

Flann O'Brien
CONTESTING LEGACIES

EDITED BY
RUBEN BORG, PAUL FAGAN
AND
WERNER HUBER



First published in 2014 by
Cork University Press
Youngline Industrial Estate
Pouladuff Road, Togher
Cork, Ireland

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-78205-076-6

Typeset by Tower Books, Ballincollig, County Cork
Printed in

www.corkuniversitypress.com

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some of the essays collected in this volume have their origins in papers delivered at *100 Myles: The International Flann O'Brien Centenary Conference*, which was held at the University of Vienna, 24–27 July 2011. Neither the conference itself nor this edited collection would have been possible without the generous support of various individuals and institutions. The editors would like to express their sincere gratitude to H.E. Ambassador James Brennan and cultural attachés Niamh Neylon and Ian Devine (representing the Embassy of Ireland in Austria) for their continuing encouragement and steady support, as well as to the Rector's Office, the Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies, the Department of English and American Studies, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research and the City of Vienna. Special thanks go to Dr Julia Lajta-Novak, Dr Sandra Mayer, Ms Tamara Radak, Ms Ulrike Zillinger and Dr Dieter Fuchs for their help with the organisation of the conference and the preparation of this volume. Finally, the editors are grateful to Jack Fennell for his guidance in Irish language matters, David O'Kane for graciously providing the collection's artwork and to Maria O'Donovan and Mike Collins at Cork University Press for their work in bringing this volume to fruition.

Vienna, January 2014
Ruben Borg
Paul Fagan
Werner Huber

TEXTUAL NOTE

The following abbreviations are used throughout:

Primary

- ABB* Myles na gCopaleen, *An Béal Bocht*. (Cork: Mercier, 1941, 1999).
BM Flann O'Brien (Myles na Gopaleen), *The Best of Myles*, Kevin O'Nolan (ed.). (London: Harper Perennial, 2007).
CL Myles na gCopaleen/Gopaleen, 'Cruiskeen Lawn', *The Irish Times*.
CN Flann O'Brien, *The Complete Novels: At Swim-Two-Birds, The Third Policeman, The Poor Mouth, The Hard Life, The Dalkey Archive*, Keith Donohue (introd.). (New York, NY: Everyman's Library, 2007).
MBM Flann O'Brien, *Myles Before Myles*, John Wyse Jackson (ed.). (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2012).
PT Flann O'Brien, *Plays and Teleplays*, Daniel Keith Jernigan (ed.). (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2013).
SF Flann O'Brien, *The Short Fiction of Flann O'Brien*, Neil Murphy and Keith Hopper (eds), Jack Fennell (trans.). (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2013).
SP Flann O'Brien, *Stories and Plays*, Claud Cockburn (introd. and ed.). (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1973).

Secondary

- Baines* Jennika Baines (ed.), *'Is it about a bicycle?': Flann O'Brien in the Twenty-First Century*. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011).
Cronin Anthony Cronin, *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien*. (London: Grafton, 1989).
Hopper Keith Hopper, *Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-Modernist*, 2nd edn, J. Hillis Miller (foreword). (Cork: Cork University Press, 2009).

x *Textual Note*

- RCF Neil Murphy and Keith Hopper (eds), *Flann O'Brien: Centenary Essays, The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 31, no. 3, Fall 2011. (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011).
- Taaffe Carol Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate*. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008).

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

SIR MYLES NA gCOPALEEN (the da) who has been buried in the country for some months, was exhumed last week following a dispute as to the interpretation of a clause in his will [. . .] The grand old man was alive and well, and looked extremely fit as he stepped from the coffin. 'Never again,' he said as he jested with reporters before being driven away in a closed car. (*BM*, 158)

In 2011, 'the da' was resurrected once again to offer his expert testimony in the unresolved dispute over the legacy of the author Brian O'Nolan – the progenitor not only of Myles Sr and Jr and his most famous heir Flann O'Brien, but also of a host of literary offspring whose parentage remains a point of contention. The occasion was the centenary of O'Nolan's birth, marked by an international gathering of readers and scholars at *100 Myles: The International Flann O'Brien Centenary Conference* at the University of Vienna and its Centre for Irish Studies. Their common purpose: to take stock of how the writer's legacy has been shaped throughout the last century. Yet one might wonder to what extent O'Nolan would have appreciated the efforts of these 'Flanneurs' and 'Mylesians' given Sir Myles's mature reflections, following his re-exhumation, on the inconvenience of afterlife:

'I considered carefully,' Sir Myles said, 'the advisability of dying intestate but rejected the idea as too dangerous. [. . .] I would have placed upon me the onus of establishing quite novel juridical theses. For example, I would have to show that there is an alternative to testacy or intestacy, viz., extestacy, which would be the condition I would claim to be in. I would have to show that death is an essential concomitant of intestacy and this would involve lengthy legal definitions of death. I would have to show that death is not final and conclusive. This in itself would involve equally recondite definitions

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of life. My own 'existence' would be called in question and I would have to prove – on oath, mind you! – that I was not dead, notwithstanding my recent decease and the hasty nuptials of my dear widow. [. . .] Even my undoubted right to participate as next-of-kin in my own estate would be called in question. The income tax authorities would challenge the inclusion of funeral charges under allowable expenses and would probably insist on sticking me for death duties. It would all be far too troublesome. I would not like it at all. Gentlemen, I would rather be dead.' (*BM*, 158–159)

Implied in the parable of the resurrected da's legal troubles – almost as though 'legal troubles' were the very definition of life after death – is a hilariously forbidding view of literary immortality, but perhaps also a commentary on the task of the critic. Whether O'Nolan scholars consider themselves executors of his will or its beneficiaries, it seems they must take stock of a deep-seated discomfort with any form of afterlife, literary or otherwise.

Thankfully, as close as he has come to obscurity at times, Brian O'Nolan did not die intestate, but entrusted to us some of the finest works of twentieth-century literature. The matter of his legacy, however, has often been as burdensome as Sir Myles seems to have feared. Born 5 October 1911 in Strabane, County Tyrone, O'Nolan's two most famous and innovative novels *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) and *The Third Policeman* (1967; written 1939–40) were both written, under the guise of Flann O'Brien, before the author had even outgrown his twenties. Each could easily take a seat alongside Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) at the head table of masterpieces of comic literature. Yet O'Nolan's reputation remains a strange one indeed. While Anthony Burgess might urge that 'of all the neglected truth-tellers of our age, Flann O'Brien is perhaps the most considerable [. . .] You *have* to read him',¹ O'Nolan's standing as one of the best kept secrets of modern literature has been dogged by the idea that by the end of his life, 'a great future lay behind him'. 'Was it the drink was his ruin', Hugh Kenner asked, somewhat less than rhetorically, 'or was it the column? For ruin is the word. So much promise has seldom accomplished so little'.² Once actuated, this narrative of underachievement and disappointment can take on a life of its own in the eyes of its tellers, who find everywhere, even in O'Nolan's greatest achievements, indices of its work.

At Swim-Two-Birds, Flann O'Brien's riotous matryoshka of a debut novel, was praised by James Joyce as 'a comic work of remarkable creative power',³ and by Jorge Luis Borges as outdoing even the Argentine fantasist's own verbal labyrinths,⁴ before selling a mere 244 copies and being consumed, along with Longman's London warehouse, back into obscurity and legend by a *Luftwaffe* bombing raid. The issue of inheritance weighs heavily on the work and not only the contested issue of O'Nolan's own debts to Joyce. Against this charge O'Nolan would protest that the book was 'not a pale-faced attempt to hold a mirror up and has nothing in the world to do with James Joyce'. Rather the writer presented his debut as 'a lot of belching, thumb-nosing and belly-laughing', humbly adding: 'I honestly believe that it is funny in parts'.⁵ It is and more than in parts; yet as Graham Greene insightfully pointed out in his reader's report for Longman, 'its amazing spirits do not disguise the seriousness of the attempt to present, simultaneously as it were, all the literary traditions of Ireland'.⁶

O'Brien's follow-up, *The Third Policeman*, offered a fantastic vision of the Irish midlands re-imagined as a hellish place populated by grotesque bicycle-obsessed policemen. By turns hilarious and frightful, sublime and ridiculous, the book follows the misadventures of a murderous scholar, as he struggles to make sense of his uncanny surroundings, of the policemen's impossible inventions and of absurd theories about harnessing the fundamental energy of the universe for boiling eggs. Tellingly, inheritance is again at the root of the scholar's problems. It is the bequest of a small farm that seals his fate, setting up the plot, serving as a catalyst, creating the opportunity for his disastrous relationship with John Divney:

A full year had not passed when I noticed that Divney was using the word 'we' in his conversation and worse than that, the word 'our'. [. . .] After that it was useless trying to tell him that it was I who owned everything. I began to tell myself that even if I did own everything, he owned me. (CN, 227)

Championed by Pulitzer Prize winner William Saroyan, *The Third Policeman* was perhaps O'Nolan's masterpiece and it was rejected for publication in the writer's lifetime.⁷

In the aftermath of this rejection and while supporting his mother and eleven siblings with a day job as an Irish government civil servant, O'Nolan produced two decades worth of work on which critics have

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been keen to hang the label of 'squanderer'. *An Béal Bocht* (1941), the memoir, 'discovered' by Myles na gCopaleen, of one Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa (aka Jams O'Donnell) in the perpetually rainy, poverty-stricken and relentlessly Gaelic Corca Dorcha: 'written in Gaelic'; over two decades (4 October 1940–1 April 1966) of bitingly satirical and uproariously anarchic *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns cataloguing clichés, bores and the strange adventures of Keats and Chapman: 'tomorrow's fish wrap'⁸; a late return to the novel and the Flann persona with *The Hard Life* (1961) and *The Dalkey Archive* (1964): 'diminishing returns'. Thus we find in O'Nolan an author that combines the tags of 'incomparable comic genius' and 'avant-garde innovator' with that of 'wasted talent'.

Yet, these critical counterfoils seem wildly lacking in comparison with the cheques that Myles himself wrote towards down payments on his own good standing in posterity. As even a casual reader of *Cruiskeen Lawn* will know, the question of his own legacy was one that occupied Myles's thoughts regularly:

I DISLIKE LABELS – rather I mean it's not that they aren't terribly useful. *They are, old man.* But do . . . do they sufficiently take account of one as . . . a . . . person? There is my dilemma. (How do you like his horns?) But [. . .] I know how the small mind hates what can't be penned into the humiliating five-foot shelf of its 'categories'. And so . . . if you must libel me, sorry, wrong brief, if you must label me, if you must use one epithet to 'describe' a being who in diversity of modes, universality of character and heterogeneity of spatio-temporal continuity transcends your bathetic dialectic, if, in short, one . . . practically algebraic symbol must suffice to cover the world-searing nakedness of that ontological polymorph who is at once immaculate brahmin, austere neo-platonist, motor-salesman, mystic, horse-doctor, hackney journalist and ideological catalyst, call me . . . call me . . . (qu'importe en effet, tout cela?) call me . . . ex-rebel. (*BM*, 373)

Myles's monomaniacal narcissism is part tongue in cheek, no doubt, yet perhaps here we find a trace of an expansive practice of enquiry into a polymorphic legacy that constantly undermines itself in order to refashion itself anew and neatly sidestep the red tape of literary after-life. A mode of appraisal that, rather than leaving the resurrected 'ex-rebel' longing for a return to the grave, 'transcends your bathetic dialectic' between 'hackney journalist and ideological catalyst' by contesting all of the labels that have been attached to the author.

What if, rather than the ruination of his immense talent in subservience to an inferior medium, the *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns represent O'Nolan's great modernist magnum opus in that most Benjaminian site of modernity, the newspaper?⁹ What if, rather than a minor, if funny, bald parody of *Peig* and *An t-Oileánach*, Myles na gCopaleen's *An Béal Bocht* deserves acknowledgement for the subtlety of its nuanced cultural critiques, the innovation of its compositional strategies and the fullness of its achievement beside Flann O'Brien's more established novels? What if long-standing views of O'Nolan's position on the spectrum from parochial conservatism to international experimentalism are complicated by the rich expanses of largely uncollected experimental Gaelic texts, from the anarchic tales and columns that he contributed to Éamon de Valera's *Irish Press* to the predominantly Gaelic first years of *Cruiskeen Lawn*? And what if the wealth of O'Nolan's short stories, dramatic texts, translations, poetry, teleplays, uncollected columns and non-fiction, once reassessed, call into question his reputation for wasting his talent? The essays collected within this volume aim to tackle these contested issues head-on; in the process laying bare the amount of exciting work that lies before this emerging and expanding generation of O'Nolan scholars.

Yet, beyond centenary festivities, the time is ripe for such a re-evaluation of this great late-modernist writer. With isolated exceptions, O'Nolan scholarship has long subsisted on the margins of Irish Literary Studies. Even when the work produced was of the highest calibre, the rubric 'Irish Modernism' tended to provide the co-ordinates for readers, with O'Nolan's exiled and significantly more canonised, compatriots James Joyce and Samuel Beckett as standard terms of comparison. Flann O'Brien and Myles na gCopaleen were, Hugh Kenner proclaimed, 'not bottled for export'.¹⁰ Yet in recent years this trend has begun to change, with critics finding O'Nolan's fingerprints all over self-reflexive fictions by Alasdair Gray, Anthony Burgess, John Fowles and Gilbert Sorrentino,¹¹ and exploring his stature among authors as varied as Georges Perec, Patrick McGinley, Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges.¹² Following Timothy O'Keeffe's *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan* (1973), Anne Clissmann's pioneering *Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings* (1975) and Rüdiger Imhof's casebook *Alive Alive O!: Flann O'Brien's At Swim-Two-Birds* (1985) a full ten years later, the last two decades have seen monographs on O'Nolan that hint at new lights by which the author's

work might be read.¹³ Breandán Ó Conaire tackled 'Gaelic Myles',¹⁴ while M. Keith Booker took on 'Menippean Flann'¹⁵; Keith Donohue and Joseph Brooker 'Irish Modernist Myles',¹⁶ and Sue Asbee and Thomas F. Shea 'Metafictional (Post-)Modernist Flann'.¹⁷ Monographs have also started to emerge from continental Europe, from scholars such as Roberta Ferrari, Monique Gallagher, Ralf Zimmerman, Jürgen Meyer, Christian Schuldt and Thierry Robin.¹⁸ So much for the notion that O'Nolan was 'not bottled for export'.

More recently, in a new wave of O'Nolan scholarship, a number of book-length studies devoted to O'Nolan's work have picked up the different threads established by these pioneers and woven them into a more complex tapestry, not in isolation, but in fruitful dialogue with each other. Four works in particular from the current generation of O'Nolan scholarship stand out as important points of reference for the essays in this collection. Two book-length studies published by Cork University Press set the general borders of the terrain. Carol Taaffe's *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate* (2008) expertly applies the toolkit of the cultural critic to O'Nolan's work, reading the fiction and the newspaper columns against the Irish context that informs them.¹⁹ Keith Hopper's *Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-Modernist* (1995; 2nd edn, 2009), by contrast, provides a groundbreaking analysis of O'Nolan's experiments with literary form (especially with the form of the novel), presenting O'Nolan as an Irish post-modernist whose metafictional experiments are best read in alternative to the two prevailing paradigms of Irish modernism: Yeats and Joyce.²⁰ Elsewhere, two recent O'Nolan collections have subtly negotiated the terrain between these two flags in the sand. Jennika Baines's *'Is it about a bicycle?': Flann O'Brien in the Twenty-First Century* (2011) aligns itself more closely to Taaffe's cultural contextual approach,²¹ while a special Flann O'Brien edition of *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (2011) positions itself in conversation with Hopper's calls to explore O'Nolan as an innovator of post-modern forms and to re-centre *The Third Policeman* as the site for such critique.²² Each collection demonstrates the robustness of O'Nolan's work for a variety of critical approaches, thus providing an important precedent for this collection.²³

The essays in this volume expand on these examples through three interrelated strategies. Firstly, they address the need to rethink O'Nolan's canon by re-evaluating his lesser-known works and personae,

foregrounding the centrality of his journalistic writing, of his short stories and of his Irish-language masterpiece *An Béal Bocht*. Secondly, they promote O'Nolan's international profile while examining debts and influences closer to home. Finally, they explore this broader canon as a fertile ground for a range of critical perspectives.

Broadening the canon

The essays in the volume's first section aim to redraft the O'Nolan literary canon by bringing a rich panoply of 'minor' texts in from the margins and analysing them alongside the major novels.

Even from his student days, O'Nolan was making anarchic, often surreal contributions, under various guises, to the University College Dublin student magazine *Comhthrom Féinne* and to his short-lived Dublin monthly *Blather*, which announced itself to the world with the bold, if somewhat spurious, claim of being 'THE ONLY PAPER EXCLUSIVELY DEDICATED TO CLAY-PIGEON SHOOTING IN IRELAND' (*MBM*, 96). The most prominent work from this period is 'Scenes in a Novel by Brother Barnabas (Probably Posthumous)' (1934), which pits its putative author against creations who refuse to follow his design (*SF*, 49–53). The story anticipates not only many of the themes and devices of O'Nolan's post-UCD debut *At Swim-Two-Birds*, but also three decades of writing about problems with authority of one kind or another. Between and against, the canonical authorities of the novels and columns, the contributors here plough the course of richly metafictional and complex, yet critically under-analysed short stories ('Díoghaltais ar Ghallaibh 'sa Bhliain 2032!', 'Teacht Agus Imtheacht Sheáin Bhuidhe', 'Scenes in a Novel', 'John Duffy's Brother', 'The Martyr's Crown', 'Two in One'), plays (*Faustus Kelly*, *Thirst*), non-fiction ('A Bash in the Tunnel', 'The Pathology of Revivalism'), student writing, letter-writing and a wealth of equally under-analysed correspondence, drafts and manuscripts housed in collections in the Morris Library (Southern Illinois University), John J. Burns Library (Boston College) and Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (University of Texas at Austin). The welcome recent republication of O'Nolan's short stories, plays and teleplays in two volumes by Dalkey Archive Press has provided further impetus for these investigations; as does the editorial note by Neil Murphy and Keith Hopper that these valuable resources offer 'an initial act of recovery rather than a completist project' (*SF*, ix). In the same spirit, while focusing overdue

critical attention on O'Nolan's 'minor works' as fertile sites for literary and theoretical investigation, the essays in the present volume do not close the door to enquiry into these texts, but rather invite future scholars to follow them in re-assessing O'Nolan's fuller body of multi-genre and polyphonic comic texts.

