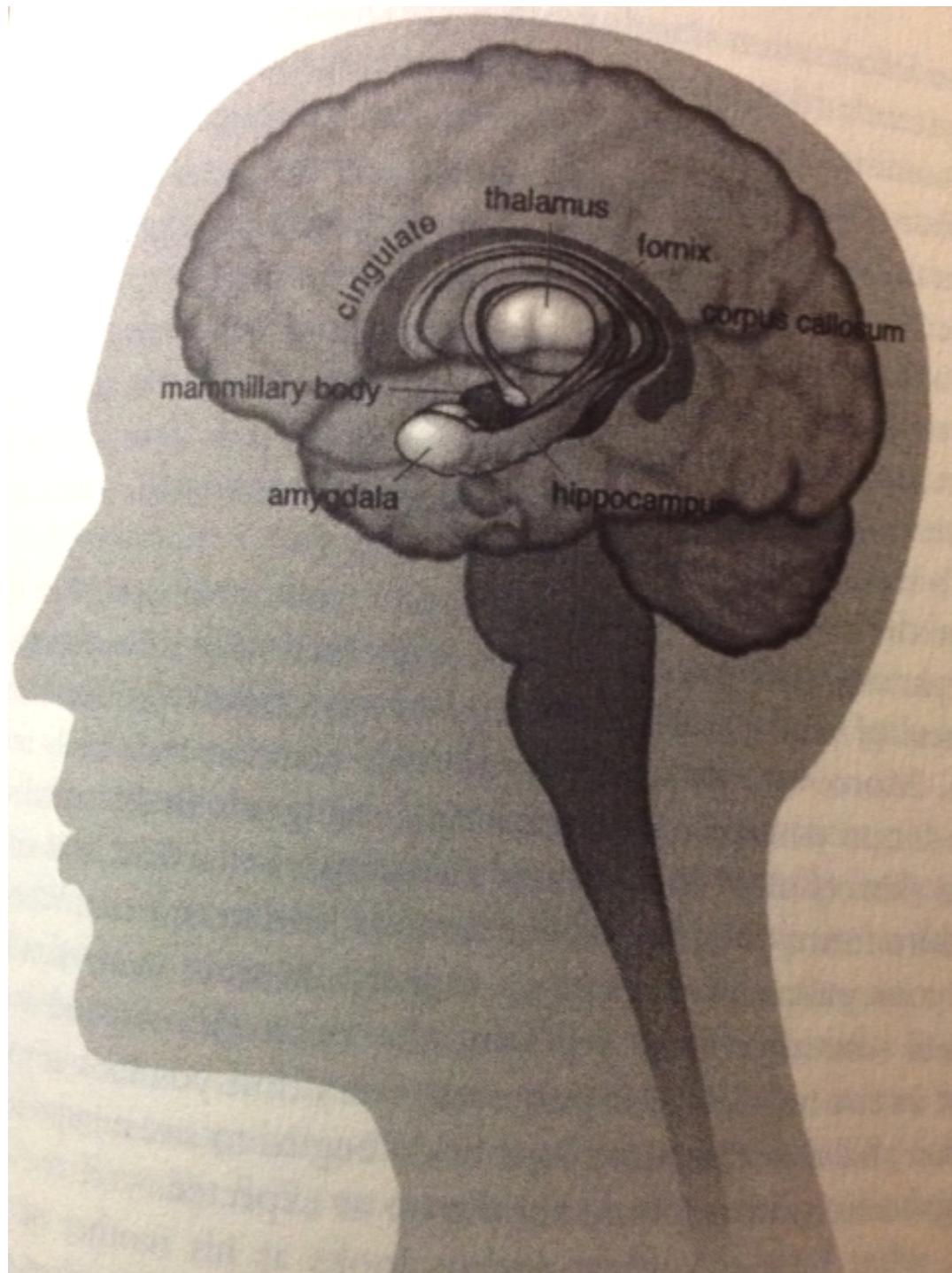
This particular case of what many people would consider a visual hallucination can be categorized as something other than an hallucination, actually. For example, Dr. Oliver Sacks, as well as other professors and doctors studying the inner workings of the brain compose texts on their former and current patients. These patients’ situations help better understand the concept of visual images, separate from hallucinating. One doctor in particular is Dr. V.S. Ramachandran, whose book, *Phantoms in the Brain*. While including a foreword by Dr. Sacks, *Phantoms in the Brain*, a compilation of odd cases

and situations, can help shed insight on the narrator's perspective, if looked at through a particular neurological symptom, rather than the general concept of hallucinating.

Imagining other people are imposters, or different from the people they claim, is not as common as other neurological disorders, but it does occur within *The Third Policeman* and amongst patients described in popular neuroscience books, such as those by Dr. Sacks and Dr. Ramachandran. In Ramachandran's *Phantoms in the Brain*, one chapter is dedicated to Capgras' delusion, "Chapter 8: 'The Unbearable Likeness of Being,'" and interestingly enough, it begins with a quote from one of Lewis Carroll's texts, located directly underneath the chapter's title (Ramachandran 158). "One can't believe impossible things," says Alice to the Queen (158). Ramachandran proves Alice statement wrong by discussing the reality behind his patients' (mis)perceptions, or their impossible beliefs, of their loved ones, relatives and others they have had close relationships with as imposters. Capgras' delusion is considered "one of the rarest and most colorful syndromes in neurology," where the patient, "who is often mentally quite lucid," begins believing people s/he is close to, or has some relationship with, as impostors (161). These "bizarre delusions can crop up in psychotic states," and "over a third of the documented cases of Capgras' syndrome have occurred in conjunction with traumatic brain lesions," similar to the accident one of Ramachandran's patients, Arthur, had been in and caused his head injury (161). Put simply, Capgras' syndrome can be a result of head trauma or psychosis, and it is characterized by sufferers believing people they once had close relationships with are imposters, or not the actual people they had known and had a close relationship with beforehand. Arthur's father called Dr. Ramachandran to seek assistance for his son, who did not believe his father was his

actual father. “That guy isn’t my father. He just looks like him. He’s—what do you call it?—an impostor, I guess. But I don’t think he means any harm. [...]he looks exactly like my father but he *really* isn’t” (159). The patient is looking at this in two ways, just as the narrator looks at things: logically and emotionally. According to Sacks, people with Capgras syndrome recognize people’s faces they know; however, people with the syndrome “no longer generate a sense of emotional familiarity” (Sacks 105). The fact is, the man looks like his father, just like old Mathers looks like the man he had previously murdered; however, there is something about him that does not trigger the emotional response to the actual person, similar to the narrator seeing old Mathers. Mathers is there, but it is like he is not there, but the *real* is behind the *fake* him and mechanical eyes.

This relates back to the disconnect between emotion and logic. The “temporal lobes” have regions which focus on “face and object recognition,” and when these regions are damaged, “patients lose the ability to recognize faces” (Ramachandran 162). The temporal lobes are responsible for recognition and obtain the hippocampus, which helps with making new memories (*INS Dictionary of Neuropsychology* 157). These memories, therefore, are linked to face recognition, as well as the limbic system. This system provides access to emotional and mnemonic information. The image below illustrates the location of the limbic system, as well as its components responsible for face recognition, memory and emotions. (Ramachandran 163).



Sending information to the limbic system, which is located within the center of the brain, prompts the emotional response for those communicating with people they have relationships with, or at least had prior to the incident; and said incident causes a disconnect between recognition and emotionally recognizing the person. Both Arthur's

case, as well as the nameless narrator's situation, prevents his brain's message relaying system from working properly; thus, the two know who people are, but there is no emotional response because of their brains being incapable of acknowledging the emotional relationship with the people, or imposters, in front of them.