Keith Hopper opens the collection by exploring Flann O'Brien's 1940 short story 'John Duffy's Brother' as a complex text with an uncanny unspoken notion at its centre. Using O'Nolan's boisterous *Envoy* editorial on James Joyce as a frame by which to access various anxieties submerged throughout O'Nolan's work, Hopper deftly interweaves intertextual readings with Joyce's 'A Painful Case' and John Keats's 'Upon First Looking into Chapman's Homer' in order to open up O'Brien's story to a suspicious reading of its anxieties of influence (as well as the influence of anxiety) and of oppressions both divine and cultural.

Continuing this theme, Jack Fennell unfolds another aspect of O'Nolan's multigeneric output beyond Myles the scathing satirist and Flann the daring experimenter in literary forms: that of Brian Ó Nualláin, Gaelic science-fiction writer. Focusing on two 1932 Irish-language short stories published in de Valera's *Irish Press*, Fennell reads O'Nolan's engagement in the genre of science fiction against a historical moment in which the tension between science and religion was increasingly defining Ireland's cultural make-up. Opening out his argument to revisit O'Brien's final novel *The Dalkey Archive*, Fennell finds within its negotiations of genre an index of O'Nolan's existential anxieties and apocalyptic 'Manichaeian' imagination.

Marion Quirici shifts the conversation of O'Nolan's metafictional 'mastery' from the familiar terrain of the Flann novels to the less travelled roads of the shorter fiction. Casting new light on O'Nolan's negotiations of the communicative literary circuit through a close analysis of the frame-breaking strategies of 'Scenes in a Novel (Probably Posthumous)', Quirici offers a comparative genetic reading of 'The Martyr's Crown' with an earlier draft, 'For Ireland Home and Beauty', in order to elucidate O'Nolan's attitudes and experiences regarding writing, revision and publication. Vividly illuminating the connections between the textual object and the historical conditions of its production and reception, Quirici finds that in O'Nolan's hands these metafictional techniques insist, ultimately, upon the definitive vulnerability of text and the failures inherent in authorship.

From Quirici's investigation of the writer behind his desk, Paul Fagan turns to O'Nolan's metafictional foregrounding of the reader's unusual vantage point in the literary event. Reading 'John Duffy's Brother' and 'Two in One' against Maurice Blanchot's reinterpretation of the myth of Narcissus and Michel Foucault's understanding of the relationship between confession and power, Fagan finds O'Nolan returning to Ovid's scene in order to deconstruct humanistic models of subjectivity and to test the peculiar ethical demands of the encounter between narrator, character and reader. Drawing together their contrasting exploitations of genre, their intertextual echoes and their metafictional strategies, Fagan proposes that these stories negotiate the tension between self and Other and between secrecy and confession, in order to ask us to attend to what is owed when we (figuratively, literally) get under the protagonists' skins in the act of reading.

Thierry Robin explores the subtle metafictional modes and parodic devices of 'The Martyr's Crown' and *Thirst* as fruitful sites for negotiations of O'Nolan's brand of historical scepticism. Investigating O'Nolan's blurring of the boundaries separating spurious local anecdotes from the 'Grand Narratives' of history, Robin refreshingly places these sceptical readings within a frame of cultural critique. Interweaving post-modern compositional strategies as catalogued by Ihab Hassan with the irreducibly local aspects of humour, accent, idiom and bar room banter, Robin explores O'Nolan's 'peculiarly Irish postmodern treatment of history as a never-ending source of ideological hangover' (p. 90).

Inter/national contexts

At the centre of this project is an exploration of this broadened (and broadening) canon as fertile territory for mediating between Irish cultural perspectives and international and European modernist perspectives. Increasingly, O'Nolan scholars have traced his influence on later writers through their employment of suspiciously O'Nolanesque self-reflexive tropes and compositional strategies. On this theme M. Keith Booker writes,

like his character Bonaparte O'Coonassa, O'Brien's literary reputation has suffered a certain amount of 'Gaelic hardship', including 'distress, need, ill-treatment, adversity, calamity, foul play, misery, famine and ill-luck' [. . .] But [. . .] O'Brien's work in fact resembles that of many important modern authors, ranging from Kafka to Conrad to García Márquez to Bulgakov.²⁴

Even as we rightly claim O'Nolan's international profile among these writers and his works as essential reference points in any discussion of late-modernist or postmodern metafiction, it is important to avoid reducing O'Nolan's texts to non-proprietary formal strategies. Seen in this light, the critic's task is not to liberate O'Nolan's writing from 'Gaelic hardship' to position it in 'international prosperity', but rather to explore a body of work that uniquely tests the old lines between stay-at-home conservatism and international experimentalism. Thus, as much as cultural critics need to accommodate Booker's call for a 'recognition of O'Brien's engagement with the kinds of issues that have concerned so many other modern thinkers in so many themes from around the world',²⁵ the contours of O'Nolan's aesthetic project need to be traced with a careful eye towards longer-running critical conversations about the ways in which his texts are shaped by and in contrast to, towering authorities at home.

In this section our contributors subtly address the intricacies of these debates by renegotiating the reference points of Republicanism, the Gaelic tradition and the Dublin literary scene of the 1940s and 1950s, while looking outward to the submerged pressures of the external gazes of international scholarship (in the alien form of American Joyceans), European experimentalism (Alfred Jarry's experimental pataphysics) and contemporary philosophies (viewing O'Nolan's texts as a solicitation of the emergent school of postmodernism).

Ute Anna Mittermaier explores the dichotomy between O'Nolan's reputation as an apolitical jokester and the ascription to him of several letters to *The Irish Times* signed by 'Oscar Love', which supported the Republican government shortly before the end of the Spanish Civil War. Mittermaier casts this critical conversation over the problem of the 'Love Letters' in new light by investigating it as a productive site on which to engage the conflict between 'inside' and 'outside affairs' in O'Nolan's writing. Continuing the volume's emphasis on testing the borders of O'Nolan's canon, Mittermaier draws on evidence from the Irish church and census records, *The Irish Times* digital archive, O'Nolan's early *Blather* columns, his infamous letter-bombing of *The Irish Times* editorial page and his unpublished manuscript 'The Pathology of Revivalism'.

John McCourt re-examines a long-running thread in O'Nolan Studies: the author's attempts to come to terms with his Joycean inheritance. Declining the traditional critical path of finding in O'Nolan's Joycean debt a picture of the lesser writer, crippled and consumed by

anxiety, McCourt offers a more sensitive re-appraisal of O'Nolan's complex relationship with Joyce in the cultural context of the Dublin literary scene of the 1940s and 1950s, in which the Joycean absent presence was close to asphyxiating. In O'Nolan's curiously ambiguous mixture of disdain and admiration for Joyce's writings and his increasingly hostile attitude towards the growing armies of (mostly American) 'Joyceans', McCourt finds a mask for the writer's own deeper and more personal lifelong battles; 'battles he both lost and won' (p. 125).

Tom Walker builds on recent efforts to reposition O'Nolan's work more clearly in relation to Irish cultural history by considering *The Third Policeman* in the light of various forms of Republican life-writing that appeared in the aftermath of the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. From memoirs by Dan Breen and Ernie O'Malley to the fiction of Frank O'Connor and Seán O'Faoláin, this material offers an unexplored context to the undertow of violence and its repeated association with the act of writing in O'Nolan's work, informing its often-noted mixture of fantasy and realism. Drawing these materials together to emphasise the persistent presentation of the bicycle as a driving force behind Irish freedom, Walker's essay substantially extends the sense that the bicycle in *The Third Policeman* operates as an index of the ideology of the new state.

Neil Murphy explores a broad network of Irish allusions and generic echoes in *An Béal Bocht* in order to claim for the text an under-acknowledged and under-explored variation on postmodern compositional strategies that is the equal of Flann O'Brien's more established novels. Exploring the novel's sustained parodic treatment of an intertextual complex encompassing works by Máire, Peig Sayers, Tomás Ó Criomhthain and the Middle Irish saga *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin*, Murphy argues the case that *An Béal Bocht* deserves to be considered a radical, multi-layered, intertextual masterpiece of early postmodern Irish writing.

Ondřej Pilný focuses on the remarkable similarity in the techniques and motifs of two outstanding innovators: Brian O'Nolan and Alfred Jarry, the father of pataphysics. Positioning O'Nolan's fascination with science and technology in *The Third Policeman* and the 'Myles na gCopaleen Central Research Bureau' amid the dreary times of the 'Emergency' and politico-cultural debates involving the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, Pilný explores O'Nolan's critique of universal science in a certain aesthetic line of experimental writing

from Jonathan Swift to Jarry's grotesque pataphysician Dr Faustroll. In the process, O'Nolan's debts to the past and his position in modernity are cast in new and expansive light.

Critical perspectives

Beyond illustrating the fuller wealth of O'Nolan's body of work and its vast potential for scholars of Irish and modernist studies, this volume extends the purview of O'Nolan scholarship by confronting some of the more complex ideological positions tested in his writing. This final selection of essays builds on the emphasis placed in previous sections on the potential for bringing a range of critical perspectives to bear on the study of O'Nolan's work, from adaptation, genre and genetic criticism to cultural materialism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism. At issue in the essays gathered are the author's gender politics, his language politics, his parodies of nationalism, his ideology of science and his treatment of the theme of justice.

Alana Gillespie explores Myles's infamous exchanges with the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, in which Myles provocatively wrote that the DIAS's only accomplishment to date was having proved that there were 'two Saint Patricks and no God'. Deconstructing this debate through the critical perspectives of cultural materialism and Bakhtinian dialogism, Gillespie finds that Myles dialogically voices at least four different attitudes to science prevalent in 1940s Ireland, ranging from the suspicious and derisive to the curiously open-minded. Through his cumulative critique of the conflicting attitudes towards science held by members of the government, the Church, educationalists and the Plain People of Ireland, Myles reveals the pieties, misconceptions and motivations that underlay Irish science debates.

Combining the precedent of the real-life 1882 trial for the 'Maamtrasna murders' with Jacques Derrida's theories on the proper name, Walter Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence' and Giorgio Agamben's concept of *homo sacer*, Maebh Long reads *An Béal Bocht* as a parable of the status of Gaelic as a language outside the law, outside trade and outside prosperity: in other words, as a language that dehumanises those who speak it and positions them outside the political realm. In this context, Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa's imposed moniker of 'Jams O'Donnell' becomes the name under which the Irish peasant can be nominally included within English-language

legal proceedings, as well as the structure through which Myles places the Gaelic League, the government, the English-speaking public and the Gaeltacht before the law.

Concentrating on *The Dalkey Archive* and *The Third Policeman*, Thomas Jackson Rice analyses representations of masculine identity in O'Nolan's fiction, focusing on the author's defensive gestures of misogyny and on the predominance of male characters in his writing. When the anonymous narrator of *The Third Policeman* tells his wooden-legged confrère Martin Finnuane, 'Women I have no interest in at all' (CN, 260), O'Nolan's largely submerged references to homosexuality, both in this novel and throughout his *œuvre*, come as close to the surface of the narrative as they ever dare. In claiming little interest in women, Rice proposes, this anonymous narrator might well be speaking for his creator, for females are at best marginalised and sentimentalised in O'Nolan's fiction, killed off early, sequestered in back rooms, or altogether absent.

Finally, Jennika Baines considers murder as a trope for meting out punishment in O'Nolan's first three novels and his grotesque short story 'Two in One'. In *At Swim-Two-Birds* Sweeny is murdered only to be resurrected in order to suffer further humiliation at the hand of the text, while the nameless murderer in *The Third Policeman* ultimately returns to claim the life of his accomplice. As these narratives draw to a close, it seems these characters will continue on without the reader, trapped in a textual existence that serves as a punishment. However, Baines argues, Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa differs from the first two protagonists because, accused of a murder he did not commit and wrenched from the plot to take his father's place in jail, he is forced to exist in a punishment outside his native realm of fiction. Thus an implied text continues on without the reader, but that text is to be located in the suffering at Corca Dorcha, the 'brutality and cruelty' of which is so much at odds with the text's fantastical narrative that 'the only response that *An Béal Bocht* can make is to come to an end' (p. 218).

* * *

The tropes and rhetorical strategies explored in these essays show up O'Nolan's suspicion of the very concept of literary afterlife. The writer's frequent disappearing acts under cover of pseudonymity, his arsenal of disguises, his generic eclecticism and his debunking of

fantasies of immortality seem designed to pull the rug from under the scholar's feet. How can one be faithful to a legacy that continually undermines its own reception as a single body of work?

For all that, we cannot but look to the future of O'Nolan scholarship with an unqualified optimism. Each member of this strong line-up of established and emerging scholars makes the gesture towards burying the myth that O'Nolan wrote two good novels and then retired to the inferior medium of journalism. In its place, this volume aims to open up a space for competing and contesting voices, more suited to 'the world-searing nakedness of that ontological polymorph' Myles na gCopaleen/Flann O'Brien/Brother Barnabas/Count O'Blather/George Knowall, et al. Above all, greeting 'the da' as he steps from obscurity, the editors and contributors mean to keep him to his word: 'Never again'.

Selected primary bibliography

Given the extent of Brian O'Nolan's writing in various genres under multiple pseudonyms in diverse newspapers and journals – and given the fact that numerous works attributed to him remain a point of critical contention – this bibliography represents only the author's most prominent and most frequently discussed works and the sources in which they were first published. For a live and continually updated bibliography of works by, about and adapted from Brian O'Nolan/Flann O'Brien/Myles na gCopaleen, et al., the reader is encouraged to consult the *International Flann O'Brien Society Brian O'Nolan Bibliography* at <<http://www.univie.ac.at/flannobrien2011/bibliography.html>>.

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PART I

Broadening the canon

1

COMING OFF THE RAILS
the strange case of 'John Duffy's Brother'

Keith Hopper

FADE IN

INT. THE HOUSE OF JOHN DUFFY'S BROTHER – NIGHT

A dimly lit attic room where an old-style train set runs on a modest oval track. Close-up on the engine as it chugs along mechanically on its route. We follow the engine through tiny tunnels and past small model trees and stations as the NARRATOR speaks. His voice is confident yet grave.

VOICEOVER:

Strictly speaking, this story should not be told at all. To tell it is to spoil it. This is because the man who had the strange experience we will relate never told it to anybody. Indeed, the fact that he kept it secret in his memory is the whole point of the story. Thus we must admit from the beginning that it is absurd for us to tell the story, absurd for anyone to listen to it and unthinkable that anyone should believe it.

[. . .] *Close-up on the model train engine which comes abruptly off the rails.* ROLL CREDITS.

(Eoghan Nolan, screenplay, *John Duffy's Brother*, 2006)¹

Trains appear everywhere in Brian O'Nolan's shorter works. In an early metafictional sketch, 'Scenes in a Novel' (1934), the despotic author-narrator, Brother Barnabas, threatens to write a rebellious character out of existence by having him run over by a train (*SF*, 52); in a later short story, 'Donabate' (1952), the drunken protagonist is killed by a train (*SF*, 83); and in 'Naval Control' (1932) – a newly-discovered story, which has been provisionally attributed to O'Nolan – much of the action takes place on board a Pullman train (*SF*, 151–153).² Elsewhere, in his long-running *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns, Myles na

gCopaleen talks about steam trains so often that a whole section of *The Best of Myles* (1968) is dedicated to the topic ('For Steam Men'; *BM*, 163–179), while Myles's teleplays for *O'Dea's Yer Man* (RTÉ, 1963–64) centre around a loquacious railway worker and are set entirely inside 'an old-fashioned railway signal box'.³

Trains also figure prominently in O'Nolan's 1951 essay on James Joyce, 'A Bash in the Tunnel'.⁴ In this rather cantankerous portrait of the artist as an egotistical iconoclast, O'Nolan relates an apocryphal tale told to him by an archetypal pub bore. The central conceit of this shaggy-dog story involves an unnamed man stealing whiskey from a train's buffet car and secretly drinking it, alone, in the toilet of an empty carriage. Unfortunately for him the carriage in which he is hiding gets moved and he ends up being trapped in a tunnel for three days: 'surely there you have the Irish artist', remarks O'Nolan, 'resentfully drinking somebody else's whiskey, being whisked hither and thither by anonymous shunters, keeping fastidiously the while on the outer face of his door the simple word, ENGAGED? I think the image fits Joyce' (*SP*, 206).

This elaborate and abstruse metaphor introduces more sober reflections, including the perceived relationship between comedy and religion in Joyce's writings: 'Humour, the handmaid of sorrow and fear, creeps out endlessly in all Joyce's works. [. . .] With laughs he palliates the sense of doom that is the heritage of the Irish Catholic' (*SP*, 208). Moreover, O'Nolan sees religious belief and a fear of hell as fundamental to Joyce's worldview: 'Joyce emerges, through curtains of salacity and blasphemy, as a truly fear-shaken Irish Catholic' (*SP*, 207). He concludes his essay on a typically waspish note: 'Perhaps the true fascination of Joyce lies in his secretiveness, his ambiguity (his polyguity, perhaps?), his leg-pulling, his dishonesties, his technical skill, his attraction for Americans'. In a final flourish, O'Nolan suggests that despite the best efforts of these American scholars, 'at the end, Joyce will still be in his tunnel, unabashed' (*SP*, 208).

It could be argued that 'A Bash in the Tunnel' ultimately says more about its author than it does about its subject; as J.C.C. Mays has shrewdly noted, O'Nolan 'characteristically mistakes Joyce's position for his own, [. . .] yet the misunderstanding vindicates his own originality'.⁵ In this respect, O'Nolan's idiosyncratic critique of Joyce could be read as a deep-rooted expression of his own religious and artistic anxieties. By way of exploring these elements of secretiveness, ambiguity and leg-pulling in his work, I wish to examine Flann O'Brien's most complex

and compelling short story, 'John Duffy's Brother' (1940). This absurdist fantasy, which is only 2,047 words in length, is about a lonely office clerk – known only and mysteriously, as 'John Duffy's brother' – who, after a series of meandering digressions by an unknown narrator, imagines one morning that he has turned into a steam train: 'No explanation of this can be attempted. [. . .] But John Duffy's brother was certain that he *was* a train' (SF, 56). Just as mysteriously, in the middle of his lunch, he transforms back again: 'He gazed out into the day, no longer a train, but a badly frightened man' (SF, 58). The story ends with John Duffy's brother reassured in his own mind that the full import of this psychotic episode seems to have gone unnoticed: 'Nobody knew his secret but himself and nobody else would ever know' (SF, 58).

As Anne Clissmann has observed, 'John Duffy's Brother' anticipates the digressive style and fantastic logic of O'Brien's masterpiece *The Third Policeman* (1967; written 1939–40). 'After all', Clissmann points out, 'a man thinking he is a train is not far removed from a man becoming a bicycle' – a reference to a key scene in *The Third Policeman*, to which I will return later.⁶ 'John Duffy's Brother' also bears (deliberately) uncanny resemblances to Joyce's classic short story 'A Painful Case' (composed in 1905; published in 1914), although the particular manner in which it deconstructs and re-imagines Joyce's text has not yet been fully explored. For the purposes of this essay, I would like to bring to the surface some of these submerged intertextual elements and think about how these ghostly allusions allow us access to the unspoken 'secret' at the heart of the text. In passing, I will briefly touch on the short film version of the story and consider how even the most faithful of adaptations can sometimes offer – consciously or unconsciously – a deconstructive commentary on the original text.⁷ Finally, I would like to offer what Margot Norris has called a 'suspicious reading' of 'John Duffy's Brother', linking it back, in turn, to 'A Painful Case'.⁸ And part of what I want to suggest is that by 1940 Brian O'Nolan had successfully overcome the Joycean anxiety of influence – though not, perhaps, his own fear of hell and damnation.⁹

Joyce, Keats and 'Negative Capability'

'John Duffy's Brother' was first published in Dublin in the *Irish Digest* (June 1940), although, tantalisingly, the original byline describes it as being taken 'From a Radio Éireann broadcast', so there may well be an earlier version which is yet to surface.¹⁰ A year later, the story appeared

in the prestigious New York literary magazine *Story* (July–August 1941), on the recommendation of the American author William Saroyan.¹¹ It was later reprinted in *Flann O'Brien's Stories and Plays* (1973; SP, 89–97) and in *Black Water: The Anthology of Fantastic Literature* (1983).¹² As Neil Murphy and I remark in our introductory notes to *The Short Fiction of Flann O'Brien* (2013), there are minor but telling variations between the 1940 and 1941 imprints. In the American version, there is a reference to a character who ‘had gone to sea at the age of sixteen as a result of an incident arising out of an imperfect understanding of the sexual relation’; in the more prudish Irish version, this simply reads as ‘an imperfect understanding of the world’.¹³ This variation says much about the Draconian censorship code then in operation in Ireland, which O’Nolan spent much of his career trying to circumvent or subvert (I will return to this issue of censorship later on). In turn, the 1941 American version has blandly smoothed out some of O’Brien’s more idiosyncratic linguistic usages; for example, his pedantically precise description of a train’s ‘four-wheel bogey’ is changed to the more banal ‘four-wheel buggy’. Consequently, the definitive version of ‘John Duffy’s Brother’, which appears in *The Short Fiction*, is derived from the original (undated) typescript held in the Flann O’Brien Collection at Boston College and this clean copy text has been cross-checked against all later variants.¹⁴

There is also an early draft typescript of the story housed in the Special Collections Research Center at Southern Illinois University.¹⁵ The title page reads ‘John Duffy’s Brother, by Flann O’Brien, 1,000 words, 2.12.1938’. This four-page version is approximately half the length of the extant text; it ends quite abruptly and is most likely an incomplete fragment. The draft begins with the words ‘Mr Hugh Duffy lived in a small house on an eminence in Inchicore’, an opening that is much closer to that of Joyce’s ‘A Painful Case’: ‘Mr James Duffy lived in Chapelizod because he wished to live as far as possible from the city of which he was a citizen’.¹⁶ As Thomas F. Shea notes, ‘By 1940, O’Brien had added the opening two paragraphs and had changed the protagonist’s name, emphasising narrative digression and the wonderful absurdity of the term “John Duffy’s brother”’.¹⁷ In one of the few scholarly commentaries on the story, Shea outlines some of the many similarities between ‘John Duffy’s Brother’ and ‘A Painful Case’:

First, both stories centre on a man named Duffy; Joyce’s story features a James Duffy while O’Brien’s story revolves around the

unnamed brother of a John Duffy. Second, readers often misremember that each story involves a sea captain. Mrs Sinico's husband is a sea captain, 'plying between Dublin and Holland', but John Duffy's brother's father is merely 'late of the mercantile marine'. Finally, each forges a connection between trains and death. Mrs Sinico is struck by a train which precipitates 'shock and sudden failure of the heart's action'. [. . .] John Duffy's brother spends the better part of a day 'possessed of the strange idea that he was a train'.¹⁸

Furthermore, as Shea notes, there are striking similarities in the sense of place:

Both main characters live alone, James Duffy in Chapelizod, John Duffy's brother next to it. [. . .] Both stories intersect on points of geography. Confused over the death of Mrs Sinico, James Duffy wanders through Phoenix Park until he 'gained the crest of Magazine Hill'. In O'Brien's story, Mr Smullen is regularly seen 'hurrying across the uplands of the Park and disappearing from view in the direction of the Magazine Fort'.¹⁹

However, Shea's observations come with two important caveats. First, 'the assertion of affinities actually interferes with and often precludes, the thoughtful investigation of O'Brien's texts'.²⁰ Second, as Shea rightly argues, 'the oppositions between the stories are far more resonant than any resemblances':

The stories essentially *sound* differently and the styles intentionally and successfully take us in opposite directions. While Joyce's sentence structures sound spare, rigid and enervated (like James Duffy's sensibility), O'Brien's configurations want to wander energetically. They build themselves mellifluously, asking us to listen to the pregnancies of periphrasis and to witness moments of imaginative conception.²¹

This periphrasis – or 'a roundabout way of speaking'²² – is largely a result of O'Brien's playfully digressive style and enigmatic theme, but is also a by-product of another key intertext which runs throughout the story. In the final lines of the written text, the narrator tells us that 'Never once did the strange malady return. But to this day John Duffy's brother starts at the rumble of a train in the Liffey tunnel and stands rooted to the road when he comes suddenly on a level-crossing – silent, so to speak, upon a peak in Darien' (*SF*, 58). In the 2006 film

version, the intertextual source of the final phrase is made more explicit in the narrator's final voiceover (spoken by Michael Gambon): 'silent, as Keats has it, upon a peak in Darien' [my emphasis].

The reference here is to John Keats's famous sonnet 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'.²³ First written in October 1816, the sonnet tells of the poet's astonishment upon reading a translation of Homer's *Odyssey* by the Elizabethan playwright George Chapman. The *Odyssey*, in this regard, offers a discreet point of intersection between Joyce and Keats and the two dominant intertexts in 'John Duffy's Brother'; as the narrator himself tells us, Mr Duffy's father 'was of a scholarly turn of mind and would often spend the afternoons [. . .] thumbing a book of Homer with delight' (*SF*, 55).

Like 'John Duffy's Brother', Keats's sonnet is strategically periphrastic, especially in the final sestet, in which Keats characterises his own 'delight' at thumbing Chapman's translation of Homer by way of analogy:²⁴

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific – and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise –
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.²⁵

As Shea points out, there are several allusions to the Keats poem sprinkled throughout the text of 'John Duffy's Brother':

The first (seemingly incidental) reference to Keats occurs early in the story just after we are introduced to the title character. We learn that he has the habit of killing time in the morning by taking the family spyglass and 'ranging the valley with an eagle eye'. Like Keats's 'stout Cortez' who 'with eagle eyes/. . . stared at the Pacific', John Duffy's brother is looking out with the vision of speculative fantasy.²⁶

In all, Shea reckons, 'six separate references in the story reiterate twelve distinct words in the sonnet'.²⁷ What is the point of this particular intertextual citation? For Shea, "John Duffy's Brother" deliberately wants to remind us of "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" because the story and sonnet share essential, vital themes celebrating the risks of imaginative exploration and the fantastic possibilities intimated by incompleteness'.²⁸ Sue Asbee suggests something similar,

although she also acknowledges the darker energies in O'Brien's story: 'new horizons are opened for the explorer, for the poet Keats and for John Duffy's brother, the inoffensive, quiet citizen of Inchicore who would have preferred the unfathomable depths of his mind to have remained undiscovered'.²⁹

We shall return shortly to those 'unfathomable depths' that John Duffy's brother might have wished to remain undiscovered (and shall see how the intertextual parallels with 'A Painful Case' might aid us in recovering them). In the meantime, it is worth exploring the notion that O'Brien's story celebrates imagination, undecidability and indeterminacy, as Asbee and Shea suggest in their readings of the story's Keatsian allusions. This concept of an open-ended text, which invites the reader to participate in the construction of meaning but which resists any single or absolute interpretation, is a hallmark of both post-structuralist thought and literary post-modernism and of Flann O'Brien's work in particular. However, this concept can be traced at least as far back as the Romantic period and to John Keats himself. In a famous letter to his brothers in 1817 (a year after he had written 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'), Keats wrote about the dual importance of the imagination and of uncertainty to literary expression: 'at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'.³⁰

As Nathan A. Scott has argued in *Negative Capability: Studies in the New Literature and the Religious Situation* (1969), this romantic concept may well be the key distinguishing feature that differentiates post-modernism from modernism:

Today, we do, indeed, find ourselves in a period in which the primary quality of the 'men of achievement' – of a Beckett, a Robbe-Grillet, a Grass, a Burroughs, a Godard – appears to be a *Negative Capability*, for they represent, generally, a firm disinclination to transfigure or to try to subdue or resolve what is recalcitrantly indeterminate and ambiguous in the human scene of our time; they do not reach irritably after any great counterpoise to chaos. It seems to me that it is in this that their difference from traditional modernism chiefly exists [. . .].³¹

In other words, post-modernism is against resolution, reason and certainty and all in favour of indeterminacy, irrationality and ambiguity. In 'John Duffy's Brother' this epistemological and ontological instability is reflected in one of its most striking formal features, namely the narratological paradox with which the narrator opens the tale:

Strictly speaking, this story should not be written or told at all. To write it or to tell it is to spoil it. This is because the man who had the strange experience we are going to talk about never mentioned it to anybody and the fact that he kept his secret and sealed it up completely in his memory is the whole point of the story. (*SF*, 54)

As Sue Asbee perceptively remarks, if 'the story was never told in the first place, how does the present narrator know about it – unless it happened to him and we are, in fact, reading a disguised first-person narration?'³² As Asbee concludes, although 'the story *can* be read and dismissed as simply amusing, it is a not-inconsiderable achievement. [. . .] The best of O'Brien's fiction all has this ludic – or playful – quality. The main pleasures of the game are the inexhaustible possibilities of narrative that are alternately exposed or hidden'.³³ The director of the film adaptation of 'John Duffy's Brother', Mikel Murfi, notes something similar:

The narrative voice is significant. At once it is deft and unobtrusive and at the same time it tells us exactly about its technique of storytelling. It tells us no-one could know this story and yet it can furnish us with the most intimate details. [. . .] The narrative voice gently reinvents at every turn the world we're inhabiting. It points up its own digressions. It lulls us, it asks questions by subterfuge and ends the film acknowledging the epic grandeur of the small man. It is a voice which adds to the intrigue of the world into which we're bringing the audience.³⁴

On this scheme, then, the source and cause of John Duffy's brother's metamorphosis is essentially unknowable and effectively unimportant – indeed, it transcends rational analysis. Instead, what really matters is the telling of the story itself – despite, or perhaps because of, the narrator's insistence that the story is untellable. While I have some sympathy with this view, I do think we should at least try to find some sort of explanation for Mr Duffy's transformation and breakdown, even if it remains speculative and provisional. Without wanting to reduce the complexities of art and literature to a set of simplistic and

mechanical explanations, it does seem important to maintain some sort of critical balance between mystery and reason. As Alberto Manguel astutely observes, in 'John Duffy's Brother', 'as in other fantastic stories, the seemingly impossible might be explained away by madness or delusion. And yet, as in a dream that seems real, the reader knows that something more is being said'.³⁵

For steam men

One way of articulating these silences in the text is to replant the story in its original historical context and to read it allegorically. A common problem with many critical accounts of metafictional and post-modernist texts is that elements of formal play and self-reflexivity are often privileged over the material and ideological content. It seems to me that Flann O'Brien's particular brand of post-modernism needs to be understood in two interrelated contexts: in an aesthetic domain (a challenge to the conceits of high modernism); and in an ethical domain (a resistance to the nativist and Catholic hegemony of post-colonial Ireland).

In the case of 'John Duffy's Brother' and despite its determined sense of indeterminacy, there is a strange and disquieting specificity. Often overlooked, for instance, is the fact that the protagonist's metamorphosis takes place on a quite specific date: 'He arose one morning – on the 9th of March, 1932 – dressed and cooked his frugal breakfast. Immediately afterwards, he became possessed of the strange idea that he was a train. No explanation of this can be attempted' (*SF*, 56). However Shannon Tivnan does attempt an explanation, highlighting the fact that 9 March 1932 'is the same day that Éamon de Valera took his place as president of the Executive Council and head of the ruling Fianna Fáil party'. Thus, according to this resolutely materialist reading, 'John Duffy's brother's experience as a train and the frugal meal he enjoys immediately before the experience appear to be connected to the official rise of Éamon de Valera and the Fianna Fáil party to power'. Moreover, Tivnan deconstructs the name 'Duffy' to mean 'duffing' – nineteenth-century slang for the selling of 'inferior or counterfeit' goods – and interprets the story as a satire of Fianna Fáil's economic policies in 1938.³⁶ While the exclusive emphasis on economics is too reductive, the attempt to understand the story in historical terms is laudable and Tivnan's suggestion that trains are 'a symbol for the paradox that is the Irish Free State' is worth considering further.

As I indicated at the outset, trains appear frequently in Brian O’Nolan’s writings, where they often function as complex symbols of frustrated modernity and thwarted desire: trains may present the possibility of escape from provincial life, but they also represent the suburban dreariness of the daily commute. In his own anarchic and absurdist way, Myles na gCopaleen cannot help but offer a more direct commentary on the strangeness of everyday life in the Irish Free State, especially during the Second World War – or the ‘Emergency’, as it was officially dubbed in neutral Ireland. Take this fairly typical example from *Cruiskeen Lawn*:

MYSELF AND THE EMERGENCY

I have been looking further into the problem of maintaining efficient railway services in these days of inferior fuel. My latest solution is expensive, but highly ingenious. My plan is that all lines should be re-laid to traverse bogland only and that the locomotives should be fitted with a patent scoop apparatus which would dig into the bog underneath the moving train and supply an endless stream of turf to the furnace. [. . .]

Of course, there are difficulties – nobody sees them more clearly than myself. For example, unless care were taken, an express careering across a bog at full tilt might encounter a quagmire and disappear into the bowels of the earth, passengers and all. [. . .]

FURTHERMORE

Another snag is the difficulty of finding continued bogland between, say, Dublin and Galway. Here, again, failure to recognise defeat will be invaluable. Our plan will be to follow the bog wherever we find it and get to Galway one way or another, even if we have to spend weeks in the train and wander through every county in Ireland. The unrelieved bogland scenery on such a journey would be a bit tedious to the eye, but telescopes could be supplied for viewing the more distant vistas. (*BM*, 114–115)³⁷

O’Nolan’s conscious yoking together of James Joyce and trains in ‘A Bash in the Tunnel’ demonstrates his appreciation of the importance of the motif of trains in Joyce’s writing and not just as the instrument of Mrs Sinico’s death in ‘A Painful Case’. Unlike Myles’s inventive (and inventorially) flights of fancy, Joyce tends to associate trains more with sensuousness and sensuality. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), the young Stephen Dedalus is fascinated with trains: ‘he heard the noise of the refectory every time he opened the flaps of his ears. It

made a roar like a train at night. And when he closed the flaps the roar was shut off like a train going into a tunnel'.³⁸ In the course of Molly Bloom's interior monologue in *Ulysses* (1922) – at the very point at which she fantasises 'I wished he was here or somebody to let myself go with and come again like that I feel all fire inside me' – she hears a 'train somewhere whistling the strength those engines have in them like big giants and the water rolling all over and out of them'.³⁹ Trains can also be erotically charged in Brian O'Nolan's work, but in a much more roundabout and secretive way. Notice how in 'John Duffy's Brother', for instance, the narrator recalls Mr Duffy's initial transformation into a train:

Small boys sometimes like to pretend that they are trains and there are fat women in the world who are not, in the distance, without some resemblance to trains. But John Duffy's brother was certain that he *was* a train – long, thunderous and immense, with white steam escaping noisily from his feet and deep-throated bellows coming rhythmically from where his funnel was. Moreover, he was certain that he was a particular train, the 9.20 into Dublin. His station was the bedroom. (*SF*, 66)

This barely sublimated and contorted eroticism, along with its tinge of misogyny, is commonplace in O'Nolan's fiction. Interestingly, in the film version of 'John Duffy's Brother' the existing train metaphor is supplemented by and conflated with, another of O'Nolan's favourite machine metaphors: the bicycle. The final image in the film is a shot of John Duffy's brother (played by Mark O'Halloran) standing at a railway crossing holding onto a bicycle. This image does not appear in the original story, although its casual inclusion in the film does help to enlarge our understanding of the sexual subtexts. In O'Brien's dark Menippean satire *The Third Policeman* – for which 'John Duffy's Brother' could be considered something of an ur-text – the bicycle forms part of an elaborate scientific conceit by which, in an absurd parody of atomic physics, it transfers its atoms into the person riding it. This complicated bicycle motif also fulfils another function, as a rhythmically encoded image of sex and sexuality:

Her saddle seemed to spread invitingly into the most enchanting of all seats while her two handlebars, floating finely with the wild grace of alighting wings, beckoned to me to lend my mastery for free and joyful journeyings [. . .]. How desirable her seat was, how

charming the invitation of her slim encircling handle-arms, how unaccountably competent and reassuring her pump resting warmly against her rear thigh! (CN, 378–379).