After visiting with old Mathers, the nameless narrator continues on his uncertain journey towards the police barracks, which illustrates his absence of logical control over his imagination and emotions. He follows the country road, and an extraordinary spectacle was presented to me. About a hundred yards away on the left-hand side was a house which astonished me. It looked as if it were painted like an advertisement...did not seem to have any depth or breadth. [...] I had never seen with my eyes ever in my life before anything so unnatural. (O'Brien 55)

This astonishing house, which looks as false as an advertisement to the narrator, does not obtain the usual components of the average house. Instead, it looks unnatural—supernatural, possibly—and the narrator goes on further to claim the look of the house “was the greatest surprise I had encountered since I had seen the old man in the chair and I felt afraid of it” after realizing it was Mathers (55). Whether he fears the house because its location is supposedly the policemen’s place of residence, or he fears its unnatural characteristics, it is uncertain. However, the emotional response is activated by its falseness, the same terror which had been present when encountering and conversing with the man he had previously murdered. As the narrator gains distance upon the house, it seems as if it begins “to change its appearance” (55). Furthermore, the narrator seems “to see the front and back of the ‘building’ simultaneously,” and the house’s shape and

design looks “triangular” (55). The closer the distance he gets towards the daunting house, the more shapes, or forms, it takes. In other words, the more terrified the narrator, the more active are his emotions; and he experiences more visual hallucinations.

Experiencing hallucinations in response to emotional triggers signify a sense of paranoia, or fear. As the narrator makes his way towards the house, he considers it “momentous and frightening” (56). This hallucination of the police station, or house, occurs directly after leaving old Mathers. As previously discussed, dissociation and schizophrenia share the component of hallucinations; however in Kaplan’s *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, she acknowledges another perspective. Freudian theory of trauma suggests, “The traumatic event may trigger early traumatic happenings, already perhaps mingled with fantasy and shape how the current event is experienced” (Kaplan 32). In other words, when something traumatic happens (seeing Mathers), it may sprout earlier traumatic issues (the narrator murdering Mathers), which may bring about—if it has not already—fantasies shaping the current experience.

An alternative source to the frightening hallucination is that of stress. According to Sacks, “Severe stress accompanied by inner conflicts can readily induce some people a splitting of consciousness, with varied sensory and motor symptoms, including hallucinations” (Sacks 245). The narrator’s stress levels are drastically high. In addition to being uncertain about the world around him, he is approaching the policemen’s house after conversing with a man he had murdered years prior. He is paranoid, and everything which has happened to him thus far “seemed to have no purpose at all save to frame it and give it some magnitude and position so that I could find it with my simple senses and

pretend to myself that I understood it" (O'Brien 56). In other words, the events, the country roads, everything has directed him to this moment of finding the house. Therefore, a sense of paranoia, combined with high stress levels, together sprout the "momentous and frightening" hallucination of the house (56). He is paranoid and terrified for what will happen to him as a result of his previous traumatic events, such as committing murder.

Towards the end of the novel, another visual hallucination, a map drawing out the land of the surrounding countryside located on the ceiling of the police barracks, illustrates another illogical component of the story. The nameless narrator follows the Sergeant into MacCruiskeen's room within the house. After suggesting the narrator looks up to the ceiling, the Sergeant inquires of his observations. His response, that there is "little to be seen," except for "a blue bottle that looks dead," is strange; but it prompts the Sergeant's purpose for bringing him into the room: "'That is not a bluebottle,' he said, 'that is Gogarty's outhouse'" (127). As a turn of events, rather than the narrator hallucinating, or piecing the imaginary parts together, it is the Sergeant who claims the ceiling of MacCruiskeen's room is a map of the countryside in which they live.

Assuming a ceiling's cracks can connect to create a map of a particular location and area does not seem as fantastic, or imaginative, as a house moving. It does, however, demonstrate the Sergeant's use of his and MacCruiskeen's imagination, which is viewed as both logical and illogical.

First, the logical side allows O'Brien's readers to consider the ceiling map, hallucinations and the categories they fall into: visions, delusions and fantasies. Dr. Tiffany Jan of University of California, however, lists the various causes of

hallucinations in an article on Charles Bonnet Syndrome, “There are many etiologies for visual hallucinations, which include retinal disease, migraines, acute stroke, drug-related side effects, neurodegenerative disease, alcohol and/or drug use, toxic-metabolic encephalopathy and psychiatric illness” (Jan 544). In other words, O’Brien’s readers may provide a few reasons for the hallucinations; however, when looking at hallucinations from an alternative view, just as Dr. Jan does, there is a plethora of causes—none nearly as simple as calling them fantasies. She goes on to discuss the various categories of hallucinations. “Visual hallucinations can be categorized as simple or complex. Simple hallucinations involve basic imagery, such as lights, colors, lines and shapes, whereas complex hallucinations include images of people, objects or specific scenes” (544). Thus, *The Third Policeman* consists of both simple and complex hallucinations, simple in terms of the line-covered ceilings creating maps of the countryside and complex in terms of the nameless narrator visualizing the man he murdered on various occasions throughout the story.

Alternatively, O’Brien’s readers consider the ceiling map, as well as all other hallucinations within the story, as unreal. “‘The funny thing is,’ the Sergeant said, ‘that MacCruiskeen lay for two years staring at that ceiling before he saw it was a map of superb ingenuity’” (O’Brien 127). The nameless narrator responds, “Now that was stupid,” which brings the reader to question the reliability of MacCruiskeen, the Sergeant, as well as the narrator. If a person looks at lines on a ceiling for a length of time, especially two years, just as MacCruiskeen, one is apt to make his sense of logic of the lines. In one of the first books about hallucinations, *Hallucinations*, Brierre de Boismont tries acknowledging the causes of hallucinations and argues people need “to call things

by their right names” and categorize them properly, “*supernaturalism* and *rationalism*” (Brierre de Boismont x). In other words, even back in the mid-1800s, people were trying to acknowledge the difference between the supernatural and rational when it came to hallucinations and prevent people from simply believing those who hallucinate were madmen. He goes further to claim,

Ambition has doubtless made blamable use of hallucinations. Who would deny it? That visions and apparitions have been feigned by imposters is incontrovertible. But to all who have studied the question, the fraud is so easily discovered that we shall not even attempt a refutation. (xii)

What the author is meaning to say with this is people’s ambition, or the desire to get ahead of others in life, may prompt false images, or hallucinations. Similarly, in “Science, Philosophy, and ‘The Third Policeman’: Flann O’Brien and the Epistemology of Futility,” M. Keith Booker reminds everyone of Nietzsche’s work, who claims, “Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions” (Booker 51). This shows the perception, or misperception, people have on truth, or real information. Ramachandran’s patient, Arthur, truly envisions, or obtains the illusions, these people as imposters, which becomes his new reality. Relating this back to *The Third Policeman*, it is apparent the policemen’s ambitions, or illusions, overtake their senses of logic, and they fabricate images, the lines on the ceiling, claiming they illustrate something else, a map of the countryside. The nameless narrator convinces himself the Sergeant is correct: “When I looked carefully at the ceiling I saw that Mr Mathers’ house and every road and house I knew were marked there, and nets of lanes and neighbourhoods that I did not know also” (O’Brien 127). The narrator claims there are parts he does not know. Having grown

up and lived in that exact area for years, though, means he would have, or should have, known said areas. In other words, lines on the ceiling, lines the ambitious policemen are trying to claim ownership of this “phenomenon of the first rarity,” causes others to believe it creates an image of a map (127). Finally, Joe comes in the narrator’s mind to acknowledge his falsification of the image. “*By God... You’re a goner if you listen to much more of this gentleman’s talk*” (128). Logic trumps the lies on an image the policemen claim proud ownership over.