As I have argued at length elsewhere,⁴⁰ this mechanised erotic discourse derives in part from a colloquial expression for a ‘loose woman’ (i.e. ‘the town bike’), but is also intertextually sampled from a sexualised description of trains in J.K. Huysmans’s influential symbolist novel *À Rebours* (*Against Nature*, 1884):

[She was] an adorable blonde with a shrill voice, a long slender body imprisoned in a shiny brass corset and supple catlike movements; a smart gold blonde whose extraordinary grace can be quite terrifying when she stiffens her muscles of steel, sends the sweat pouring down her steaming flanks, set her elegant wheels spinning in their wide circles and hurtles away, full of life, at the head of an express or boat-train.⁴¹

The inherent misogyny of these symbolist descriptions – women reconfigured as unthinking machines designed to service male desire – is further complicated by a distinct thread of homoeroticism. As Andrea Bobotis has astutely noted, although the bicycle in *The Third Policeman* is described as ‘she’ by the nameless narrator, it is, in fact, a man’s bike.⁴² Encoded deep in this novel – and, indeed, throughout O’Nolan’s *œuvre* – is a fascination with homosexuality. And what I want to suggest is that this may well be the source of John Duffy’s brother’s untellable secret – and even perhaps the source of O’Nolan’s fear of hell in ‘A Bash in the Tunnel’.⁴³

A suspicious reading

O’Nolan began writing in Ireland at a time when the State censorship of literature was at its height. With the establishment of the Censorship of Publications Act in 1929, the newly-established Irish Free State embarked on a policy of cultural protectionism, aptly described by the poet Robert Graves in 1950 as ‘the fiercest literary censorship this side of the Iron Curtain’.⁴⁴ The Censorship Act provided for the banning of any book or writing deemed to be ‘in its general tendency indecent or obscene’. As there were obvious semantic difficulties in defining such a relative concept as ‘indecent’, guidelines were established which defined it as ‘suggestive of, or inciting to sexual immorality or unnatural vice’.⁴⁵ The key word, in practice, was ‘sexual’, for anything

suggesting even the remotest sexual content was dubbed indecent and thus liable to be banned. Despite these stringent restrictions, writers have always found ways of circumventing censorship through imaginative processes of invention and euphemism, or by resorting to a coded language which substitutes symbols for what is forbidden. As the Viennese satirist Karl Kraus wryly remarked, 'satire which the censor understands is rightly prohibited'.⁴⁶

Throughout his novels, O'Nolan writes about a range of taboo topics, including abortion and contraception, but he smuggles in this material in symbolic form. He also writes a great deal about sex and sexuality, but again in a manner that is covert and coded. One fascinating aspect of this metonymic code is the way that O'Nolan writes about homosexuality, often by punning on the ambivalence of the words 'fairy' (defined by *The Oxford English Dictionary* as 'a mythical small being with magical powers' or 'slang for male homosexual') and 'queer' (defined as 'odd' or 'slang for homosexual'). From this perspective, then, it is worth noting that the word 'steamer', meaning a steam train, was also a colloquial Irish term, at the time of the story's composition, for a male homosexual.⁴⁷

So, is the metamorphosis of John Duffy's brother into a steam train a coded symbol of his repressed homosexuality, playing on the double meaning of the word 'steamer'? Read again – preferably aloud (the oral rhythm is important) – the description of when he first turns into a train:

No explanation of this can be attempted. [. . .] But John Duffy's brother was certain that he *was* a train – long, thunderous and immense, with white steam escaping noisily from his feet and deep-throated bellows coming rhythmically from where his funnel was. (*SF*, 56)

Notice, too, what happens when he transforms back; as the narrator insinuates, the whole psychotic episode is indeed a 'queer' one:

In the middle of his lunch John Duffy's brother felt something important, something *queer*, momentous and magical taking place inside his brain, an immense tension relaxing, clean light flooding a place which had been dark. [. . .] He gazed out into the day, no longer a train, but a badly frightened man. (*SF*, 58) [my emphasis]

As Margot Norris notes, 'If we remember that Duffy lives in a social world that punishes homosexuality even more harshly than it punishes

adultery, Duffy's isolation, asceticism, aloofness and misanthropy take on a wholly different character'.⁴⁸ However, Norris is referring here not to 'John Duffy's Brother', but to her own speculative 'queer' reading of 'A Painful Case' in *Suspicious Readings of Joyce's Dubliners* (2003). Norris interprets Joyce's story against the backdrop of 'the two great Irish sex scandals of the late nineteenth century: the case of Charles Stewart Parnell and the case of Oscar Wilde', but she also draws attention to 'a kind of black hole in the narration that effectively decentres the story and leaves not only Duffy's moral nature in pieces but also our own'.⁴⁹ As Norris writes:

There is something simply wrong with this whole story whose central question [. . .] is never answered by either Duffy or the narrator. And yet we are given a clue to this mystery – a solution in plain sight [. . .] so shocking that critics and readers have overwhelmingly failed or refused to see it.⁵⁰

It seems clear to me that in his reading of 'A Painful Case', Brian O'Nolan recognised the symbolic elisions and homosexual implications – and wove them back into his own story. And as Margot Norris concludes, 'once the possibility of homosexuality is considered, the reader must take ethical responsibility for now imagining the thoughts, feelings and anxieties of the possibly homosexual man'.⁵¹

The story 'John Duffy's Brother' is about many things: a cautionary tale about the power and danger, of the imagination; a celebration of language and literature; an allegory of de Valera's Ireland; and an exploration of Keats's 'Negative Capability', where 'uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts' matter more than 'fact & reason'. It also suggests that O'Nolan's supposed 'anxiety of influence' in relation to Joyce was already incorporated and overcome as early as 1940. Yet the story is also, it seems to me, a very real account of sexual anxiety and the fear of discovery, written at a time when homosexuality was considered both criminal and sinful. Thus, 'John Duffy's Brother' was partly written to the future, to a time when these psychosexual anxieties no longer mattered, either in this world or in the next. In this respect, at least, Flann O'Brien remains in his own post-modernist tunnel, unabashed.

IRELANDS ENOUGH AND TIME
Brian O’Nolan’s science fiction

Jack Fennell

In a letter to publisher Timothy O’Keeffe in 1963, Brian O’Nolan alluded to ‘a horrible fear that some stupid critic (and which of them is not) will praise me as a master of science fiction’.¹ As yet, nobody has praised him thus, but an increasing amount of attention has been paid to his engagements with the genre, by critics such as Keith Hopper, Samuel Whybrow and Val Nolan. The consensus emerging from this attention is that O’Nolan was conversant with science fiction, however much he may have claimed to despise it.

In this essay I will explore O’Nolan’s familiarity with and creative exploitation of, the motifs and clichés of science fiction by focusing on three particular texts – the short stories ‘Díoghaltais Ar Ghallaibh ’sa Bhliain 2032!’ and ‘Teacht agus Imtheacht Sheáin Bhuidhe’, both published in 1932, and *The Dalkey Archive*, published in 1964. There is a marked difference in tone between the early short stories and O’Nolan’s final completed novel. The former are unambiguously comic, while the latter uses comedy to mask some rather more disturbing ideas and anxieties. I will claim that the shift in O’Nolan’s philosophical outlook can be accounted for by the odd resonances between the philosophical works of J.W. Dunne and Thomas Aquinas – resonances O’Nolan dramatised by deploying tropes and motifs from science fiction. By studying these texts according to this generic tendency, we can refine our understanding of what Anthony Cronin has described as O’Nolan’s ‘Manichaeism’, namely his preoccupation with the idea that ‘the balance of good and evil in the universe as we know it had been disturbed in favour of evil’ (Cronin, 104).²

The early science fiction works

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, a number of Irish-language authors experimented with futuristic narratives set in Ireland, most of which either portrayed Ireland as a nation under siege, or sought to ameliorate the people's feelings of frustration with what they saw as the unfulfilled promises of independence. Pádraig Ó Conaire's 1926 short story 'Páipéar a Frithadh i mBosca' ['A Paper Found in a Box'] depicts a scene from the year 1966, in which the 'Warden of Galway' conciliates a mob who are demanding social reform by reading them excerpts from a forty-year-old copy of a newspaper that details the awful condition of Galway in those far-off times.³ The following year saw the publication of Art Ó Riain's novella 'An Tost' ['Silence'], under the pseudonym Barra Ó Caochlaigh. Divided into five sections, the story follows the fortunes of one nationalist family over a four-decade time span. Part Five, set in 1975, tells of a world war erupting between the Americas and a British–Japanese alliance, during which a neutral Ireland is invaded by Britain and rescued by the Americans.⁴ Despite the dystopian vision of a world at war, the Ireland of the future is described as having considerable material wealth and powerful allies.

By contrast, O'Nolan's early contributions to the genre were rather more tongue-in-cheek, although they still took for granted that Ireland was progressing towards a prosperous future.⁵ 'Díoghaltais Ar Ghallaibh 'sa Bhliain 2032!' and 'Teacht agus Imtheacht Sheáin Bhuidhe' were written while O'Nolan was still completing his BA at University College Dublin and were published under the name Brian Ó Nualláin in *The Irish Press*, a Fianna Fáil newspaper established by Éamon de Valera in 1931. 'Díoghaltais Ar Ghallaibh 'sa Bhliain 2032!' ('Revenge on the English in the Year 2032!') is set in a future United Ireland, where *Gaeilge* is the first language of the citizenry and few remember how to speak English. The bilingual narrator describes meeting an unnamed English tourist, who is desperately looking for an English-speaking hotel. The narrator at first attempts to help the hapless tourist, but is suddenly enraged by the memories of English atrocities, including the slaughter of '2,000 respectable Corkmen' in Dublin on Halloween 1997 (*SF*, 27). To avenge these crimes, he teaches the tourist what he says is a phrase asking for directions, but is actually a string of obscenities so vile that they cannot be printed.

When the unfortunate tourist recites this phrase to a taxi driver, he receives a terrible beating and is arrested for disturbing the peace.

The structure of the story reveals that if not a fan, the young writer was certainly familiar with science fiction clichés. In the first half of the story, the narrator finds himself in strange and frightening surroundings and wonders whether he is ‘in Ireland or in Aran or in the deepest recesses of the devil’s Hell’. When a customs official searches his bag, a stunning revelation occurs:

‘You have to pay five shillings on this hat,’ [the customs officer] said, pulling a new hat out of the depths of the bag. I paid the money without saying a word and he gave me a receipt; I looked at it and the date filled me with astonishment – 12-02-2032.

‘I thought,’ I said, ‘that it was only the eleventh.’⁶ (SF, 24)

In June of the same year, Ó Nualláin’s second futuristic story was published, again taking the Irish language as its theme: ‘Teacht agus Imtheacht Sheáin Bhuidhe: Iarsma an Bhéarla – Cuireadh ar Phlátaí Ceoil é!’ (‘The Arrival and Departure of John Bull: The Relic of [the English language] – Let It Be Put On Record!’). In the distant future, Ireland is ruled over by a High King and a Gaelic nobility – perhaps a subtle satirical jab at de Valera, then President of the Executive Council and Fianna Fáil, which in February had won 72 seats in the general election to become the largest party in the Dáil. Furthermore, the population speaks only Irish. In fact, it appears as though the entire Western world speaks only Irish. A grotesque giant named John Bull invades and says he will only leave if the Gaels can prove that English is still spoken somewhere in the country. Experts are summoned from Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Limerick to recite the little English they know. The Belfast man recites a string of Unionist slogans, devoid of context (‘*Not an inch. Used as a pawn in the game. Up the Twelfth. To aitch with the Pee*’); the Dubliner’s response is similarly disjointed (‘*Alf. Where were you in sixteen [1916]? O Yeah! Sez me! Branch-a Mapaíochta & Survey-reachta*’); the Corkman parrots a train timetable and the Limerickman commands, ‘*Sprechen sie Deutsch*’ (SF, 33).⁷ The giant is delighted and having recorded these snippets for study, he departs the country on amicable terms with the High King. It transpires that John Bull is a researcher for a society named ‘Conradh an Bhéarla’ (‘The Covenant of English’), a group with the aim of reviving English as a spoken language and a parody of *Conradh na Gaeilge*,

Douglas Hyde's initiative to restore the Irish language (*SF*, 34). The satire is hammered home by the deliberately awful Irish translation of 'record' in the story's title: 'plátaí ceoil' literally means 'music plates'.

These future Irelands are described via what the critic Marc Angenot has termed 'the absent paradigm': though the world of the science fiction story is unfamiliar, exposition is kept to a minimum. As a consequence, the reader must '[project] onto the text semantic, logical and anthropological structures taken from his empirical world' in order to make sense of the unfamiliar setting.⁸ The reader is not told what led to the 1997 massacre, how Gaelic came to be spoken throughout Europe, or how Ireland came to be a monarchy. These future-histories are implied but never described and thus the reader must engage with the text, becoming an active participant in the construction of the fictional world. Another name for this process and the most frequently cited scholarly definition of science fiction, is the one proposed by Darko Suvin: that it is the literature of 'cognitive estrangement'. The estrangement is caused by the 'novum', the 'strange novelty' that is central to the world of the text.⁹ The reader and/or protagonist then navigate this estranged world with regard to their cognitive abilities, interpreting the events of the narrative with reference to the established norms of our physical universe.¹⁰

In both of O'Nolan's Irish-language future narratives the 'novum' is an achieved nationalist dream: a unified, Gaelic-speaking Ireland. Nationalism, with its constant appeals to tradition and obsession with the past, is simultaneously amenable to parody and to the broad-strokes illustration of a future-history. Though humorous in their intent, these stories imply a teleological view of the universe in which Catholic teaching and economic progress are compatible with Newtonian science – time has a 'forward' direction, allowing for the acquisition of material wealth as well as the salvation of the soul.

The Third Policeman and J.W. Dunne

Before the end of the same decade, however, O'Nolan's forays into the genre of science fiction started to take a much grimmer turn, from an assumption of inevitable prosperity to one of ontological breakdown. Hopper acknowledges the influence of science fiction in the construction of the 'death-world' of *The Third Policeman* (1967; written 1939–40) – 'a space-time continuum where sinister forces of science and technology have conspired to create Noman's hell' (Hopper, 196).¹¹ In

relation to the novel’s creation of a manifestly dystopian science-fiction vision of hell, Jeffrey Mathewes notes that ‘Manichaeism shrouds the text like a fog of de Selby’s black air, dense and inflammable to any phosphate-induced flicker of hope’.¹²

While Mathewes convincingly argues that O’Nolan’s ‘Manichaeism’ pessimism was a trait present from childhood,¹³ it was likely exacerbated by the discoveries of the age in which he grew to adulthood. It is difficult to overestimate the magnitude of the philosophical crisis triggered by quantum mechanics’ challenge to Newtonian physics. Newton’s ‘absolute time’ has qualities that reflect a ‘realist’ view of the world (such as objectivity, continuity, linearity and directionality) and support concepts of historical and economic change. The new physics cast doubt on the ‘self-evident’ truth of these characteristics and even seemed to throw them into reverse. For an indication of some of the effects the theory of relativity had on Western popular culture, we can look at Everett F. Bleiler’s overview of ‘pulp’ science fiction from 1926 to 1936 – a form with which O’Nolan was undoubtedly familiar, as the early Gaelic stories reveal. In narratives featuring time-travel into the past, the protagonists almost invariably encounter a long-lost civilisation which is possessed of scientific knowledge light-years ahead of our own.¹⁴ In tales depicting a journey into the future, meanwhile, the outcome is more often than not decidedly grim, with planet Earth either dead or dying.¹⁵ O’Nolan’s initial reaction to the philosophical crisis presented by quantum mechanics was to ignore it, as in the two short works from 1932 – after all, the prosperous future of Ireland, which he took as a given even as he gently poked fun at it, required a teleological, Newtonian universe. By 1939, when he began writing *The Third Policeman*, the problem was weighing heavily on his mind.

As Jennika Baines succinctly puts it, the setting of *The Third Policeman* is ‘an eerie hell in which reason is perpetually thwarted by seemingly impossible facts completely disconnected from truth’.¹⁶ While the novel’s epistemological breakdown is precisely what makes the narrative so comic, it is not necessarily an attack on rationalism. Rather, it seems that O’Nolan expended a lot of energy trying to recapture the state of non-contradiction between science and religion that had notionally existed between Catholicism and old-fashioned Newtonian physics, but with little hope of success. Catholicism ‘is founded on absolute belief in a supernatural system of truth that is not subject to human theories of proof and evidence’,

requiring 'faith in the unknown and unknowable'; quantum physics, however, 'make the impossible possible',¹⁷ perhaps indicating that conflict was inevitable.

Hopper takes issue with Charles Kemnitz's reading of *The Third Policeman* as a dramatisation of the theory of relativity:¹⁸ O'Nolan was not properly conversant with such theories, his limited knowledge of the subject coming from the philosophical treatises of J.W. Dunne rather than from Albert Einstein (Hopper, 196–199). As Carol Taaffe establishes, Dunne's work provided 'appropriately hokey scientific grounds for [O'Nolan's] tale of scholarly crime and punishment' (73) and Dunne was undoubtedly one of the satirised models for the foot-noted de Selby (Hopper, 212–213).¹⁹ Cronin attributes O'Nolan's fondness for Dunne's work to a wider trend prevalent in Dublin at the time, whereby Dunne's theories became popular because, superficially, they appeared to deal with the problems posed by relativity (103). However, O'Nolan was not merely a follower of intellectual fashion – as in his relationship with science fiction, something about Dunne's 'Serialism' intrigued him, even as he mocked it.

Dunne's theories on the nature of time came about through his attempts to explain 'scientifically' a number of prophetic dreams, in which he apparently predicted events ranging from stopped watches to air disasters.²⁰ He eventually came to the rather de Selbian conclusion that the dreams were not prophetic at all – they were ordinary dreams, 'but they were occurring on the *wrong nights*'.²¹ Dunne further concluded that this experience was a natural one and therefore that dreams in general are an equal mixture of past and future 'memories', dislocated in time and accessible while we sleep.²² Dunne expanded upon this theory in *The Serial Universe* (1934) to demonstrate that the nature of human consciousness is one of infinite regress, since we are conscious of our own consciousness,²³ and that this condition of infinite regress mirrors the fundamental nature of the universe.²⁴ Thus, we are indeed immortal, but that immortality exists in 'multi-dimensional time' and thus is not the same as living forever according to the mundane passage of time as we perceive it. Dunne's was a kind of rationalism that could be interpreted to confirm any number of pre-existing cultural logics, one of which was the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas.²⁵ Indeed, the latter is so pronounced an element of O'Nolan's outlook that several critics, in an ongoing debate helpfully summarised by Carlos Villar Flor, have argued that he cannot be considered a postmodernist, since

religious belief implies an underlying meaning to life that post-modernism denies.²⁶

As Taaffe points out, in de Selby O’Nolan appropriates the pop-culture figure of the mad scientist in order to tackle modern science ‘in a manner that ultimately re-establishes the traditional universe’ (84). O’Nolan’s Thomist Catholic philosophy undoubtedly influenced the way in which he utilised this stock character:

Thomistic Catholicism was the received religion of all the educational institutions that [O’Nolan] attended, including UCD, where the philosophy courses were designed to confirm that everything worth knowing was in St Thomas Aquinas’s great synthesis of Catholic doctrine and Aristotelian philosophy, the *Summa Theologica* and that all the rest was vain speculation. (Cronin, 106)

The *Summa Theologica* holds that there are differing kinds of temporal experience, based on an object’s ‘permanence’ or degree of perfection: there is Eternity, which is unchanging; there is the ‘Time’ mortals perceive as a continuum, in which each occurrence has a ‘before’ and an ‘after’; and lastly, there is ‘Aeviternity’, which can be thought of as an intermediate stage between the two – compatible with the human perception of ‘before’ and ‘after’ and yet possessing neither quality. Beings belong to a time-stream appropriate to their level of permanence: absolute permanence belongs to God alone and therefore He alone exists in Eternity; material things may be long-lived but they are not permanent and therefore they exist only in mundane Time; Aeviternity is the continuum of the imperfect supernatural, the home of angels and the human soul.²⁷ ‘Real time’ may not have a direction, but in this context it does not have to: the important thing is that the immortality of the soul is guaranteed and the possibility of salvation is re-affirmed.

The resonances between Aquinas and Dunne are undeniable: both suggest that our commonplace conception of time as a continuum is largely a psychological construction and both suggest that the human soul, being immortal, exists beyond this continuum. If Thomism was central to O’Nolan’s outlook, it is easy to see why certain aspects of Dunne’s theories appealed to him, especially if the only alternative was a directionless quantum universe. It is telling that, as Hopper points out, ‘only certain aspects of Serialism are adhered to’ in *The Third Policeman*. Most notable among these are ‘the movement of the soul on a relative plane’ and the ‘simultaneity of time’ (Hopper, 207), both

of which are core tenets of Thomism and central to the plot of *The Dalkey Archive*. It is also easy to see why O’Nolan revisited the pulp science fiction he had parodied in his undergraduate days and appropriated elements of it to construct the plot of what would be his final novel – for what else does this particular overlap of Thomism and Serialism call to mind but a kind of Roman Catholic time-travel?

The Dalkey Archive

In a 1966 article for *The Guardian*, O’Nolan wrote that he had become fascinated with Saint Augustine’s detailed lists of the misdeeds of ‘heresiarchs and voluptuaries’, including Augustine himself (significantly, Augustine was formerly a Manichaeon). The more O’Nolan read of Augustine, the greater the opportunity he saw to have fun at the holy man’s expense: ‘I would jeer uproariously at Augustine’s fleshly obsessions and ambush Loyola by restoring James Joyce to life and equipping him with an ambition to join the Jesuits’.²⁸ This jeering was not without its costs, however and O’Nolan attributes a string of unfortunate events to Augustine’s wrath.²⁹ In addition to a number of physical mishaps, O’Nolan discusses the unsettling discovery of a birth certificate dated eight months after his own, testifying to the existence of a sister he never knew. The most favourable explanation for the second birth certificate, O’Nolan tells us, is that the girl was someone else’s illegitimate daughter, mistakenly registered as an O’Nolan sibling. ‘Not for a moment to be entertained’ was a theory that the mysterious second child suffered from ‘foetal dyscrasia’ or turned out to be one of a pair of intersexed twins – ‘The fact is that Saint Augustine’s vengeance [. . .] had been permitted to reach into gestation’.³⁰

The oddly specific reference to ‘dizygotic gynandrous aberration’ indicates not only that the factuality of this account is to be taken with a pinch of salt, but that O’Nolan’s conception of the divine had a distinctly threatening, almost medieval, aspect; indeed, Mathewes interprets the change from first-person to third-person narration between *The Third Policeman* and *The Dalkey Archive* as an attempt ‘to hold the heresies and other outrages at arm’s length’.³¹ It is telling that in the third edition of *An Béal Bocht*, released in the same year as *The Dalkey Archive*, a new foreword by ‘The Editor’ (retained by subsequent editions) is dated ‘Lá an Luain, 1964’ (ABB, 8) – *Lá an Luain* meaning ‘Doomsday’.

Intended, in the author’s own words, as a ‘farrago of geophysics, Einsteinian energy, theology, hagiography and booze’ (qtd. in Taaffe,

193), O’Nolan’s final novel revolves around the physicist and theologian De Selby, who has invented a substance called DMP (named after the Dublin Metropolitan Police).³² DMP creates an anaerobic environment wherever it is released (CN, 609–787) and in so doing it re-aligns human perception to the true nature of time, which is simultaneity (CN, 624). This enables De Selby to converse with individuals existing outside of normal time, particularly figures from Christian history, including Saint Augustine, whom De Selby has summoned repeatedly in an underwater cave and in a secret chamber in his house (CN, 633–643, 749). By conversing with these figures and reflecting upon the horrid nature of the material world, De Selby has come to the conclusion that he is the new Messiah and that it is his God-given duty to destroy life on Earth with a massive application of DMP (CN, 621). Keen to stop this destruction is Mick Shaughnessy, an alcoholic civil servant, with the aid of his loutish drinking buddy Hackett.

A formalist analysis of *The Dalkey Archive* reveals that a great deal of the plot structure is reminiscent of a certain kind of science fiction story, which in turn is a formal mutation of the initial ‘Departure’ section of Joseph Campbell’s ‘monomyth’, commonly known as ‘The Hero’s Journey’. The first stage of the ‘Departure’ is *The Call to Adventure*, whereby ‘a blunder – apparently the merest chance – reveals an unsuspected world and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood’.³³ The second stage is the *Refusal of the Call*, ‘essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one’s own interest’,³⁴ which in turn leads to *Supernatural Aid*: an encounter with a character ‘(often a little old crone or an old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass’.³⁵ This encounter is succeeded by the *Crossing of the First Threshold* – the point at which the protagonist has one last chance to remain safely within his or her prior mundane existence³⁶ – and the *Belly of the Whale* – the point of no return, at which the adventurer is ‘swallowed into the unknown’.³⁷ Following the ‘Departure’ section of the monomyth comes the ‘Initiation’, the most important stage of which is *The Road of Trials*, in which ‘the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms’.³⁸ The final stage is the ‘Return’, concerned with the task of ‘bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or [the] sleeping princess, back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand

worlds'.³⁹ In the science fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the chance encounter is usually with a mad scientist and the *Supernatural Aid* is usually a marvellous invention. Any thresholds that the protagonist must cross are by necessity cultural or intellectual – preconceived notions of 'the way things are', challenged by 'mad science'. *The Road of Trials* normally takes the form of a conflict or series of conflicts against an otherworldly adversary and in the 'Return', a miraculous invention or scientific discovery is retrieved in time to renew planet Earth.

In *The Dalkey Archive*, Mick and Hackett experience a *Call to Adventure* when they encounter De Selby on the coast road, escort him home and are exposed to the scientist's theories on the nature of time (CN, 612–618). De Selby presents them with a *Supernatural Aid* to their understanding – the miraculous week-old whiskey (CN, 617). Before long, they find themselves in the *Belly of the Whale* – in this case, discussing the Biblical Jonas in the underwater cave in which De Selby demonstrates the DMP. What this formalist analysis reveals is that, for a science fiction text published in 1964, the narrative structure of *The Dalkey Archive* is surprisingly old-fashioned. This exposition-heavy narrative format, wherein a chance encounter with a mad scientist transports the hero into an estranged world, is antiquated today and was already superannuated by 1932, when O'Nolan constructed his future-Irelands along the lines of the 'absent paradigm' model to which science fiction has generally adhered ever since. As outlined by Angenot, modern science fiction tales are narrated 'from within', by an inhabitant of the estranged world who takes that world's norms for granted, to the extent that he or she does not see any need to elaborate on them for the reader's benefit.⁴⁰ The story of *The Dalkey Archive* is an anachronism, a nineteenth-century plot ambushing a twentieth-century novel. There are, however, no episodes corresponding to the 'Initiation' or the 'Return' of Campbell's 'Hero's Journey' – the traditional 'monomyth' structure is undermined by meandering philosophical debates and long moments of introspection and inaction. This abortive evocation of an old-fashioned plot structure is, I believe, reflective of O'Nolan's growing philosophical anxieties – anxieties personified in the character of De Selby.

Cronin describes O'Nolan as something of a cultural conformist, in that he 'did not have a problem' with Catholicism or nationalism and that his Catholicism inculcated a belief that 'all scientists were mad

scientists’ (Cronin, 52, 105). This attitude is echoed in this description of de Selby’s thought processes from *The Third Policeman*:

It is a curious enigma that so great a mind would question the most obvious realities and object even to things scientifically demonstrated [...] while believing absolutely in his own fantastic explanations of the same phenomena. (CN, 265)

The scientists of science fiction are ‘mad’ because they deny the validity of Occam’s Razor – the logical principle by which the simplest solution to any given problem is most likely to be the correct one – whether by proposing absurdly complex theories or by taking this principle to its deranged extreme. However, Occam’s Razor is a problematic heuristic because many of the discoveries yielded by scientific study are counter-intuitive, especially in the field of quantum mechanics. For many, the ‘simplest solution’ might also be a supernatural one, meaning that there is only the slenderest of differences between a mad scientist and a mad theologian. Val Nolan insists that O’Nolan was unquestionably more knowledgeable about science than he allowed his characters to be – the writer perceived scientific principles where his characters saw only magic⁴¹ – but that De Selby is the exception to this rule. Nolan sees O’Nolan’s writing as a synthesis or ‘bridge’ between the worlds of folklore and quantum mechanics and De Selby is central to this endeavour: he straddles the divide between tradition and modernity to the point where he might also be considered a shaman.⁴² In this respect, De Selby is almost an autobiographical figure, reflecting O’Nolan’s own wish to see science and faith reconciled.⁴³

In most instances of the genre, the mad scientist is the cause of his own downfall by ‘meddling in things man was not meant to know’. O’Nolan’s dialectic between Serialism and Thomism actually facilitates this meddling, since it opens up the realm of the soul, Aeviternity, to those who do not believe. De Selby’s use of the DMP is abusive – he is now possessed of the means to speak directly to inhabitants of the afterlife and he squanders this ability on irrelevant trivia, such as the sexual activities of Saint Augustine’s people and the colour of Augustine’s skin (CN, 642–643). Neither does he display the proper reverence for the beings with whom he interacts, hurling insults at Augustine and describing Jonah as ‘a bit of a ballocks [sic]’ (CN, 669). Cronin reads this line of questioning as one of the novel’s major faults, accusing De Selby of carrying out his research ‘in the fashion of an

inquisitive nun trying to find out what the Pope had for breakfast' (Cronin, 228). This is, however, precisely the point: De Selby asks such questions because he is a caricature, articulating a Menippean satire of bean-counting scientific positivism. Here, we return to Baines's description of Catholicism as 'a supernatural system of truth that is not subject to human theories of proof and evidence'.⁴⁴ From the point of view of the devout, any attempt to understand the former in terms of the latter is an indication of dangerous lunacy. Throughout the narrative of *The Dalkey Archive* a second catastrophe is implied – if De Selby does not destroy life on Earth, he will destroy religious faith by removing the mysteries upon which that faith depends. If De Selby is indeed a scientist/shaman, a combination of both tradition and modernity, it is because he combines the most dangerous aspects of each. That men of his ilk are widely renowned only makes matters worse: 'If the most highly regarded minds in human society are all de Selbys – that is, mad scientists', Mathewes asks, 'how could this world not be guided by a malignant force?'⁴⁵

The scientist's madness is communicable, as evidenced by Hackett's degeneration from a pretentious know-it-all to an outspoken heretic. Hackett initially feels the need to interject that, like Mick, he is not a 'christophobe' (CN, 624), but after his acquaintance with De Selby he comes to describe himself as a believer in the Pelagian heresy (CN, 652)⁴⁶ and praises Judas Iscariot as a martyr (CN, 665). When Mick outlines his plan to steal the DMP, Hackett responds ominously, 'Well, Mick, if *you* don't trust De Selby, maybe I don't trust *you*' (CN, 711). Conversely, Mick undergoes a conversion from a churchgoing 'cultural' Catholic to a would-be Messiah, a transformation necessitated by the scale of the perceived spiritual threat. Whereas previously 'he had never found himself much in rapport in the human scene with any priest' (CN, 662) and he begins the narrative by defending Descartes as 'a remarkable man however crazy his scientific beliefs' (CN, 619), Mick comes to see himself as a holy man appointed directly by God: the saviour not just of humanity, but of the Almighty himself (CN, 712). Mick's metamorphosis dramatises O'Nolan's anxieties regarding the cultural implications of the march of science – namely, that one day it would no longer suffice to be passively religious or passively interested in science; one would have to declare wholeheartedly for one side or the other. For O'Nolan, as for Mick, there was no option but to declare for God. De Selby, it would seem, is voicing the

author’s own anxiety when he asks Augustine whether ‘the ascent to piety [was] sudden and even distressing’ (CN, 635).

The threatened apocalypse, however, does not happen. Mick and Sergeant Fottrell manage to steal the DMP from De Selby’s house under cover of darkness (CN, 742–746), only for Mick to learn later that night that the scientist has had a change of heart, leaving a message with Hackett to say, ‘I will make a most unambiguous retraction of my error. I will make an end of all my experiments and return as a peaceable citizen to Buenos Aires, where my good patient wife is waiting for me’ (CN, 748). Mick and Fottrell need not have bothered, for there never was going to be an apocalypse and humanity is not going to be summoned and judged. Neither do any of the subsequent parts of Campbell’s ‘Hero’s Journey’ have any relevance to the rest of the plot: there is no *Road of Trials*, no ‘Return’.

The incomplete narrative structure could be taken as confirmation of the ‘Manichaeian’ view that Evil has triumphed over Good: no religious apocalypse is going to happen because we have unknowingly been living in a ‘death-world’ all along. This reading would account for the anachronisms Cronin notes in the plot: a lack of motor vehicles, women not being served in bars and trams on the streets of Dublin (Cronin, 227–228). The consoling fictions of Newtonian physics and teleology which informed the 1932 short works have been shattered and the Serialist/Thomist attempts to find points of agreement between science and religion have failed: the passage of time is an illusion, because we are all, in a sense, dead already. The ideological conflict between science and religion is over. All that remains is for science to sweep away the residual traces of a defeated God.

3
(PROBABLY POSTHUMOUS)
the frame device in Brian O’Nolan’s
short fiction

Marion Quirici

One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. (CN, 5)

Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) has long been celebrated for its cleverness and ‘metafictional mastery’.¹ The prevalent use of metafictional techniques in the novel is largely responsible for O’Brien’s reputed affinity with postmodernists. But Flann O’Brien is not the only one among Brian O’Nolan’s many pseudonyms to experiment with the frame device. A broader-scoped analysis of O’Nolan’s approach to structure across his career reveals that manipulation of the metafictional frame device is not always about demonstrating mastery or heralding the future: it is about exposing the failures and limitations of art and the processes of mediation that betray the historical moment of composition while delivering a text to posterity.

In this essay I will examine Brian O’Nolan’s metafictional framing strategies in ‘Scenes in a Novel (Probably Posthumous)’ (1934) and ‘The Martyr’s Crown’ (1950). The former sets an early standard for the framing practices that will become routine in O’Nolan’s *œuvre*, while the latter is illuminating for its abandonment of these conventions. After analysis of the typical operation of the framing device as demonstrated by ‘Scenes’, I move to the atypical ‘The Martyr’s Crown’. Using the perspective of genetic criticism – and its concomitant concerns with mediation and the reconstruction of writing processes – I compare ‘The Martyr’s Crown’ with ‘For Ireland Home and Beauty’ (1940), an earlier unpublished draft of the story. The alterations between drafts stand as testimony to O’Nolan’s attitudes and experiences regarding writing, revision and publication and to the definitive vulnerability of text. Mediating forces (namely, publishers’

preferences) here have the effect of eradicating O’Nolan’s signature metafictional touches from the developing story, asserting the limited and arbitrary degree of control any ‘author’ commands. Before moving on to these close analyses, I will review the critical conversation on O’Nolan’s metafictional strategies and provide context for consideration of mediation – both external and internal to the text in question – with reference to the writer’s well-known fiction and his *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns.

Previous criticism of O’Nolan’s metafictional experimentations emphasises their potential to challenge traditional ontological boundaries. For Keith Hopper, metafictional forms in the novels constitute ‘Frame-breaking Strategies’. Drawing on Gerard Genette’s theory of ‘metalepsis’ – which describes a strategy of transgressing traditional narrative boundaries – Hopper contends that O’Nolan’s flexible and permeable narrative layers ‘map the inescapable “writteness” of all constructed reality through self-awareness of literary practices’ (Hopper, 132). By breaking the frame, Hopper argues, the extended footnotes of *The Third Policeman* (1967; written 1939–40) collapse ontological levels and call identities into question (Hopper, 131–168). Elsewhere, M. Keith Booker cites a tradition of scholarship that argues O’Nolan’s metafiction broke ground for later postmodernists, such as Kurt Vonnegut, Donald Barthelme, Anthony Burgess and B.S. Johnson.² In the logic of the tradition Booker identifies, metafiction is fundamentally postmodern.

The insistence on such an alliance, however, obscures the historical, political, cultural and intertextual contexts of a piece of writing. In her *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass: Flann O’Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate* (2008), Carol Taaffe works to return O’Nolan to his ‘contemporary intellectual environment’: 1930s–1960s Dublin. She writes that the ‘work in progress’ structure of *At Swim-Two-Birds* results in ‘an intertextual work which also emphasises the actual context of the act of writing (and reading)’ (34). Regardless of a kinship between O’Nolan and certain continental philosophies of the twentieth century, the tides of his own cultural inheritance exerted a stronger pull on his writing. Beyond the familiar territory of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, O’Nolan also makes prominent use of the self-reflexive frame device in his shorter fiction. Here, too, we find him foregrounding the mediating apparatuses that enable the writing situation. If Taaffe situates O’Nolan among his peers and

contemporaries, then it is the work of this essay, through case studies from the shorter fiction, to situate O’Nolan behind his desk, via interrogation of his staging of ‘the act of writing (and reading)’.

By introducing the vocabulary of mediation into conversations on O’Nolan’s metafictional strategies, this essay argues that self-reflexive statements in his writing are characterised by tropes of failure. Examples of these tropes include references to the mortality of the writer, the inadequacy of language, the shortcomings of print and publication and the breakdown of instruments of mediation. When a text deliberates over its own credibility or draws attention to the conditions of its composition – when a text features the physical pen, typewriter, or other materials that aid in its manufacture – it foregrounds its susceptibility to interventions, alterations and errors. O’Nolan’s so-called ‘pioneering’ of experimental modes, if masterful, also acknowledges the limits of mastery.