This map can be viewed both ways, the logical and the fantastic. Although, based on the information, it is most likely an unrealistic fabrication of the Sergeant, as well as the other policeman, ambitiously trying to make, or save, their own reputations.

Between the false, yet incredibly familiar Mathers, a terrifying police house, and an imaginary ceiling map, there are many logical explanations for the hallucinations within *The Third Policeman*, and they are not all simple fantasies.

The Unknown: Loss of Identity and Memory Loss

Memory, or lack thereof, plays a significant role in the plot and characters within *The Third Policeman*. As previously discussed, three years separate the murder of old Mathers and Divney sharing the location of their hidden treasure—the moneybox to fund the narrator’s book on de Selby. After informing the narrator of its location, Divney reminds the narrator, “If you meet anybody, you don’t know what you’re looking for, you don’t know in whose house you are, you don’t know anything” (O’Brien 21). In response, the nameless narrator agrees, saying, “I don’t even know my own name” (21). To take it further, the narrator describes the subsequent pages, saying, “This was a very

remarkable thing for me to say because the next time I was asked my name I could not answer. I did not know" (21). While the first sentence simply illustrates a common understanding amongst the two murderers, the second part is truly remarkable: after Divney's comment, the following person to inquire of the character's name receives only a confused response from the narrator. The novel's audience, expectedly, continue reading to the next chapter in order to find the missing puzzle piece of the picture—only to realize more pieces are missing: the character is incapable of remembering barely a thing, and unable to recall many new pieces of information.

Loss of Identity

Losing the sense of one's identity is a possible outcome of various events: physical injuries and/or abnormalities, traumatic events, and/or mental illnesses. Both the nameless narrator and old Mathers suffer from this loss. Being unaware of one's identity is simply one characteristic of memory loss as a whole. Therefore, studying identity loss prior to moving along to studying the loss of memory as a whole will help assist with the understanding of both losses.

Despite not knowing his own name, the nameless narrator is still capable of recalling particular logical facts, albeit only a few. Three years after the murder of old Mathers, the nameless narrator follows Divney's directions to redeem the black money box. Upon entering the home in which Divney hid it, his "mind was strangely empty," except for finding the black box (23). Once he reaches for it, "some change which came upon" him leaves him "bewildered" (24). The nameless narrator experiences a rush of sensations before hearing a cough coming from across the room in the house of old

Mathers. He then approaches the old man, who is, surprisingly enough, the old man he and Divney had killed years beforehand—old Mathers. According to the narrator, this person seems as if he is a fake Mathers with false eyes. Because of solely remembering the black box, the narrator buys time and distracts Mathers by asking questions about everything but what is truly happening, which is him conversing with a man he had killed years ago. The two hold a civil conversation consisting of tea and the likes and dislikes of old Mathers. Small talk ensues, and an extraordinary—yet common—question is asked by Mathers. “What is your name?” (32). At this point, the narrator realizes the vast impact such a simple question obtains. He thinks to himself a while prior to preparing an answer for the deceased man’s question. Unfortunately, he is incapable of doing so.

I was surprised at this question. It had no bearing on my own conversation but I did not notice its irrelevance because I was shocked to realize that, simple as it was, I could not answer it. I did not know my name, did not remember who I was. I was not certain where I had come from or what my business was in that room. (32)

The narrator may be unaware of his own identity, as he shares with the readers; however, he does know his business there. He is at the house to get the box and asks Mathers about it before thinking of his unknown identity.

After thinking of his surprisingly blank answer to the question, his logical self, or auditory hallucination, Joe, tries solving the problem for his emotional, confused self. Joe provides suggestions of potential names. “The name is Bari. Signor Bari, the eminent tenor,” Joe begins to suggest (33). He then elaborates, “Signor Beniamino Bari,”

who performed at La Scala Opera and “delivered the immortal strains of Che Gelida Manina, favourite aria of the beloved Caruso” (43). This suggestion, in addition to the list of potential names Joe provides for the nameless narrator seems as if it is a compilation of nonsense. Yet, there had been an Italian tenor whose first name was Beniamino, according to Don Culp, the author of *Great Voices of Opera*. Beniamino Gigli had been popular during the early 1900s, and he had performed “Che Gelida Manina” at “La Scala Opera” (Culp). Just as Flann O’Brien’s lifelong friend, Anthony Cronin, suggests, *The Third Policeman* came from various sources (Cronin). For these reasons, the nameless narrator’s auditory hallucination, Joe, providing suggestions for the narrator to claim the identity of real people is not surprising. Though, the suggestion to choose a name of possibly accomplished, real people does not help solve the puzzle of him losing his own awareness of his true identity.

Despite this seemingly unrealistic, or fantastic, occurrence, losing the knowledge of one’s own identity is more realistic and common than O’Brien’s readers would believe. Whatever happened prior to the narrator hearing old Mathers cough must have been a traumatic event, as it is the most logical explanation for the rest of the novel. According to Dr. Carlson and Dr. Ruzek in their work, “Effects of Traumatic Experiences,” people who find themselves in a dangerous situation, “are overcome with feelings of fear, helplessness, or horror” (Carlson). These feelings describe the narrator’s response to Mathers, his surroundings and the police barrack perfectly. Carlson goes on to state, “People who react to traumas are not going crazy. They are experiencing symptoms and problems that are connected with having been in a traumatic situation” (Carlson). *The Third Policeman* is a novel with a nameless narrator who seems crazy,

but can simply be a result of his traumatic event—a traumatic event which may have impacted his head.

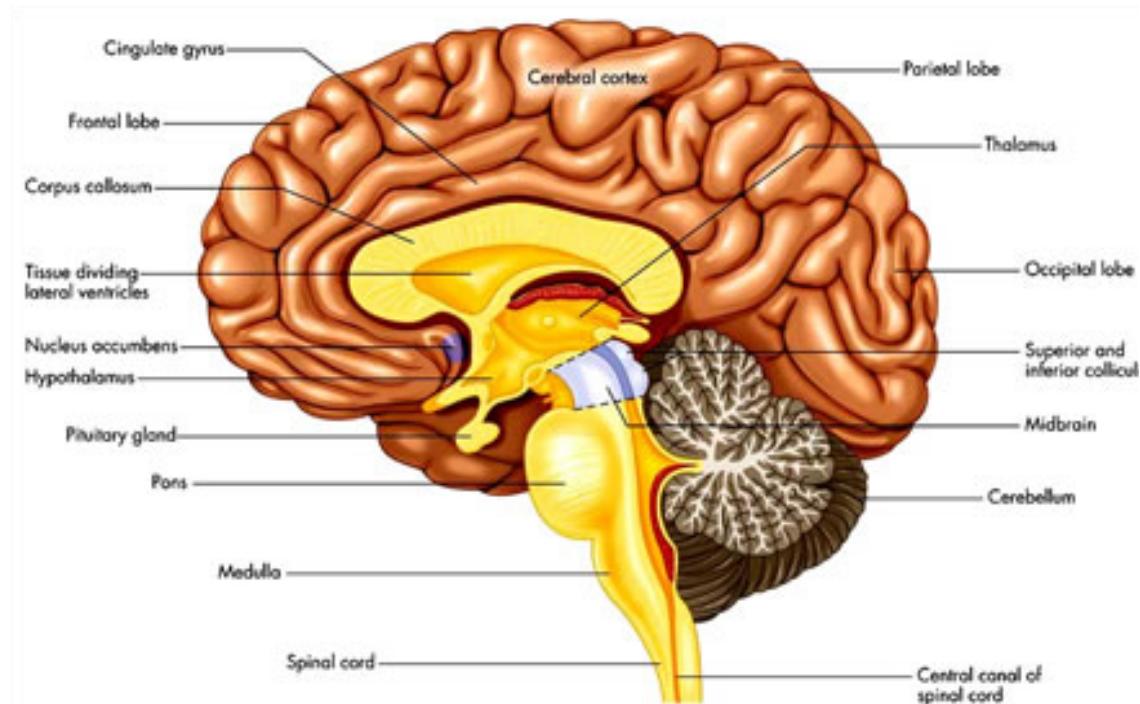
Many head injuries cause the sufferers to be unaware of their own identities. Dr. Ann McKee, a neuropathologist who helps lead The Center for the Study of Traumatic Encephalopathy, or where people donate their brains for research after deceased, acknowledges the significant importance temporal lobes have on memory during the dissection of an NFL player's brain: "The temporal lobes are crucial to memory and learning [...] I would assume that with this amount of damage the person was very cognitively impaired. I would assume they were demented" (Pilkington). Since the temporal lobes play such a key role in memory, the looks of their degeneration prompts her to believe the person had suffered from dementia. Football players receive multiple blows to the head; however, one severe head injury has the potential to result in the same, if not similar, outcomes. As a result, one can lose his sense of self, which is just one, albeit significant, result of memory loss. Whether the traumatic event had been a result of head trauma, readers do not know, but this is the most logical explanation of the novel's subsequent events, especially those associated with memory loss.