Metafiction, mediation and Myles

The student narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds* shares with his creator a hyperawareness of the frame. In a fittingly self-reflexive manner, his musing on beginnings – which serves as an epigraph for this essay – is delivered at the start of the novel. O’Nolan’s tendency to frame his narratives in such a way as to call attention to that frame is a pattern that recurs throughout his writing, yet its persistence in the lesser-known short fiction is particularly striking. In one of the earliest and most representative examples of O’Nolan’s frame device, Brother Barnabas, the author, narrator and protagonist of ‘Scenes in a Novel (Probably Posthumous)’, ponders his own mortality, pen in hand:

I am penning these lines, dear reader, under conditions of great emotional stress, being engaged, as I am, in the composition of a posthumous article. [. . .] By the time these lines are in neat rows of print, with no damn over-lapping at the edges, the writer will be in Kingdom Come. (*SF*, 49)

The conceit of writing under the sign of impending doom also opens *An Béal Bocht* (1941). The incarcerated Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa explains, ‘I am noting down the matters which are in this document because the next life is approaching me swiftly’ (*CN*, 413).³ In both cases, the sense of mortality lends urgency to the writing act and renders the written document an indispensable material record, a last and lasting testament

to its fallible and now fallen, writer. The conceit can also be confessional: Murphy, the narrator of 'Two in One' (1954), writes from prison: 'I do not expect to be disturbed in my literary labours, for I am writing this in the condemned cell' (*SF*, 84). These openings read like invitations to something salacious – an insider's account or exposé of criminal misbehaviour. But the only thing being exposed here is the construction of the story itself: the naked story does not hide the conventions of its own manufacturing. That which the frame 'contains', it actually constructs. Despite the inevitable distortions and limitations of the frame, it cannot simply be discarded. O'Nolan's response to this dilemma is to situate the frame visibly within his art. Rather than *breaking* the frame, O'Nolan in these short stories and novels is *framing* the frame, embedding the various materials and processes of mediation within the text itself.

For O'Nolan, the conditions in which these stories are constructed are fundamentally flawed, seeming to restrict or intrude on the story itself. The narrator of 'John Duffy's Brother' (1940) puts it bluntly:

Strictly speaking, this story should not be written or told at all. To write it or to tell it is to spoil it. This is because the man who had the strange experience we are going to talk about never mentioned it to anybody and the fact that he kept his secret and sealed it up completely in his memory is the whole point of the story. Thus we must admit that handicap at the beginning – that it is absurd for us to tell the story, absurd for anybody to listen to it and unthinkable that anybody should believe it. (*SF*, 54)

In 'John Duffy's Brother', oral and written media alike are identified as a 'handicap' to the story. Paradoxically, the media that enable the story will inevitably 'spoil' its essence: its telling undermines its clandestine appeal, because once told, the secret no longer entices. The 'handicaps' of a story are thus a necessary constituent in its making. Notwithstanding the unavoidable 'spoiling' that storytelling and writing bring about, without these processes, the story would have no reception and no impact. That O'Nolan calls attention so freely and so frequently to the limitations of the frame indicates that the imperfections inherent in storytelling and writing are of principal concern to his aesthetic. At the moment of inception, there is evidence of mortality, entropy and failure. A major aim of O'Nolan's metafiction, this essay contends, is to stage the limitations of mediation.

The anxieties expressed by O’Nolan’s many narrative personae have a counterpart in the transmission of his own writing, in which publishers and editors call for changes or make silent putative corrections to his prose. As is well documented, Niall Sheridan excised a large portion of the original manuscript of *At Swim-Two-Birds* prior to its publication.⁴ Taaffe chronicles and catalogues the many cuts and alterations made to the original version of the novel and notes that all of the more blasphemous or sacrilegious sections are removed (Taaffe, 54–59). According to Anthony Cronin, O’Nolan made similar cuts to *An Béal Bocht* prior to its publication in response to publishers’ demands, writing in a letter to Browne and Nolan: ‘I have cut out completely all references to “sexual matters” and made every other change necessary to render the text completely aseptic and harmless’ (qtd. in Cronin, 127).

The demands of print were a subject of regular concern in O’Nolan’s journalistic career. Cronin writes of O’Nolan’s relationship with the printers of *The Irish Times*,

There had always been rows because his copy, though admirably clear, was difficult both to sub and to set; and unfortunately the more alert the sub or meticulous the typesetter, the more his puns, his jokes and his deliberate mistakes were ‘corrected’. This had led to a stream of letters to whoever was subbing the column over the years, the terms of abuse employed being already familiar from their use in the column itself – ‘cornerboy’, ‘thullabawn’, ‘thooleramawn’, along with the odd ‘gobshite’, ‘bastard’ and other terms (176).

As Myles na gCopaleen, O’Nolan privileged the productive capacity of mistakes and errors. As his puns and purposeful misspellings in *Cruiskeen Lawn* attest, the failure of language can give rise to fresh meanings and can be a means of subverting the ‘mortified language’ of clichés (BM, 227). If the limitations of language can be exploited to creative ends, so can the limitations of the frame. Self-reflexive frame devices may be properties of *metafiction*, but that was no reason to stop Myles from exercising these devices in his *metajournalism*. Whether we think of the *stet*, instructions to compositors – let it stand – that appear in *Cruiskeen Lawn* next to Myles’s neologisms, or of the interruptions of a censoring construction called ‘The Editor’ who leaves a part of the task of composition to the reader, articles employing these devices are always, in a sense, unfinished, even in print.

As a classic example of the intrusive construction of 'The Editor', let us consider the entry that Kevin O'Nolan, the compiler of *The Best of Myles* (1968), chose to lead the section 'The Myles na Gopaleen Catechism of Cliché':

IT IS about time certain things were said and if they won't be said in the leader columns they will be said here. We have had about enough of this thing that the Germans call *unmaessigkreisenheit*. A certain thing happened the other day but not a word about it in the papers. I have now made up my mind to shoot my mouth off, whatever the consequences may be. Listen to this, for example –

The Editor: You will keep the fun clean like the rest of us.

Myself: O is that so, who said I will, you and who else?

The Editor: Your man will be down on us if we are not careful.

Myself: But surely we are prepared to suffer for our principles?
(*BM*, 201)

Myles does not continue with his discussion of *unmaessigkreisenheit*, a nonsense German compound suggesting, perhaps, 'excessive or insatiable circularity'. By interjecting a censorious editorial figure, Myles both alludes to the Censorship Board's veto on prurient material – 'keep the fun clean' – and reminds his readers that the news to which they have access in Emergency-era Ireland is policed for partiality to the Allied cause.

Appearances of 'The Editor' are common as a reference to a mediating body; less frequently, but perhaps more suggestively, Myles writes about the typewriter itself. This excerpt appeared in *The Irish Times* on 11 May 1942: 'ERWOOD STANDARD TYPEWR. Reason that out. It's before me on my desk as I write'. Myles describes the activity of his busy thumbs as he operates his Underwood Standard Typewriter. The work of producing his column year-in, year-out has wiped the gold finish off the letters on the line-spacing mechanism. The activity of writing degrades the instrument of inscription. He goes on, 'It's fairly obvious I haven't much to say to-day'.⁵ Apparently, when Myles has nothing to say, he writes about the condition of having nothing to say and about the material conditions of 'saying' – or in this case, typing on a degraded instrument of transmission.

'Scenes in a Novel (Probably Posthumous)'

Under the guise of Brother Barnabas, O'Nolan wrote 'Scenes in a Novel (Probably Posthumous)' for the University College Dublin

journal *Comhthrom Féinne* in May 1934. O’Nolan and his friends had been contributing to the journal, a more daring alternative to the *National Student*, since the early thirties (Cronin, 54–56). Though still a student, O’Nolan’s purposeful disposition toward metafiction is already registered. The article stages a fatal confrontation between an author and his indignant creations, a conceit with which readers will be all too familiar from its recurrence in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Barnabas relates how, ‘one night when [he] had swallowed nine stouts and felt vaguely blasphemous’, he had created the character of the villainous Carruthers McDaid (*SF*, 50). McDaid later turned against the author Barnabas – apparently, the character resented the depravity his creator had bestowed upon him, the point of departure being McDaid’s refusal to rob a church poor box. ‘Scenes’ opens with Brother Barnabas living in fear, McDaid having sworn vengeance. He predicts his own inevitable demise in a direct address to the reader: ‘I am penning these lines, dear reader, under conditions of great emotional stress’ (*SF*, 49). Referring to the story as a ‘posthumous article’ (*SF*, 49), Brother Barnabas plays on the concept of a ‘posthumous child’, likening his manuscript to a child born after the death of its father. Hopper recasts this metaphor of ‘aestho-autogamy’ – authorship as a male substitute for childbirth – as O’Brien’s satirical admonishment of the Catholic and censorship ‘ideal of a celibate utopia, where there would be no need for sex, contraception, or feminism’ (Hopper, 70). If aestho-autogamy is a way to circumvent the sinfulness of sexual reproduction, the premise of ‘Scenes’ – the author’s impending assassination – insists that it is not a sinless alternative.

The self-reflexive devices that draw attention to the frame also highlight the inevitable loss of authorial control. The parenthetical subtitle ‘(Probably Posthumous)’ is a comic insertion that foresees the author’s death. He will die before his words see print: ‘By the time these lines are in neat rows of print, with no damn over-lapping at the edges, the writer will be in Kingdom Come’ (*SF*, 49). Beyond the author’s own limitations, this moment of self-reflexivity anticipates the limitations of the publishers, who will wrest control over the manuscript from the author. ‘[N]eat rows of print, with no damn over-lapping at the edges’ is a frustrated instruction to the compositor setting up the type of *Comhthrom Féinne*, or to the pressman taking responsibility for seeing the story into print. Because he anticipates a violent death at the hands of his creation, Brother Barnabas leaves his

instructions embedded within the text. Therefore, beyond the internal 'character revolt against the author' that is 'an integral element of the metafictional deconstruction of traditional fiction' (Hopper, 64), the story itself alludes to a long process of *extratextual* manipulation that is also outside of authorial control. The modifier 'probably' in the subtitle asserts not only a sense of uncertainty about the author's fate, but also the author's fundamental uncertainty about the ultimate appearance of his text: he knows his is not the only hand involved in its making. If the 'posthumous article' survives its author, that survival depends upon the contentious relationship between Barnabas and his publishers, in which the author will ultimately lose control over the manuscript. In a sense, authors are always dead at the moment of publication. Even in manuscript, this anxiety is registered in 'Scenes in a Novel', a story painfully aware of its own mediation.

We speak of metafiction as introducing or exposing a distance between the origin of a text and its destination. This distance is usually conceived of as spatial: critics map out or diagram O'Nolan's narrative layers, implying that one narrative contains and surrounds another.⁶ Flann O'Brien's layered narrative technique in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, for instance, has often been compared to a Chinese box.⁷ But in 'Scenes', the narrative distance is temporal: Brother Barnabas insinuates that a certain amount of time will elapse between the moment of his writing and the moment of our reading. The subtitle '(Probably Posthumous)' constitutes an allusion to a time lag or delay. This delay is not empty time: it contains the material processes of textual composition, transmission, printing, publication and distribution. These temporally and materially situated processes, encoded in the text and paratext of 'Scenes', speak to Stuart Hall's model of mass communication. For Hall, the pathway of communications from production to consumption is not a strictly linear conduit, but rather a circuit, in which each 'moment' in the sequence resituates and reconstitutes the rest.

The apparatuses, relations and practices of production thus issue, at a certain moment (the moment of 'production/circulation') in the form of symbolic vehicles constituted within the rules of 'language'. It is in this discursive form that the circulation of the 'product' takes place. The process thus requires, at the production end, its material instruments – its 'means' – as well as its own sets of social (production) relations – the organization and combination of practices within media apparatuses.⁸

Textual production can therefore be understood as a feedback loop, occasioning many opportunities for intervention. The many agents and aspects of mediation always leave their trace on a story. What we might consider to be interference is actually contribution – as important as any – that makes the textual object possible. When Brother Barnabas remarks on the way his story will appear on the page, ‘in neat rows of print’, this is more than a final command to his printers. It is a reminder that from the moment of composition, there are still several stages of textual production pending before the textual object actually exists. It is a reminder, too, that the *story*, as such, is only complete when it attains an audience – a reader – to engage in the process of exchange. ‘Before this message can have an *effect*’, Hall writes, ‘it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded.’⁹ After its distribution, the text is decoded and reconstituted by its audience. Therefore, as the metafictional strategies of ‘Scenes’ lay bare, the act of reading itself is constructive; reading is the consummation of the writing act as a mode of communication. Reception is the final and, perhaps, most crucial stage of textual production.

‘The Martyr’s Crown’ and ‘For Ireland Home and Beauty’

A consideration of the ten-year gestation period of ‘The Martyr’s Crown’ will now allow us to observe these interactions between the various stages of textual production in the context of O’Nolan’s 1940s situation. The story was first published in *Envoy* under the byline ‘Brian Nolan’ in 1950,¹⁰ but O’Nolan began work on it as early as January 1940 (Cronin, 172). This earlier version, called ‘For Ireland Home and Beauty’, is different enough to be a separate story in its own right.¹¹ Although we cannot say how frequently or under what circumstances O’Nolan returned to the manuscript for revision, in the ten intervening years the story altered significantly.

‘The Martyr’s Crown’ is a standard *mise en abyme* featuring two characters, Mr Toole and Mr O’Hickey. The two friends pass ‘a young man of surpassing elegance’ in the street, who fails to return Toole’s greeting (*SF*, 76). The snub prompts Toole to give the tale of the young man’s origins (although not, of course, until O’Hickey has loosened his tongue with drink in the nearest public house). Toole relates

how he and five comrades bested the British during the Anglo–Irish War. They were hiding out in the home of a widow, Mrs Clougherty, following a bloody fire: the battle of Harcourt Street. After a week, ‘two luries packed with military’ arrived and an officer banged on the door (*SF*, 79). Mrs Clougherty answered, took the officer ‘into the room off the hall’ and ten minutes later, the lorries drove away (*SF*, 79–80). Getting back to the young man the two gentlemen had seen in the street, Toole finishes, ‘that young man was *born* for Ireland’ and his mother ‘wears the martyr’s crown to-day!’ (*SF*, 80).

‘The Martyr’s Crown’ is an unusual text in the O’Nolan canon insofar as overt self-reflexivity makes no appearance. In comparison to the openings previously discussed, the first line is unproblematically realist: ‘Mr Toole and Mr O’Hickey walked down the street together in the morning’ (*SF*, 76). The metafictional frame device employed is covert. ‘The Martyr’s Crown’ foregoes any reference to the act of writing or the circuit of communication; it is simply a story that features the telling of another story. The reliability of the storyteller, Toole, is immediately thrown into question: his companion, O’Hickey, is ‘well up to Mr Toole’s tricks. Mr Toole at his best, he thought, was better than a play’ (*SF*, 76). Before Toole even speaks, we know he is an entertainer, more concerned with enrapturing audiences than with the tyranny of fact.

While ‘The Martyr’s Crown’ is written in a third-person omniscient perspective, ‘For Ireland Home and Beauty’ has the key distinction of a first-person narrator – unnamed, as are so many of O’Brien’s narrators – who is perhaps a prototype for O’Hickey. In this earlier version of the story, throwing the reliability of the storyteller into question is the first order of business. The ‘Mr Toole’ character from ‘The Martyr’s Crown’ is here named ‘Mr Cullen’ and his self-aggrandising tendencies are more overblown. The story opens:

In my many walks with Mr Cullen I had become accustomed to his habit of saluting the most unlikely people and explaining to me afterwards that they were in ‘the movement’ and had been ‘mainly responsible’ for such and such a piece of work when the fight against the British was at its hottest.¹²

Cullen includes himself among the roll call of patriots, having long given the narrator the impression that he was responsible for the Howth gun-running operation. ‘Later’, the narrator assures us, ‘when I learnt that he

had been living in Howth during these eventful times and for many years before, I found several rather shabby thoughts coming into my head every time I met the good-natured burly patriot'.¹³ Cullen had evidently taken pains to suggest, without saying directly, that his own role in the event had been instrumental. The gesture is only complete when it succeeds in influencing a gullible listener.

The earlier draft, then, emphasises the role of reception in giving a story its meaning: Cullen never *said* he had been responsible for the gunrunning, but his listener, our narrator, had inferred that its teller had had a bigger part to play. This small detail illuminates the potential of a narrator to intervene. When O'Nolan removed the first-person narrator and replaced it with the third-person, he also removed a layer of narrative distance. In 'For Ireland Home and Beauty', the story undergoes two levels of mediation: Cullen to the narrator and the narrator to the reader. 'The Martyr's Crown', by contrast, has no central mediating figure of narrative deferral. The circuit of communication is thus shortened, cutting off some of the feedback potential originally staged within the story. Some of what is lost as a result includes a trick ending-beyond-the-ending, in which the narrator's troubled thoughts collapse the possibility of the truth of Mr Cullen's tale. Leaving the pub, the narrator reflects that the young gentleman in question was 'neither supercilious nor shy merely short-sighted. [. . .] He was Mr Murtagh's second son'.¹⁴

Beyond the metafictional and mediatory implications of the double role of the narrator as both listener and teller of stories, as both audience and author, 'For Ireland Home and Beauty' includes a self-reflexive exchange on what constitutes a valuable story. The draft introduces an additional character, not present in the published version: Mr Murtagh, a bartender, who listens to Cullen's story with some interest. Murtagh's interest fades, however, when he hears that Mrs Hogan, the prototype for Mrs Clougherty, is a respectable woman. When Cullen describes his impression that Mrs Hogan had had sex with the two British officers who came to the door looking for rebels in hiding, Murtagh warms to the tale: 'By God there's a story there somewhere', he says; 'If you wrote down the inside story of what happened there you would make a fortune in America'.¹⁵ Stories, for Murtagh, are part of an economic framework; his comment identifies market forces as the motivation for the work of writing.¹⁶ Murtagh's remark also implies that Cullen's words have not given him the most

satisfactory version of the story, the version that will sell. Cullen has related his own perspective on what he observed; Murtagh wants the bedroom perspective. Cullen gives us a frame-tale: the story of Mrs Hogan framed by the context in which he had witnessed it. The story, from this perspective, is mediated, quite literally, by a wall and a closed door. It is mediated again by the conventions of storytelling, from memory (or fabulation) to rhetoric. Murtagh, it seems, would prefer an *immediate* version of the story – ‘the *inside* story’ – a straight account of what happened behind the closed door. Yet the structure of ‘For Ireland Home and Beauty’ – a frame tale framing a frame tale – reminds us that there is no ‘inside story’, no straight account that is free of mediating forces.

At some point, O’Nolan decided to eliminate Murtagh, along with his statements about what qualifies as a worthwhile story: the maxim that sex sells. ‘For Ireland Home and Beauty’ hung in limbo for a decade and when it finally emerged as ‘The Martyr’s Crown’, the elements that bespoke provocative self-reflexivity had been excised. The question then arises as to what interventions or mediations could have provoked the changes?