Memory Loss

The narrator suffers from amnesia as a result of psychological trauma, considering his life's events. Amnesia is a common outcome of surviving a traumatic event, and according to *Cognitive Neuroscience*, "Deficits in memory as a function of brain damage, disease, or psychological trauma are known collectively as amnesia [...] Amnesia can involve either the inability to learn new things or a loss of previous knowledge, or both"

(*Cognitive Neuroscience 324*). In this circumstance, the nameless narrator obtains very little previous knowledge, save for the black box and Mathers, yet he is capable of recalling certain pieces of information, which is illustrated throughout the rest of the novel. Following the inquiry of his name and the realization he is incapable of answering the common question shows the nameless narrator suffers from amnesia. This particular case is characterized as a result of psychological trauma, considering his life's previous events.

The image below shows the particular regions of the brain responsible for memory and will be discussed further in depth (“Brain and Function in the Context of Acquired Brain Injury”).



Amnesia occurs when the brain's "hippocampus is wired to receive information from the cortex as well as return information to it" (Medina 141). Oftentimes, the hippocampus does not work accordingly. Whether it is a result of trauma, age, or a disconnect between the two, the hippocampus does not communicate with the other areas within the center of the brain, the limbic system. This limbic system, according to Dr. Joseph LeDoux in *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*, is made up of the "amygdala and hippocampus," which are "found deep inside the medial part of the temporal lobe" (LeDoux 190). Just as Caruth had previously stated, Kandel agrees, "The amygdala is thought to coordinate the conscious experience of feeling and the bodily expression of emotion, particularly fear" (Kandel 342). When the nameless narrator arrives in the house of Mathers, he is frightened. Because of being unfamiliar with his surroundings, despite being his own neighborhood, his emotions consume his thoughts until Joe, his auditory hallucination and sense of logic, redirects his focus towards the facts of the situation at hand.

Similarly, Clive Wearing's case helps others see the impact amnesia obtains on its sufferers. According to his wife's story in *The Telegraph*, Clive's brain had been eaten by a virus. "His memories had fallen out. The doctors said it was encephalitis [...] and instead of going to the mouth, it goes to the brain. The brain swells up, and, before long, brain crushes against bone" (Wearing). This virus initiates swelling, which impacts the temporal lobe region, altering the ability to obtain and recall memories as before. "In spite of Clive's amnesia, inside he retained his fundamental intelligence: that same intelligence that had propelled him throughout his career. He was often lucid," which is what made "his condition all the more horrific" (Wearing). The previous memories of

Clive's life had been wiped away due to his brain no longer obtaining the "parts necessary to recall anything that had happened," and he could no longer acquire, or retrieve, any new information (Wearing). There has been progress made by the Wearings, though, despite the uncertainties surrounding amnesia sufferers. Little by little, his memory improves. It is with much therapy and determination. Similarly, the nameless narrator in O'Brien's novel, in due time, begins recalling places, people, and, eventually, his own character.

Throughout the novel, the narrator is capable of remembering new information quite well, despite potentially obtaining amnesia-like symptoms; and, eventually, his previous memory begins returning to him. This can relate back to the murder of old Mathers, who receives a fatal blow to the back of his head. The impact of the bicycle pump most likely causes damage to his limbic system. Even though the limbic system is located deep within the brain, as illustrated in the above image, and would not have been directly hit by the bicycle pump, such a blow to the head impacts this region, leading to future memory problems. Referring back to Ramachandran's text, the amygdala, located towards the center of the brain, or "in the front pole of the temporal lobe," receives "input from the sensory areas and sends messages to the rest of the limbic system to produce emotional arousal" (Ramachandran163). Its main responsibility, therefore, is to receive input, or messages, from sensory retrieval areas, such as sight, sound, etc., and send said messages to other areas of the brain, those in the limbic system, thus producing an emotional response. According to Eric Kandel,

It has been known since the end of the nineteenth century that head injuries and concussions can lead to a memory loss called retrograde

amnesia. A boxer who is hit on the head and sustains a brain concussion in round five of a match will usually remember going to the event, but everything after that will be blank. (Kandel 211)

In other words, the concern with this kind of trauma has been researched since the 1800s, and head injuries oftentimes result in some form of amnesia, whether it is retrograde or a different type. The specific form of amnesia of both the narrator and Mathers cannot be confirmed, but it shows throughout the storyline by the inability to recall facts.

Keeping Mr. Clive Wearing in mind as the exception, suffering any form of major impact to the head results in subsequent memory loss, with prior memories leading up to the impact remaining intact. O'Brien's main character, however, is in a state of confusion, the result of being incapable of recollecting the correct words, or terms, he had previously used to describe, explain, or remember something previously known, and he still does know. These circumstances make memory loss seemingly more problematic than normal. For example, O'Brien's nameless narrator begins his endeavor towards the police barracks in hope of finding the black box with money, the one thing left in his memory, with a fabricated excuse. This excuse he tells the policemen one could consider it a justification, rather, for his arrival. As he walks towards the station, he thinks

I would soon have the black box [...] I would go to the barracks and report the theft of my American gold watch. Perhaps it was this lie which was responsible for the bad things that happened to me afterwards. I had no American gold watch. (O'Brien 38)

Made at the end of Chapter Two, this comment introduces O'Brien's readers to his journey, and the beginning of the following chapter continues on the exact topic. Chapter

Three begins with more information on de Selby. “Of all the many striking statements made by de Selby, I do not think that any of them can rival his assertion that ‘a journey is an hallucination’” (O’Brien 52). The fabricated philosopher claims, “Human existence” can be defined by “a succession of static experiences each infinitely brief” (52). This parallels the fragmented thinking aspect of Kaplan’s definition of quiet trauma, as well as that of the *INS Dictionary of Neuropsychology* on schizophrenia. By simply describing the narrator’s journey, making his first stop in this unknown world, the barracks, the narrator draws on the blank slate. “I came here to inform you officially about the theft of my American gold watch” (63). He is creating an event and object which is nonexistent to him in order to acclimate to his surroundings. Another case of someone suffering from memory loss due to damage to the limbic system is William Thompson, a patient of Dr. Oliver Sacks, who has “a little trouble with [his] memory—difficulties remembering,” resulting in “confabulations and fictions of all kinds. For him they were not fictions, but how he suddenly saw, or interpreted, the world” (Sacks 109). Because of Thompson’s absence of working memory, he feels it necessary to come up with one, whether about himself, or his friends—made up or real. Booker’s stance puts Thompson’s perceptions into perspective. “The defamiliarizing strangeness of works such as *The Third Policeman* enriches our conceptions of the world by suggesting alternative conceptions of reality that escape the limiting confines of traditional systems of knowledge” (Booker 51). In other words, the traditional limitations put on reality need challenged, and O’Brien, just as Thompson, puts these realities into alternative perceptions. Thompson’s amnesia causes his mind to become what many people refer to as a “blank slate.”

Therefore, he and other sufferers, just like the narrator in the novel, resort to picking up their own chalk to write whatever comes to mind—false or fact—on the slate.

Additionally, the nameless narrator is exactly that: nameless because of his amnesia. Similar to the boxer Kandel describes who suffered from a blow to the head during a match, other people who suffer from trauma to the head become people whose names, jobs, and families are unknown to them—they are fabricated. Being without a name shares the significance of being without a past. Therefore, many sufferers fabricate pasts, identities, and life stories, just as the nameless character does with the story of the lost watch *The Third Policeman*. Upon his arrival to the new location, he is asked about his name over tea with the dead Mathers. “‘I can always get a name,’ I replied. ‘Doyle or Spaldman is a good name and so is O’Sweeny and Hardiman and O’Gara. I can take my choice.’” (O’Brien 33). Although the nameless character is incapable of recalling his own name, his memory still obtains the names of others he had previously heard of and liked.

Just as making up his own name, *The Third Policeman*’s nameless narrator fabricates other stories about himself. Along the way towards the police barracks, he runs into a strange man, Martin Finnucane, another man sporting a wooden left leg. Prior to realizing what they consider their one-legged brotherhood, Finnucane threatens to kill him, and the narrator informs him,

robbery and murder are against the law and furthermore my life would add little to your own because I have a disorder in my chest and am sure to be dead in six months. As well as that, there was a question of a dark funeral in my teacup on Tuesday. Wait till you hear a cough. (48-9)

First, the nameless character's memory is incapable of knowing "robbery and murder are against the law," wherever the two characters find themselves, because of his own uncertainty about the precise location (49). Second, there is no disorder from which he suffers, or had previously suffered, before being incapable of knowing. Finally, he previously sat for tea with old Mathers, his neighbor, but he is uncertain of his current location—just a few roads down from Mathers. Therefore, being absolutely certain about the month and day of his impending death, but not knowing his location, presents a disparity between what he does know, does not know, and what he simply claims as false knowledge.

All of these considered, in addition to the claim the nameless narrator makes regarding his memory, stating his "mind was strangely empty," illustrate he is, in fact, suffering from some form of amnesia (23). Because of his uncertainty about anything—time, location, people—the nameless narrator decides to fabricate most of what he says with the hope of making himself someone, just as most people would do after suffering from traumatic events, resulting in a disconnect between working parts of their brains.

Playing with Language and Words: Aphasia

While O'Brien's narrator first introduces the readers to old Phillip Mathers within the novel's first few sentences, not until after learning about his friendship with Divney is their motivation behind murdering the old man made apparent. Their plan, rather Divney's plan, is to steal the old man's black box, which is filled with money, with the sole purpose of reallocating the funds to go towards the printing and publishing of the narrator's long-awaited "de Selby Index" (14). Despite this motive benefiting mostly the

narrator and his life's goal, he is hesitant to follow Divney to the house of old Mathers from the beginning. Disregarding the hesitation, he follows through with Divney's plan and finds himself mechanically following alongside his roommate, going through with his suggestions without having an alternative thought. Not until this point do the readers of O'Brien's novel finally learn of the surprisingly indecent, yet elaborately told, murder of the characters' neighbor, old Phillip Mathers, who

received a blow in the back of the neck from Divney's pump which knocked him clean off his feet and probably smashed his neck bone. As he collapsed full-length in the mud he did not cry out. Instead I heard him say something softly in a conversational tone—something like 'I do not care for celery' or 'I left my glasses in the scullery'. Then he lay very still. (16)

The narrator witnesses Divney's blow to the back of the old man's neck, at the base of his skull, where the brain stem is located. In response to this fatal hit, old Mathers mentions, "in a conversational tone," something about not caring for celery or leaving his "glasses in the scullery" (16). The narrator is unable to correctly interpret the man's words. Regardless of what precise words Mathers mentions, something about vegetables or an addition to the cooking and cleaning addition to his kitchen, either comment is a sentence about himself and completely irrelevant to his current situation of getting attacked by his neighbors ("Scullery"). Expectedly, O'Brien's readers consider this statement atypical for a person who receives a painful blow to the back of the neck. Many would anticipate reading something about him responding with a shriek of pain, yelling, or performing a defensive attack on the perpetrator. These responses seem more logical, and initiating a

conversation about celery, or anything found in the kitchen for that matter, is simply an absurd way of responding to such an attack. German Professor of Arts Dr. Wim Tigges agrees and believes *The Third Policeman* is just as illogical as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In his paper "Ireland in Wonderland: Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* as a Nonsense Novel," Tigges states O'Brien's writing is only "truly nonsensical work" (195). He elaborates:

The characteristic elements of nonsense I consider to be a permanent [...] unresolved balance between meaning and simultaneous absence of meaning, an ultimate lack of emotional involvement, and a reality which is created by means of play with language [...] places the novel firmly in the nonsense tradition as started by Lewis Carroll. (195-7)

Put simply, various characteristics of nonsense are prevalent throughout the novel, and playing with language, especially when it is used to illustrate a lack of meaning and emotions, is O'Brien's key to keeping the fantastic storyline intact. However, O'Brien is not playing with language to create fantasy with the old Mathers responding as he does to the attack, rather it is based on reality.

Surprisingly enough, O'Brien writing the response of old Mathers in such a so-called nonsensical way is more realistic and rational than many would think or believe. After previously addressing many case studies and outcomes of real people who have suffered from head traumas and/or injuries, the attention will now move towards the instantaneous aftereffects—both physical and psychological—of people who obtain similar injuries to that of old Mathers. According to Juliet Mitchell in "Trauma, Recognition, and the Place of Language,"

Definitions of trauma abound within the psychoanalytic discipline. My own definition is going to be simple. A trauma, whether physical or psychical, must create a breach in a protective covering of such severity that it cannot be coped with by the usual mechanisms by which we deal with pain or loss. (Mitchell 121)

In other words, Mitchell argues the definitions of trauma in relation to psychoanalysis are complex, which is true. She, therefore, breaks it down, providing an easier definition for people to understand by stating if it is a physical or psychical trauma, mild or severe, it must be so severe it interrupts the sufferer's comfort zone. This interruption from the norm is so powerful, no response to the trauma can be dealt with, or "coped with," by what many consider the "usual mechanisms," or what most people judge as normal (121). As a result, many sufferers respond unusually—in an absurd way. While there is a physical cause prompting Mathers to respond the way he does, any person's response to trauma is expected to be more of an absurd response. Another trauma theorist, Dominick LaCapra, agrees the trauma experience is a "shattering" one which "even threatens to destroy experience" of one's life (LaCapra 117). Therefore, any traumatic experience results in the sufferer needing to find a means of coping with the devastation, and this form of coping is not always the normal response people would expect from the sufferer. For example, Mathers attacking and yelling at Divney after hitting him is the assumed reaction; but the physical and psychological trauma this event causes brings about an unusual response: the calm discussion of vegetables and duties pertaining to the kitchen. Receiving a blow to the back of the neck, which is where one's brain stem is located, has the potential to initiate a plethora of consequences. The most noticeable of

these is the unemotional tone and simple wording Mathers uses, as it represents what doctors perceive as a common and expected aftereffect of any head injury: aphasia. This does characterize what Dr. Tigges describes as “an ultimate lack of emotional involvement,” but it also illustrates O’Brien’s so-called “play with language” (Tigges196). When old Mathers responds, “‘I do not care for celery’ or ‘I left my glasses in the scullery,’” no emotional tone is found in his words (O’Brien 16). Although, what he says, not how he says it, makes him seem, simply put, crazy. Many people, mainly those in the medical field, are aware of aphasia, its causes and its accompanying characteristics. According to O’Brien’s close friend, Anthony Cronin, O’Brien had once worked as a civil servant, along with John Garvin, a man who had written many criticisms on James Joyce. It was at work, and with Garvin, where O’Brien could participate in literary discussions. Later, he had been moved to work under the Minister for Health in Dublin, Ireland (Cronin). Whether or not O’Brien had been a participant of any discussion, at work or through personal inquiry, regarding the potential impact aphasia has on its sufferers, it is debatable. Regardless, through the response of old Mathers, O’Brien illustrates his knowledge about the subject matter quite well in *The Third Policeman*.