January 1940, the month O’Nolan drafted ‘For Ireland Home and Beauty’, is, crucially, the same month he sent the manuscript of *The Third Policeman* to Longman’s. The story of its rejection and O’Nolan’s subsequent despair is well documented, as are the many stories he subsequently concocted about losing the manuscript.¹⁷ There is much to suggest that the phrasing of the publishers’ letter of rejection affected much of his future writing: ‘We realise the author’s ability’, they had written, ‘but think that he should be less fantastic and in this new novel he is more so’ (qtd. in Cronin, 101). With these words the publishers intervened in O’Nolan’s approach to narrative structures: he thought an appropriate solution to their complaints would be to lose the character Joe (the narrator’s soul) and rewrite the whole story in the third person.¹⁸ Significantly, losing a rogue character and switching the narrative perspective are the very same revisions he did make to ‘For Ireland Home and Beauty’. In O’Nolan’s writing prior to the 1940s, the use of an unnamed first-person narrator was prevalent, while in his later fiction the third-person reigns.¹⁹

Beyond O’Nolan’s own experiences with publishers, there are more general contexts of 1940s Ireland that played a role in this change in his approach to narrative framing and textual revision. By

the 1940s, the climate of censorship in Ireland had reached its peak.²⁰ Famously, Kate O'Brien's *The Land of Spices* (1941) was banned on the basis of a single line.²¹ In 1942, the furore over the Seanad Éireann debates concerning Eric Cross's *The Tailor and Ansty* was raging. Seán O'Faoláin consistently and conspicuously argued against censorship in his editorials for *The Bell*.²² Although the premise for the heightened awareness of the Censorship Board was the maintenance of neutrality during the Emergency, the most controversial instances of banning were on the grounds of indecency, perceived blasphemy, or anti-national sentiment. Many of the changes made to 'The Martyr's Crown' before publication have the effect of 'keeping the fun clean'. The lasciviousness of Mrs Hogan's actions is toned down: Mrs Clougherty in 'The Martyr's Crown' admits one soldier, not two, into her home. Any slight against latter-day Irish nationalists is avoided with the declaration that Toole 'had never rendered military service to his country' and is only a fraud (*SF*, 77). Despite his reputation for irreverence, O'Nolan's career is notable in that nothing he published was ever banned by the Censorship Board. All of this demonstrates an attitude of acceptance – however begrudging – of the dynamics of publication in the larger creative process at his particular historical moment, made sharper by Longman's rejection of his own masterpiece. Thus, a comparison of the two different versions of 'The Martyr's Crown' tells us something about O'Nolan's participation in the mediation of his work. That is, he appreciates the mechanisms and authorities apart from himself that contribute to its manufacturing and, therefore, its expression: editors, publishers, state forces, readers. He himself was ultimately deferent about his own role in that production. Indeed, when O'Nolan sent a copy of *At Swim-Two-Birds* to James Joyce in Paris, he inscribed the message 'with plenty of what's on page 305' inside the cover – on that page the phrase 'diffidence of the author' is underlined. What we find through a comparative genetic analysis of 'For Ireland Home and Beauty' and 'The Martyr's Crown' is an O'Nolan, situated firmly behind his desk, 'with plenty of what's on page 305' (qtd. in Cronin, 93).²³

Rather than speaking to the failure of this particular text, this discovery points us to an indexical feature of O'Nolan's wider *œuvre*, as explored in this essay. Clearly, the level of playfulness he employs with his self-conscious narrative voices places O'Nolan at the heart of

Ireland's comic and, I would add, metafictional tradition. Yet, with his signature use of the metafictional framing device, O'Nolan emphasises the inherent and inevitable failures, rather than successes, of any writing endeavour. That which limits or interrupts the alleged wholeness of a story is, ultimately, constitutive of the story itself. The mediation is the message.

‘I’VE GOT YOU UNDER MY SKIN’
 ‘John Duffy’s Brother’, ‘Two in One’,
 and the confessions of Narcissus

Paul Fagan

At the outset of Chapter IX of *The Dalkey Archive* (1964) the reader finds Mick Shaughnessy deep in contemplation, devising a ‘bright, masterly, bold’ plan by which he might impede De Selby’s ambitions ‘to visit the human race with havoc’. As the reader is granted access to this moment of reflection, the narrator characterises Mick’s immediate surroundings with the curious detail that the houses ‘along the narrow quays of the Liffey seem to lean outward as if to study themselves in the water’ (CN, 674). In excess of its localised commentary on the messianic certainty with which Mick perceives his fundamental role in the world’s survival – as well as, perhaps, an echo of Myles na gCopaleen’s sustained critique of a broader form of Irish cultural navel-gazing – this explicit evocation of Ovid’s Narcissus myth in Brian O’Nolan’s final novel stands as an intriguing index of a deeper engagement with the Narcissus scene throughout the writer’s work. For Ruben Borg, the spectacle of Narcissus survives in modernist thought as ‘a scene of self-recognition and misrecognition, of impossible relations, of a likeness that is foreign yet strangely familiar’,¹ and in these terms it is a scene of central significance to O’Nolan’s poetics. As Carol Taaffe insists, O’Nolan’s writing is ‘guiltily laden with doubles and echoes’ (127).

In this essay I want to take up Taaffe’s implicit invitation to read O’Nolan’s work as testing the resonances of the Ovidian scene in the acutely guilt-ridden cultural moment in which he finds himself. More specifically, I will argue the case that a central concern in O’Nolan’s aesthetic project is the narcissistic trope of the self as a multitudinous and unfolding *mise en abyme* under the ever-watchful eye of authority, condemned to eternal self-misrecognition in a fictive world figured as a responsive mirror.² To these ends I will investigate the short stories

'John Duffy's Brother' (1940) and 'Two in One' (1954) as paradigmatic of the attention paid in O'Nolan's work to Ovid's scene as a double for the literary event. I claim that in these stories we find the writer working through these resonances along two interrelated strands. In the first instance, the texts explore the Narcissus scene as 'a powerful metaphor for the quest of self-identity'³ that challenges the humanistic emphasis on the agency of a self that is 'unitary, stable over time and able to suppress desire'.⁴ In the second instance, they attend to Ovid's myth as a 'narrative about responsibility'⁵ that is peculiarly suited to staging the problems and possibilities, of resisting the exercise of authority inscribed in the reader's gaze.

In order to unfold these dimensions of the two texts under discussion, I will put them into conversation with the writing of Maurice Blanchot, which I submit is uniquely resonant with O'Nolan's project of testing the Narcissus scene and the literary event as interchangeable sites for thinking through an 'evanescent identity which is lost even as it is grasped'.⁶ Yet alongside an exploration of the 'abyss of selfhood' characteristic of O'Nolan's work,⁷ 'John Duffy's Brother' and 'Two in One' explicitly ask us to attend to what is owed when we (figuratively, literally) get under the protagonists' skins in the act of reading. The narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) advocates that characters in fiction 'should be allowed a private life, self-determination and a decent standard of living' (CN, 21) and while this manifesto appears in a highly ironised environment, O'Nolan's writing continues to display an attentiveness to the peculiar ethical demands of the encounters between the teller, the witness and the told in the literary event. I thus advance the argument that O'Nolan's project of representing and exploring a series of selves that have been radically decentred or interrupted is intrinsically and necessarily bound up with his resistance to the authority and ethicality of the reader's impossible epistemological vantage point in the literary event. A key context for the attention paid to these entwined concerns in O'Nolan's *œuvre* is the emphasis placed in his immediate socio-cultural environment on the role of confession in the discovery of the truth about, as well as the centring and policing of, the self through the imperatives of disclosure, renunciation, absolution, salvation.⁸ My argument, then, rests on the presupposition that these texts are engaged in thinking through a rather proto-Foucauldian notion: if the fundamental exercise of the authority of readers over characters is to

be found in those characters' own confessional interpretations and renunciations of unsanctioned aspects of a decentred and relational self, then the resistance to this ethically suspect authority must take the form of a telling of the self that places it beyond interpretation.⁹ And if 'John Duffy's Brother' stages the double bind that strategies of secrecy and confession both enforce the internalisation of the cultural policing of the self, then I want to suggest that in its central conceit of literally getting under the skin of an Other, 'Two in One' returns to these problems of access in order to offer a radical solution.

'John Duffy's Brother'

'John Duffy's Brother' is the text in Brian O'Nolan's canon to engage most thoroughly Jean Paul's maxim that 'man is never alone: self-consciousness determines that there are always two of you in the room'.¹⁰ The story presents the reader with the before, during and after of a psychotic episode on 9 March 1932, when 'John Duffy's brother' – a solitary, frugal and secretly voyeuristic employee of the office of Messrs Polter and Polter, Solicitors, Commissioners for Oaths¹¹ – 'became possessed of the strange idea that he was a train' (*SF*, 56). The pivotal moment occurs when the transformation reverses and Mr Duffy 'gazed out into the day, no longer a train, but a badly frightened man' (*SF*, 58). While we are assured that 'Never once did the strange malady return', in the story's final image we are presented with a man contaminated by this encounter with an other self: 'to this day John Duffy's brother starts at the rumble of a train in the Liffey tunnel and stands rooted to the road when he comes suddenly on a level-crossing – silent, so to speak, upon a peak in Darien' (*SF*, 58).

While most commentary focuses on the story's curious central event of a man believing, briefly, that he is a train,¹² I want to attend to the text's formal, metafictional strategies. It is on this plane that I claim the story's central narcissistic scene is opened up as an inter-subjective event that makes different demands upon its participants: teller, witness, told. My argument is that 'John Duffy's Brother' foregrounds the reader's responsibility in witnessing Duffy's episode by drawing attention to what Adam Zachary Newton characterises – in terms borrowed from Emmanuel Levinas – as the distinction in the literary event 'between moral propositionality, or the realm of the "Said" and ethical performance, the domain of "Saying"'.¹³ Throughout the story, O'Nolan places these narcissistic tropes – of

doubling, of a failure to respond to the call of the Other – at the register of the 'Said' into conversation with strategies of formal narcissism – of metafictionality, of literary echoing – at the register of 'Saying'. In this way the story demands the reader attend to the ethical problems at stake in the access granted to Duffy's moment of self-collapse, as well as the necessity and impossibility, of looking away.

The story's strange, meandering opening pages are usually overlooked or treated as pure digressive play. For Thomas F. Shea, 'by deferring progression, the narrator prompts us to savor sentence sounds and invites us to explore various possibilities of verbal arrangement'.¹⁴ Rather than 'accentuat[ing] the art of artifice and style as performance',¹⁵ I would like to suggest that these passages reveal exactly what is at stake in the text by limning the character of Duffy in relation to a 'narcissism disrupted by trauma, in which one (mis)recognises oneself in another, or (mis)recognises another in oneself',¹⁶ in ways that are perhaps more subtle than we are used to with O'Nolan. When we first meet Duffy, in his 'small house on an eminence in Inchicore', his habits of surveillance are emphasised. 'When dressing in the morning he could gaze across the broad valley of the Liffey to the slopes of the Phoenix Park', while at other times he would 'spend an idle moment with his father's spyglass, ranging the valley with an eagle eye' (*SF*, 54). As Duffy surveys the valley's inhabitants, the third-person narrator underlines the interconnectivity of the objects of Duffy's gaze. We are told of the 'retired stationary-engine driver' who 'lived quietly with a delicate sister' called Goggins, of whom Duffy had never heard. She is the 'relict of the late Paul Goggins, wholesale clothier', whose cousin Leo Corr – whom Ms Goggins had never met – 'was sent up in 1924 for a stretch of hard labour in connection with the manufacture of spurious currency' before emigrating 'to Labrador upon his release' (*SF*, 55). While the associative chain that leads us to Corr's incarceration (for replication) and escape (from an authoritarian gaze) to new-found lands implies a thematic subtexture to which I will return, for now I want to underline the narcissistic thrust of this exposition. While unknown and unknowable to each other, Duffy is presented as the centre point that ties all of this disparate information together, through whom the seeming randomness and chaos of the fictive world is centred and given wholeness, purpose. As the narrator notes, 'The village of Chapelizod was to the left and invisible in the depth but each morning the inhabitants would

erect, as if for Mr Duffy's benefit, a lazy plume of smoke to show exactly where they were' (*SF*, 54–55) [my emphasis].¹⁷

In these acts of detached surveillance, Duffy is not only positioned as a narcissistic reader, but also, importantly, as a *misreader*. His glass, we are told, 'usually came to rest' upon the obscure figure of Martin Smullen, who

carried in the crook of his arm an instrument which Mr Duffy at first took to be a shotgun or patent repeating rifle, but one morning the man held it by the butt and smote the barrels smartly on the ground as he walked and it was evident to Mr Duffy – he felt some disappointment – that the article was a walking-stick. (*SF*, 55)

It is further disclosed that Duffy and Smullen, the voyeur and unaware object of the gaze, 'once stood side by side at the counter of a public house in Little Easter Street, mutually unrecognised, each to the other a black stranger' (*SF*, 55). This moment of failed recognition is essential to the tropes of narcissism being worked out in the scene. For Blanchot, in so far as it stages a scene of failed recognition Ovid's myth provides a site for encountering writing as a space not of subjectivity but of alterity:

the aspect of the myth which Ovid finally forgets is that Narcissus, bending over the spring, does not recognize himself in the fluid image that the water sends back to him. It is thus not himself, not his perhaps non-existent 'I' that he loves or – even in his mystification – desires.¹⁸

In O'Nolan's story this attention paid to the self is historically situated in relation to the 'three blows' Sigmund Freud claims 'the researches of science' have inflicted upon 'the universal narcissism of men': the *cosmological* blow to man's centrality in the universe inflicted by Copernicus, the *biological* blow to man's superiority over creation inflicted by Darwin, the *psychological* blow to man's sovereignty over his own mind inflicted by Freud himself.¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, adding the decentring processes inflicted by Karl Marx, notes that these 'traumas' have resulted in the 'effective de-centering [. . .] of the *ego cogito* – and of the very concept of narcissism'.²⁰ O'Nolan explicitly links this trope of self-misrecognition with 'modern writing':

It could be argued that much of the foregoing has little real bearing on the story of John Duffy's brother, but modern writing, it is hoped, has passed the stage when simple events are stated in the

void without any clue as to the psychological and hereditary forces working in the background to produce them. (*SF*, 56)

The implicit references to Freud and Darwin ('psychological and hereditary forces'), in conversation with the explicit references to Marx later in the story,²¹ situate Duffy's 'adventure' of the self in a particularly modern moment and present the dynamics of modern writing as concerning the revelation of and granting of access to, a secret inner self.

The 'simple events' of Duffy's tale at once trace and challenge such a revelation. In his encounter with his *doppelgänger* 'Mr Train' (*SF*, 57), Duffy comes to recognise and be contaminated by, 'the paradox of encountering oneself like another'²²: the uncanny phenomenon of realising that one is neither oneself nor *one* self. This interruption of the narcissistic scene of failed recognition with the introduction of the spectre of the *doppelgänger* – a manifestation through which the revelation of the disunified self becomes a recognised object of horror – in the direct context of these Freudian echoes is significant. As Dimitris Vardoulakis highlights, the rise in a Freudian stress on 'a stable and retrievable origin' of the content of the self led to a reinscription of the figure of the *doppelgänger* as a manifestation of 'a sense of failure or loss in the self [...] an aberration, the stencil of a symptomatology of the self.'²³ Yet the text's presentation of this event, of which 'no explanation [...] can be attempted' (*SF*, 56), suggests that Mr Train's arrival in Mr Duffy's life does not constitute a splitting of a previously unified self, but rather a more radical form of interruption.²⁴ In this context Shea's reading of the opening passages in which the narrator 'delights in beating around, over, under and some distance from the bush, continually taking us further and further from the supposed focus'²⁵ takes on new force, hinting that a more fundamental relationality of the self is discovered. I will return to Duffy's self-encounter as a staging of the realisation and ultimate refusal, of the imperative to offer this disunited self up for symptomatic analysis through telling and confession. For now I want to unfold some of the ways in which the story's strategies of literary echoing reveal the stakes of this power-relationship between reader and would-be confessor. As I will show, these echoes are carefully chosen to advance the dual dynamic of the Narcissus myth as a 'powerful metaphor about the quest for self-identity'²⁶ and a 'narrative about responsibility'²⁷ – a dual dynamic which drives the text towards its final narcissistic *tableau* of Duffy lost in self-contemplation at the

sounds and signs of trains, indices of his other self, 'silent, so to speak, upon a peak in Darien' (*SF*, 58).

That this final echo reveals the story's symbolic sub-structure to be formulated around John Keats's 'Upon First Looking into Chapman's Homer' (1816) is significant – particularly with respect to the ways in which O'Nolan's story places these echoes of Keats's poem into conversation with parallel echoes of James Joyce's 'A Painful Case' (1914), a story about another Mr Duffy, a middle-aged bank cashier who lives in a similarly isolated suburb of Dublin 'at a little distance from his body, regarding his own acts with doubtful side glances'.²⁸ While Joyce's text at least superficially charts the story of a tragic narcissist at the register of the 'Said',²⁹ Keats's poem attends to the qualia and the responsibilities of the act of reading. In the sonnet, Keats represents his experience of reading Chapman's translation as a surplus beyond articulation. The *mise en abyme* of a reader reading Keats reading Chapman reading Homer – and its refiguration here in our reading of the narrator reading Duffy (mis)reading Smullen – echoes the matryoshka structure of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, but with the emphasis shifted from creating to witnessing.³⁰ Importantly, Keats's poem guards against the violence that would be committed by staging this sublime moment in a direct representation. He finally looks away from Chapman's text as object, deflecting our gaze by analogising his experience to 'two radical restructurings of the mind'³¹: an astronomer 'When a new planet swims into his ken' and

stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He star'd at the Pacific [. . .]
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.³²

The threat entailed in reading is signalled through the brief reference to Duffy's father, from whom he had received the spyglass – a well chosen index of the reader's position as conceived in the story, simultaneously implying intimacy and distance, familiarity and inaccessibility. Duffy Sr suffers a collapse similar to his son's:

On the fourth day of July, 1927, at four o'clock, he took leave of his senses in the dining-room. Four men arrived in a closed van at eight o'clock that evening to remove him from mortal ken to a place where he would be restrained for his own good. (*SF*, 55–56)

Shea glosses over the relevance of Duffy's mercantile father as an avid reader of Homer as nothing more than play: 'the temptation here is to

connect the reference to Homer with fantastical journeys across wide expanses, but this affiliation probably did not occur to O'Brien'.³³ I would contend, however, that the thematic resonance of such 'fantastical journeys' is signalled in O'Nolan's text through the figure of Leo Corr – incarcerated for doubling, eluding the surveillance of authority in his escape across the Atlantic – and that the encounter between fantastical journeys and a Baconian model of discovery and analogy is clearly at stake in 'John Duffy's Brother' as well as in Keats's sonnet. As Jacqueline L. Cowan claims, 'in a Baconian world ordered by fixed and constant natural law, neither can the marvel stand as a unique ontological category nor can alterity exist in any radical sense'.³⁴ In this regard, the story's auto-reflective narrative strategies force us to attend to the violence committed by both the narrator's invitation to solve the 'clue as to the psychological and hereditary forces working in the background' of Duffy's strange transformation and the surveillant reader's demand to relocate the ontological opacity of Duffy's own mind to an epistemological register, sacrificing his integrity for our omniscience.