Aphasia has been acknowledged in many pieces of writing well before O’Brien’s time. One neurologist, Dr. Heilman writes about closed head trauma and its histories. Valerius Maximus (30 A.D.) wrote of “a learned man of Athens who lost his memory for words after being struck on the head with a stone” (Heilman 265). A rock hitting him on his head caused his knowledge of words to become a clean slate. According to Professor of Clinical Neurology Oliver Sacks, “‘Aphasia’ means, etymologically, a loss of speech,

yet it is not speech as such which is lost but language itself—its expression or its comprehension, in whole or in part” and is a result of suffering from brain damage (Sacks 34). In other words, people experience aphasia because of having suffered some kind of damage to their brains, just as Maximus had suffered. They are still capable of speaking, just like normal, but a disconnect between what they mean to say and what is actually stated prevents the full message from coming across. Thus, it is more difficult, if not impossible, for them to formulate a correctly worded, whole sentence. Sacks goes further to state,

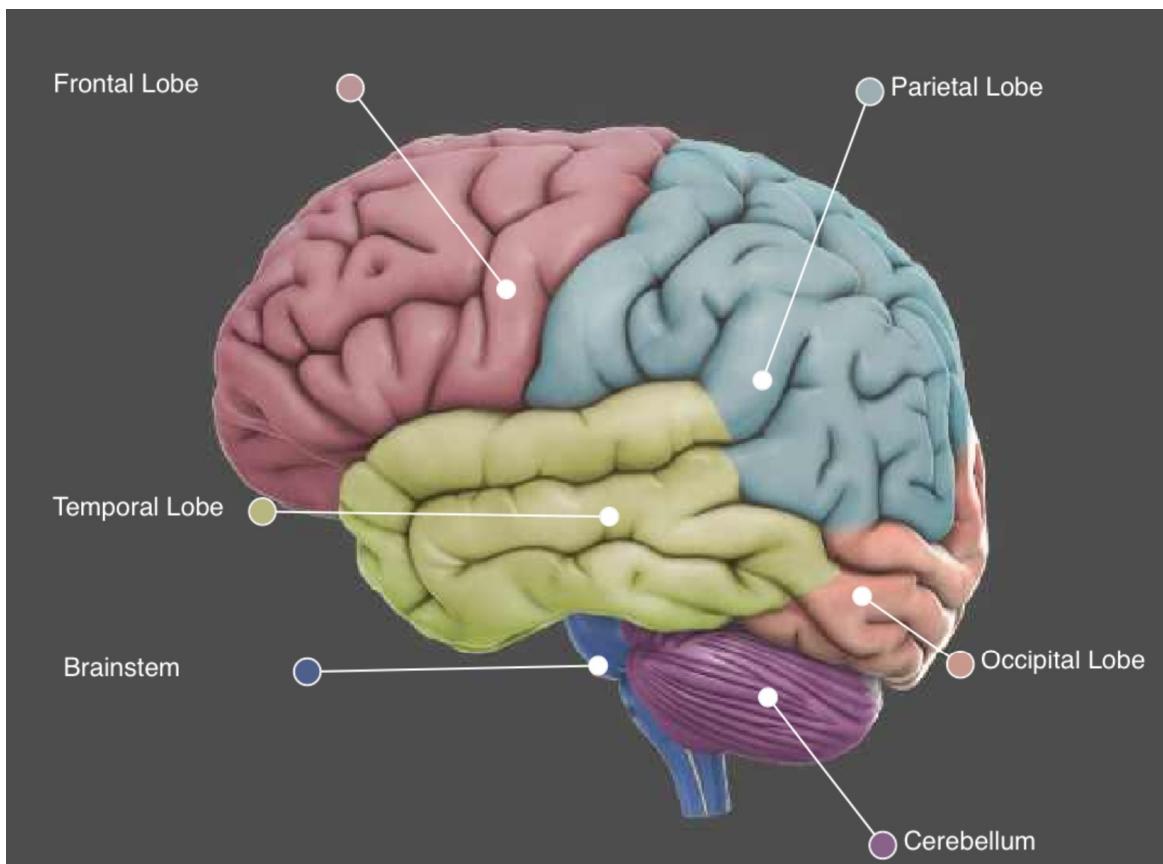
Expressive aphasia is characterized by a difficulty finding words or a tendency to use the wrong words, without compromise of the overall structure of sentences. Nouns, including proper names, tend to be affected. In more severe forms of expressive aphasia, a person is unable to generate full, grammatically complete sentences and is reduced to brief, impoverished, “telegraphic” utterances. (35)

Not only is finding the correct words difficult, but the form of expression, comprehension, and the understanding of language is lost, or lacking, when the sufferer tries communicating with others. This explains why, after receiving such a blow in the back of his head, old Mathers comments, quite calmly, about celery, glasses, or whatever it is the nameless narrator believes he hears.

Furthermore, when Wernicke and Broca studied the brain and its relationship to language, they found different areas of the brain are associated with forming language, concluding there are two different types of aphasia. Nobel Prize winner Eric Kandel writes when “damage is in the back of the brain, in a region now called Wernicke’s area,”

the second type of aphasia occurs (Kandel 123). This type, unlike the first, which is called Broca's aphasia and deals with impairment in the frontal lobe causing "an impairment in the production of speech" Wernicke's aphasia is the disruption of understanding, or comprehending, what is spoken (122). Between the two general types, though, various forms of aphasia, such as Anomic aphasia, Global aphasia, Conduction aphasia, and Paraphasia develop (Heilman 266). In addition to the piece on Maximus, another man who recovered from a form of aphasia describes his own experience in his published article in an 1867 *British Medical Journal*. According to Bramwell's article, his words became gibberish after a farming accident: a club provided him with a severe blow to his head. To "my surprise and horror, I found I could only utter unintelligible sounds" when attempting to tell them to take me to the doctor (Bramwell 180). While all forms of aphasia deal with one's means of communication via speech, this man's form of aphasia is opposite that of old Mathers. Contrastingly, it is classified as "Broca's aphasia," or "non-fluent aphasia with good comprehension" (Heilman 266). Divney hits Mathers on the back of his neck, where the brain stem is located. The location of the blow, in addition to his subsequent verbal response, illustrates what we now consider, according to neurologist Patrick McCaffrey's article in *Neuropathies of Language and Cognition*, "Paraphasia" (McCaffrey). The blow from the back would have forced his brain to shift towards the front, damaging both areas.

The image below provides a snapshot of the anatomy of the brain, specifically the different regions responsible for aphasia (3D Brain).



As Heilman states, “Trauma to the right orbitofrontal and left temporoparietal regions,” or the foremost areas of one’s brain, results in aphasia (Heilman 268). “Paraphasia refers to the production of unintended syllables, words or phrases during the effort to speak,” and in the paraphasia Mathers has is known as “Verbal” paraphasia (McCaffrey). According to the *INS Dictionary of Neuropsychology*, this form of paraphasia is a “production error in which a word is substituted for the intended word (e.g., ‘art’ for pencil)” (*INS Dictionary of Neuropsychology* 123). Mathers speaking unintended words for what he really means, just as this definition describes, is common of paraphasias. In response to this, O’Brien’s readers are left wondering, *What does he mean by scullery? Why is he talking about his glasses? What are the words he is really wanting to say?* To add to this, he speaks without any emotional tone whatsoever, illustrating not just his

inability to understand his own thoughts, but as well as his failure to communicate them correctly through speaking tones.

The ill-conceived statement of old Mathers about celery or scullery has sprouted much criticism because of its irrationality. Keith Hopper suggests in his work, *Flann O'Brien: a portrait of the artist as a young post-modernist*, that this comment was deliberately written by O'Brien to make the readers “feel obliged, somehow, to at least attempt some kind of formal decoding...it is certainly a strategic intrusion. Its inclusion deliberately impedes our emotional involvement with the murder scene” (Hopper 221). In other words, O'Brien's insertion of such a curious comment allows the reader to maintain an objective stance, rather than becoming emotionally involved with the storyline and responding negatively to the violence which triggers the old man's comment.

The (Non)Sensical

Throughout his life, Flann O'Brien, one of Brian O'Nolan's many pseudonyms, desired becoming a well-known author—just like *The Third Policeman*'s nameless narrator. Due to his father's early death, the responsibility of raising and tending to his siblings made writing a seemingly impossible feat for O'Brien. Although, he persevered and kept writing, as seen in his various publications under multiple pseudonyms. These pieces, however, are simply short news pieces serving the purpose of gaining money to support his family. *The Third Policeman* is different, and this book serves the same purpose for O'Brien as those works had done for William Saroyan. This American writer, who visited O'Brien and his friends in Dublin, claims he, just like O'Brien,

is not writing a story; that he does not believe in stories, that stories are falsities; and that he is merely trying to be truthful about something he has experienced. To some temperaments, the book could well have a destructive effect on the idea that it is either possible or desirable to construct prose fictions which honestly reflect experience. (Cronin 98)

Saroyan's pieces of writing have been compared to O'Brien's, which mirror both authors' intentions: the texts are not intentional works of fiction, or "falsities;" rather, the two authors write about true experiences (98). In a letter from O'Brien to Saroyan, he informs him of the way he makes "ordinary things uproarious and full of meaning and sentiment and make yourself appear saner than everybody else is merely crazy" (99). Both authors are capable of pulling off this way of writing, though—making everyday happenings boisterously funny when describing such events while, at the same time, causing these nonsensical occurrences to obtain a sense of normalcy within the context of the story. O'Brien received "a lot of ideas" from Saroyan; however, he acknowledged he must wait a bit to use these ideas to show he would not "be copying" him (99). From O'Brien's short letter, his intentions with *The Third Policeman* are made apparent: making normal happenings hilarious and others seem insane, which he pulls off masterfully—despite many critics considering his writing fantastic.

Normal happenings are made hilariously crazy and O'Brien writes seemingly incomprehensible events as perfectly normal. Eternity, for example, is like the concept of infinity, and according to Dustin Anderson of Florida State, "Truth is that we don't fully understand ideas like infinity or nothingness" (Anderson 2). O'Brien writes about Eternity, something readers are incapable of fully understanding, using a normal writing

style with descriptive language. Anderson takes his argument further when discussing the cognitive science behind Beckett's works, "The mind...is both vastly hugely mind-bogglingly big and pretty damn complicated" (2). O'Brien, like Beckett and Joyce, explores "the complexity of the minds" in his works, and this is one example—by making something incapable of understanding, Eternity, simple and normal (2). Others disagreed with O'Brien's talent, resulting in multiple rejections for publication of *The Third Policeman* because of its absurdities, causing the author to claim he had lost it whenever people would make inquiries. Bernard Benstock claims in "Flann O'Brien in Hell: *The Third Policeman*," "There is a possibility then that Brian O'Nolan never intended this new book to be published at all, and that decision was made by others after his death" (Benstock 69). If O'Brien had written the novel solely for himself, though, submitting it to multiple publishers would not have occurred. Whether O'Brien truly "lost" it while traveling is questionable, because it had been found within his home, leading to its posthumous publication decades after its finalized draft (Cronin). These bizarre components of the storyline—Eternity, parades of one-legged men, the main character seeing the man he had murdered throughout the cyclical story—have the capabilities of truly occurring. The most realistic is that of the narrator repeatedly seeing and conversing with old Mathers, despite murdering him in the beginning pages of O'Brien's cyclical novel.

The nameless narrator encounters the man he murdered multiple times a few years, after the actual crime is committed, illustrating his realistic coping mechanism for the traumatic murder. In the beginning of the novel, after the narrator returns to the old man's home to redeem the moneybox Divney hid away, the narrator sits and visits with

old Mathers. The naïve narrator follows through with the conversation, mistaking him for his brother—not the actual man he had murdered years ago. Finally, the logical voice of Joe corrects him, making him realize it truly is old Mathers. The narrator states, “Forlornly, I looked and saw that this was true. He was the man I had murdered beyond all question. He was sitting on a chair four yards away watching me” (O’Brien 26). It takes Joe pointing out the locations of the bandages he wears for the narrator to realize their locations are the same places he and Divney had caused damage during the murder, the back of his head and chin.

The narrator repeatedly hears and sees Mathers throughout his journey. Towards the middle, for example, the narrator overhears a discussion of Mathers. Two of the three policemen, the Sergeant and Inspector O’Corky are speaking. Inspector O’Corky asks, “Did you know that a man called Mathers was found in the crotch of a ditch up the road two hours ago...?” (99). This is yet another auditory hallucination of the narrator. Afterwards, the narrator thinks, “To say this was a surprise which interfered seriously with my heart-valves would be the same as saying that a red-hot poker would heat your face if somebody decided to let you have it there” (99). The Sergeant then informs Inspector O’Corky the narrator is responsible for the murder, because it “was your personal misfortune to be present at the time” (101). Before entering the policemen’s world, the murder had never been solved, meaning his guilt ate away at him. Being punished for the murder of old Mathers in this situation, though, is the consequence of the event’s stressful aftereffects. Interestingly enough, the murder Mathers described of Mathers by Inspector O’Corky is not the same way the narrator and Divney had initially murdered the old man.

Towards the end of the novel, when the narrator's memory begins returning to him, he envisions old Mathers once more. The narrator rides a bicycle towards the house of old Mathers, and

Suddenly my mind became clouded and confused. I had some memory of seeing the dead man's ghost while in the house searching for the box. It seemed a long time ago now and doubtless was the memory of a bad dream. I had killed Mathers with my spade. He was dead for a long time.
My adventures had put a strain upon my mind. (180-1)

The nameless narrator's mind begins remembering, albeit a cloudy and confused. By returning to the home of old Mathers, or the scene of the original incident, he now recalls the events which previously transpired there. Until this moment, his recollection of many events had been almost nonexistent, but the bicycle ride throughout his former environment serves as a refresher to his memory. Not remembering said event because of the trauma incurred is a blessing, as Freud's psychoanalytic theory "assumes that anxiety will only result when traumatic memories are dispatched to the unconscious corners of the mind" (LeDoux 239). Therefore, by the nameless narrator remembering these traumatic instances of the old man's murder, he initiates an anxious response. Before seeing the home, where the murder had occurred, the narrator's memory had been somewhat of a blank slate, learning and remembering little by little. According to Professor of Neural Science, Joseph LeDoux, stress and traumatic situations, "cause malfunctions in the hippocampus. This suggests that at least in some instances the failure to recall an instigating trauma may be due to a stress-induced breakdown in hippocampal memory function" (239-40). His life's stressful events paved the way to his broken-down

memory, or his absent memory. Throughout the novel, until the moment he returns to the home of old Mathers, his brain had been unable to recall anything as a result of the stressful situation in which he found himself.

Even though this explains his memory, or lack thereof, throughout the novel, his last vision of old Mathers needs to be evaluated as well, since it occurs subsequent to the moment of recollection. Recalling the traumatic event, just as Freud's theory suggests, instills anxiety (239). The narrator entering the deceased man's home brings about even more visual hallucinations as a result of said anxiety, causing him to remember the graphic murder. Another patient of Oliver Sacks, Donald, suffers from a similar situation. Years ago, he killed someone under the influence of PCP, and the details "were macabre, and could not be revealed in open court. [...] Comparison was made with the acts of violence occasionally committed during temporal lobe or psychomotor seizures" (Sacks 161). Donald obtained no memory of the murder, and he accepted the sentence of spending four years in a psychiatric hospital (161). Like the narrator in O'Brien's book, Donald's mind is void of the murder he had committed, continuing to live as if it had never occurred. Donald earned weekend passes, allowing him to return to bicycling, his former love. Unfortunately, he was pedaling fast one day, going down "a steep hill when an oncoming car" caused him to turn, lose control and get "flung violently, head-first, onto the road" (162). Consequently, he sustained a severe head injury and a "severe contusion of both frontal lobes" (162). After being comatose for two weeks, he started recovering, and with his recovery brought the nightmares.

As consciousness grew clearer, so memory, full memory, a now terrible memory came with it. There were severe neurological problems...and

with these, with the last of these, something totally new. *The murder, the deed, lost to memory before, now stood before him in vivid, almost hallucinatory detail.* (162)

Donald's bicycle accident, causing him to suffer from severe head trauma, brought about memories—the real memories—of the gruesome murder he had committed. Every specific detail of the event seemed extraordinarily vivid to him, and the visions were uncontrollable. It is interesting the accident prompted these memories and caused him to remember, especially in such elaborate detail, the people, event, everything from something his brain had previously worked to repress.

Even more interesting is the fact the nameless narrator also travels by bicycle, making his way towards the exact location of the murder he had committed in O'Brien's novel; however, unlike Donald, no accident occurs to sprout his memory. The narrator's bicycle ride, accident and head trauma free, triggers his absent memory, resembling Donald's experience. Arriving upon the house's door, the narrator is terribly fearful of the potential visions awaiting him behind the sole lit window viewed from the outside. He goes through multiple trials and errors before finally reaching the seemingly nonexistent room. By following the light, the narrator finds this police station within the walls of the house and sees the dead man there. Upon discovering the light's source, he sees the man he had murdered. Within Mathers' house, there is a well-lit, tiny police station—“*inside the walls of*” his house, actually—where he sees Mathers (O'Brien 189). The body was not like a normal human body the narrator knew, but

the face at the top of it belonged to Mathers. It was not as I had recalled seeing it last whether in my sleep or otherwise, deathly and unchanging; it

was now red and gross as if gallons of hot thick blood had been pumped into it. The cheeks were bulging out like two ruddy globes marked here and there with straggles of purple discolouration. The eyes had been charged with unnatural life and glistened like beads in the lamplight.

(189)

This time, unlike the narrator's previous meetings and sightings with Mathers, he sees the real Mathers as he had been murdered with the "red and gross" face with cheeks "bulging out" and beady eyes showing "unnatural life" (189). Consistent with Donald, the patient of Sacks, the narrator sees the real consequences of the murder. By repeatedly hitting Mathers with the spade beforehand, the narrator originally caused this currently fearful sight.

Like the other instances within O'Brien's novel, no reasonable logic justifies the narrator seeing a deceased man. It is not the result of a psychotic break, so why does he see and speak with a murdered man years after the murder? According to the doctors of the similarly situated Donald, they, too, cannot provide specific reasons rationalizing why the patient began seeing the person he had murdered. The cause of it, the "questions remain a mystery to this day" (Sacks 165). There is no logic behind the mind's actions, especially in this particular scenario.

O'Brien uses his logical—yet fearful—story to transfer his own terror of modern technologies to his readers. At this point in the novel, the narrator learns he, too, is dead after making his way throughout the house to find his former roommate, John Divney, almost 20 years older than just a couple days ago when the narrator went towards the black box. The narrator learns his death is the result of Divney hiding explosives in the

black box, a three-day journey equals almost 20 years and his life is now a journey through a cyclical hell. According to Val Nolan in “Flann, fantasy, and science fiction: O’Brien’s surprising synthesis,” O’Brien “had already expressed an interest in the terrifying potential of modern explosives technology” through his other pieces of work (Nolan 185). In other words, O’Brien attempts sharing his knowledge and fear with his readers.

O’Brien conveys his fear of new technology, mainly bombs, through writing science fiction mixed with reality, causing a sense of dread in his readers. For example, *The Third Policeman*’s narrator undergoes many seemingly fictional experiences and witnesses absurd sights, some terrifying, but almost all share similar characteristics of people’s experiences in real life after surviving a traumatic event. This intertwinement produces

sci-fi anxiety: technology dehumanises us, transforms us into something less than the sum of our parts, a loss of some essential aspect of ourselves that is the concurrent payoff for technology’s promise of cyborgization.

(Nolan)

The bomb, a form of technology, ruins people’s lives and removes them from their humanly characteristics: liveliness, feelings, emotions and life. Just as Nolan describes, the humanity of *The Third Policeman*’s narrator is partially removed from his self: a portion of his body (his leg), his ability to reason (Joe takes over), his memory and the comprehension skills necessary to understand both time and his situation—all because of advancements during O’Brien’s time. Like Mary Shelley writing *Frankenstein* after learning of the scientific research and advancements of her time, O’Brien’s *The Third*

Policemen serves the same purpose. After reaching the dreadful ending of his novel, readers find themselves reevaluating the importance of such advancements and wondering if the benefits will always outweigh the negatives.

Conclusion

Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* is characterized by extremely fantastic events and highly logical occurrences. Forgetting one's own name, calmly discussing celery or kitchen areas subsequent to receiving a blow to the back of the head, repeatedly seeing a previously deceased neighbor, knowing the location of Eternity and envisioning shifts in a house's architecture can only be described as imaginary, and illogical, occurrences. Expectedly, O'Brien's readers believe these fantastic characters and events obtain no characteristics of reality or logic. However, the book's illogical events are more realistic when studied further. For example, forgetting one's name is not a typical occurrence, but it is common for someone suffering from a severe head injury, traumatic event, or amnesia. Additionally, upon receiving a blow to the back of the head, most people believe shrieking and yelling out in pain is more logical than initiating a discussion about celery and kitchen areas—although, the latter is more apt to occur. Because of O'Brien's novel containing such incredible concepts as the aforementioned issues within its storyline, in addition to even more unrealistic happenings, "*The Third Policeman* is comparable only to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as an allegory of the absurd" with what its publishers call its author's "endless comic invention" (Harper Perennial). Despite people claiming such occurrences are pure fantasy, O'Brien's novel does obtain many realistic—not absurd—components when read through a trauma lens,

specifically physical and psychological trauma to the brain, as illustrated by various case studies. Trauma can affect one's mind, causing him to forget his own identity, have auditory and visual hallucinations and converse with the man he murdered; because these have all occurred various times to multiple neuroscientists' patients.

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