The importance of this attention to Duffy Sr is brought to bear in the moments after Mr Train's disappearance, when we find that Mr Duffy's primary anxiety is one of discovery. In his relief that 'down the roadway there was no dark van arriving with uniformed men' – figures of the normative authorities of the form of symptomatic reading encouraged and given access by the narrator – Duffy has discovered what his father had experienced: the danger of being the object of reading. The revelation invokes at once the dual imperatives of revealing and renouncing this secret self in order to relieve oneself of burden and of concealing this other self from the authority of normative readers who will arrive 'in a closed van' to 'remove [you] to mortal ken to a place where [you] would be restrained for [your] own good' (*SF*, 56). The pivotal role of confession in charting this distance between the alterity of the 'marvel' in (Chapman's) Homer and the relocation of the 'marvel' from an ontological to an epistemological plane so that it might be brought under conscious control is suggestive of Michel Foucault's oft-cited summation of the 'metamorphosis in literature', by which

we have passed from a pleasure to be recounted and heard, centring on the heroic or marvellous narration of 'trials' of bravery or sainthood, to a literature ordered according to the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the

words, a truth which the very form of the confession holds out like a shimmering mirage.³⁵

If the 'point' of the story, as the narrator suggests, is that Mr Duffy's 'strange malady' remained undiscovered, then we can see that what is at stake in Duffy's decision to forego the confession's promises of absolution and salvation is his suspicion of its implications in the exercise of authority over the subject.³⁶ Beyond self-preservation, forbearing confession also suggests a refusal to renounce this newly encountered, decentred self, even as it contaminates him.

As this decentring of the self leads to the formation of a secret under constant threat of exposure and as the reader gets under Duffy's skin to witness his secret moment of mental collapse, O'Nolan constructs a narrative situation that tests the fundamental ethical questions at stake in this opaque encounter between the unknowing, unwilling subject and the voyeuristic reader. The text signals these intentions from the outset:

Strictly speaking, this story should not be written or told at all. To write it or to tell it is to spoil it. This is because the man who had the strange experience we are going to talk about never mentioned it to anybody and the fact that he kept his secret and sealed it up completely in his memory is the whole point of the story. Thus we must admit that handicap at the beginning – that it is absurd for us to tell the story, absurd for anybody to listen to it and unthinkable that anybody should believe it. (*SF*, 54)

For all its technical flair, this passage simply tells us, with a self-reflective flourish, to attend to what is operative in all third-person narratives: the impossibility of the reader's gaze. Yet by signalling that the story is heavily invested in an ethical plane of 'Saying', the metafictional framing also asks the reader to attend to what is owed in the acts of looking, witnessing and surveillance that constitute the act of reading. In her *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1980), Linda Hutcheon contends that the move to the formal narcissism of such 'modern metafiction' is to be found in 'the role allotted to the reader'. This move serves not only to foreground the reader as 'a function implicit in the text, an element of the narrative situation', but also to create what she calls an 'unsettled reader' who 'is forced to scrutinise his concepts of art as well as his life values'.³⁷ The seeming relief from the imperative of 'self'-disclosure is enabled when Duffy returns to his

office to find that his colleagues Hodge and Cranberry had taken this episode for a harmless joke. Yet, if Duffy's refuge is that 'Nobody knew his secret but himself and nobody else would ever know' (*SF*, 58), then the reader cannot avoid the revelation that the impossible epistemological vantage which allows her to witness Duffy's episode is implicated in an act of violence.³⁸ The unsettled reader – disembodied, looking on impossibly – has to attend to her own position behind the spyglass, gazing at Duffy contemplating his own image as he had Smullen's earlier. 'John Duffy's Brother' completes this narcissistic scene in its final words, in which the narrator and reader can only echo the last line of Keats's sonnet – trying and failing, to speak to and access, Mr Duffy/Mr Train in his moment of narcissistic reverie.

This final move hints at another, contrary, demand that the story makes upon the reader's impossible gaze: that of looking away. As Newton insists,

The desire to know everything [. . .] is a sign of love. It is also a sign of reading. And a sign of excess. And so, reading sometimes demands the contrary sign of looking away, of stopping short, of realizing that texts, like persons, cannot entirely be known, that they must keep some of their secrets.³⁹

Clearly, in part, O'Nolan is working through the problems of 'the dizzying indulgence in the abyss of selfhood (*der selbe*), the regardless pursuit of omniscience (*omnium*)' that will be treated on the broader canvas of *The Third Policeman*,⁴⁰ yet this story is also deeply concerned with the problem of how texts and characters can keep their secrets under the watchful eye of the reader. As Blanchot observes, this 'prohibition against seeing' is at the heart of Ovid's myth:

presence is divine merely by virtue of appearing and also in the sheer multiplicity of its appearances. There is always, however, something not to see. And this is not so much because one should not look at everything, as because [. . .] it is vision that exposes men to the peril of the sacred whenever the gaze, through its arrogance quick to scrutinize and to possess, fails to look with restraint and in a retiring mode.⁴¹

At the outset, the narrator informs us that we will 'do this man one favour. We will refrain from mentioning him by his complete name' (*SF*, 54), referring to him only as 'John Duffy's brother' throughout. For Shea, O'Nolan's 'disillusionment with the naive assurance that

naming corresponds with control' is indexical of a more general 'uneasiness with the idea of an author as the origin or source of a statement'.⁴² Yet it seems to me that this elision also foregrounds an uneasiness with the reader as the terminus of a statement. Indeed, it is exactly in Newton's notion of reading as simultaneously implicated in a striving for omniscience (against which the story implicitly warns) and as a form of love ('the affirmation of otherness'⁴³ that its call to ethical consideration demands), that the tale registers itself as the staging of a problem, of an impasse, rather than as a solution (such as in the democratic liberation of the reader from the tyranny of the author). In this ongoing process of exploring 'narrative structure and form as ethical relation', by offering 'paradigms which [. . .] imply fundamental ethical questions about what it means to generate and transmit narratives and to implicate, transform, or force the persons who participate in them',⁴⁴ the story asks us to confront the emotional and ethical ambiguity of experiencing somebody else's destruction as our own aesthetic pleasure.

'Two in One'

'Two in One' provides 'the most grotesquely literal dramatisation of [O'Nolan's] obsession with the double' (Taaffe, 127). In the tale, the taxidermist Murphy details his ostensible persecution at the hand of his intellectually inferior superior, Kelly.⁴⁵ As this persecution plays itself out, Kelly figuratively gets under his assistant Murphy's skin until Murphy literally gets under Kelly's: killing his boss and disposing of the traces by disguising himself in and fusing himself with, his victim's skin. O'Nolan exploits the scenario for some comic, if macabre, encounters with the self as Other. Murphy walks the street 'dressed' in Kelly's skin, 'receiving salutes from newsboys and other people who had known Kelly' (*SF*, 86). When accosted by his own landlady, who demands of 'Kelly' to know where Murphy is, the narrator relates that 'I told her I had been on the point of calling on *her* to find out where I was' (*SF*, 87). The occasion of a rupture between interiority and exteriority is also used to enact some caustic 'self'-criticism, as Murphy describes himself in conversation as 'that fool Murphy', 'the good-for-nothing' and 'an impetuous type' that he ('Kelly') had 'reprimanded [. . .] for bad work' (*SF*, 87–88). The story is resolved with Murphy relating that some 'casual gentlemen called and put me under arrest for the wilful murder of Murphy, of myself' (*SF*, 88).

I want to advance the argument that in its central conceit of literally getting under the skin of another, the story returns to the problems of access raised in 'John Duffy's Brother'. If the earlier story demonstrates that the attempt to escape authority by eliding a confessional interpretation of the self becomes unthinkable in the literary event due to the impossible epistemological vantage point of the reader, it also tacitly acknowledges the shortcomings of a strategy of secrecy. D.A. Miller theorises the economy of the 'open secret', in which the 'function of secrecy – isomorphic with its novelistic function – is not to conceal knowledge, so much as to conceal the knowledge of the knowledge'.⁴⁶ As Alan Sinfield notes, such a strategy of secrecy 'helps to constitute the public/private boundary – the binary that seems to demarcate our subjectivities – and thus facilitates the policing of that boundary'.⁴⁷ Thus the paradox offered by 'John Duffy's Brother': to evade the exercise of authority enacted through strategies of confession and/or secrecy, one would have to find a way at once to confess and not to confess; to declare publicly the 'knowledge of the knowledge' of the unauthorised self and to place that knowledge beyond the reach of interpretation. My argument rests on the idea that 'Two in One' turns to the explicit act of telling, of confession, in order to offer a radical solution.

The opening moves of 'Two in One' economically echo the strategies of 'John Duffy's Brother' (indeed, 'John Duffy's Brother' might just as easily have gone under the name of the later story): the unusualness, even impossibility, of the tale ('The story I have to tell is a strange one, perhaps unbelievable'); the concealment of the subject's identity through a false name ('Let us say my name is Murphy'); the foregrounding of an omniscient epistemological method of reading the world (a long expository passage on the science of taxidermy) that signals an implicit threat to the subject's alterity (*SF*, 84). From these opening moves, the story unfolds along lines that echo the earlier text: a moment of chaos and radical transformation ('On this occasion something within me snapped. I was sure I could hear the snap'; *SF*, 85); the revelation of a 'secret' self more perilous than the original act of transgression (scopophilia, murder); a dual imperative to maintain the secret towards self-preservation and to confess to authority and be relieved of burden; and a final move to relocate the 'marvel' from the register of the epistemological to the ontological. Along the way, the same modern traumas by which human narcissism has been decentred are registered: Darwinian ('I applied the general technique and flaying

pattern appropriate to apes'; *SF*, 86), Marxist (the alienation of the unappreciated worker, the chaos that arises out of the revolution over the master), Freudian (the grotesque and ironising, embodiment of the notion of a secret inner self).

Yet the narrative situations of the two tales differ in significant ways. At the outset Murphy is distinguished from the passive reader Mr Duffy, as he positions himself clearly in the role of confessor addressing his reader from 'the condemned cell' (*SF*, 84), engaged in an act of literary craftsmanship. Murphy's feelings of superiority in his craft – the interchangeable acts of taxidermy and writing⁴⁸ – are slighted in the willing denial of his creative expression by his superior Kelly: 'He knew I had a real interest in the work and a desire to broaden my experience. For that reason, he threw me all the common-place routine jobs that came in' (*SF*, 84–85). Thus his taxidermic masterpiece ('perfect in every detail', *SF*, 86) doubles for his 'literary labours' (*SF*, 84), his first-person confession. Such self-reporting is ostensibly directed towards the goal of formulating the text's 'I' as a coherent, communicable and thus interpretable whole.⁴⁹ If for Foucault 'the truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualisation by power',⁵⁰ then rather than a development from narcissism to individuation through the self-exposure of a guilty inner self to the authority of the reader, 'Two in One' plots a development from narcissism to an even more radical kind of anti-individuation. If, as Mark Freeman claims, autobiographical writing charts 'the trajectory of how one's self came to be',⁵¹ then 'Two in One' is an autobiography of how Murphy's self comes not to be, or, perhaps, how it unbecomes. By placing the confessing self in a series of events that logically leads to increasing self-misrecognition and ultimately self-effacement, the story evolves the ways in which O'Nolan tests the narcissistic scene as a site in which to stage the ways in which man 'ceases to recognize himself in what he makes'.⁵² Thus Murphy's literary labours reveal 'the inadequacy of the romanticist notion, according to which creation is a mark of pure subjectivity and the poem an ideal representation of the Self'.⁵³

In terms of generic doubling, the story most obviously echoes the grotesque gothic confessions of Edgar Allan Poe. Like his counterpart in 'The Tell-Tale Heart' (1843), Murphy grounds his appeal to the reader upon his rationality and sanity, as exemplified through his presentation of the meticulousness with which he has executed the murder and disposal as an act of genius and creation.⁵⁴ The change in echo from

'John Duffy's Brother' thus highlights a change in strategy in addressing these thematic and intersubjective concerns: from Keats's poem about reading and looking away to Poe's confessions that hold the reader's gaze in rapture, in horror. By thus repositioning the reader and her access to the narrative situation, O'Nolan turns the tables on the earlier text: the form necessitates a direct encounter between reader and an exhibitionist subject/object that renders explicit the impossibility of looking away.⁵⁵ The reader is no longer witness, but, perhaps unwilling, confidante. The phrase 'I've got you under my skin' has changed from one of infestation and contamination to one that opens up the possibility of an inverted power relation and of transformation.

For Paul de Man, the confession is 'an epistemological use of language in which ethical values of good and evil are superseded by values of truth and falsehood'.⁵⁶ Thus conceived, Poe's confession pushes the logic of the confession to its extreme. Yet, the more telling echo for the ways in which O'Nolan's tale tries to think beyond these binaries of confession and secrecy, morality and ethics, truth and falsehood, is to be found in the story's opening declaration 'let us say my name is Murphy'. This deceptive opening move of self-concealment is most obviously evocative of Poe's 'William Wilson' (1839), which opens: 'let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation'.⁵⁷ In Poe's story, Wilson is haunted by a second self he encounters in school, who not only shares his name and date of birth but also increasingly assumes his clothing, voice and facial features. The second Wilson shadows him throughout his life, sabotaging his endeavours, until the narrator snaps and plunges his sword 'with brute ferocity, repeatedly through and through his bosom'.⁵⁸ In 'Two in One' this moment is translated as 'I hit him again. I rained blow after blow on him' (SF, 85). In the concluding lines of Poe's tale, Wilson's murdered *doppelgänger* appears in a 'large mirror' to declare: '*In me didst thou exist – and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself*'.⁵⁹ In 'Two in One', the confessor is placed 'under arrest for the wilful murder of Murphy, of myself' (SF, 88).

These echoes are put to work in this context as rhetorical strategies that position the reader towards the story's ulterior motives. O'Nolan inverts the roles of spectre and haunted worked out in Poe's tale; despite his self-presentation as 'the victim of this murderous monster Kelly' (SF, 89) Murphy's perspective is that of the haunting

doppelgänger who is not murdered, but murders and unites himself with the object of his obsession. In this way, the echo constitutes a strategic sleight of hand: by fortifying the claim that Murphy's crime is ultimately one of self-murder, it helps to elide the fact that the murder is of Kelly, of an Other. At the same time, the inversion works to reinscribe the decentred self away from an emphasis on 'a stable and retrievable origin' to one of accumulation and possibility.

By thus drawing a distinction between the moral propositionality of the 'Said' (which could only be articulated as banalities such as 'don't murder your boss; and if you must murder your boss, for God's sake don't try to hide your crime by fusing yourself with his skin') and the intersubjective and ethical register of 'Saying' (the impossible confession that undoes the text's 'I' even as it articulates it), I want to propose that in this story O'Nolan is exploring the potential of the *doppelgänger* to be rearticulated in positive terms, beyond its tagging as a 'symptomatology of the self'.⁶⁰ Vardoulakis insists on this possibility, as long as one challenges 'the unproblematic equating of content – either as the plot of the story, or as the history of a self – with a stable and retrievable origin'. He continues:

The subjective ontology that the Doppelgänger introduces should not be seen as positing an originary substance or essence. On the contrary, its formal openness allows for its own interruption. [. . .] The Doppelgänger, then, is a form of relationality that is not only a condition of possibility, but also a reflection on that condition. In this way, the Doppelgänger is aligned to a notion of modernity as interruption.⁶¹

Here we might chart a course of the evolution of O'Nolan's aesthetic project, from staging the problems posed to the modern self who would reject Francis Bacon's admonition 'with a religious care to eject, repress and [. . .] exorcise every kind of phantasm'⁶² to an exploration of the possibilities of the literary event/narcissistic scene that prefigures Foucault's insistence that phantasms should 'be freed from the restrictions we place upon them, freed from the dilemmas of truth and falsehood and of being and nonbeing [. . .]; they must be allowed [. . .] to act out their mime, as "extrabeings"'.⁶³

Considering the pound that he owes Æ in the 'Scylla and Charybdis' episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Stephen Dedalus reflects on the instability of the self as a means of relinquishing debt:

'Wait. Five months. Molecules all change. I am other I now. Other I got pound'.⁶⁴ As Borg notes, 'for Stephen, the idea of molecular transformation holds, if only for a few seconds, the illusion of freedom from debts incurred in the past'.⁶⁵ 'Two in One' acts out this logic to the ultimate degree, as the narcissistic confession leads Murphy from self-exposure to self-effacement and from murderer to victim, eluding the reader's fixing gaze in the story's final, aporetic move. Here, in the story's final Blanchovian blurring of the categories of subject and object, the *mise en abyme* of selfhood is both allowed to tell itself and put itself beyond the authority of the reader's interpretive gaze, placing the confessor beyond the ethical values of good and evil and beyond the values of truth and falsehood, to the ontological plane of the marvel: 'if Kelly and I must each be either murderer or murdered, it is perhaps better to [. . .] be cherished in the public mind as the victim of this murderous monster, Kelly. He *was* a murderer, anyway' (*SF*, 89).

TALL TALES OR 'PETITES HISTOIRES'
 history and the void in 'The Martyr's Crown'
 and *Thirst*

Thierry Robin

All of Brian O'Nolan's major novels aim, in one way or another, at debunking the metanarrative of history. Each of his comical, palimpsestic literary ventures is characterised by a hybridisation of genres that has little regard for 'proper' linear history. The 'scheme of recessed narratives' in *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) moves from 'domestic realism in the frame story [. . .] through the gun-slinging Western and the novel of erotic sensationalism to fairy tales and Irish myth'.¹ Likewise, the encounters of the confession, mystery fiction, philosophy, absurdist fiction and apocalyptic science fiction in *The Third Policeman* (1967; written 1939–40) position the text uncomfortably at the crossroads between fact and fiction, past and future. As Keith Hopper insists, with this ludic treatment of overlapping stories and histories O'Nolan's reader enters

the Brave New World of post-modern literature: gone is the posture of the heroic artist and in comes an art with an innate fidelity to failure. Gone is the redemptive force and coherent form of modernism to be replaced by the ludic ironies and playful parodies of postmodernism. Gone too are the closed ideological systems, the 'Grand Narratives'. (15)

One of the defining features of O'Nolan's *œuvre*, this boundless reprocessing of literary objects is crucial to understanding the peculiarly postmodern conceptualisation and representation of history in the writer's work. As Ihab Hassan establishes, such strategies of hybridising genres lead to a 'dialectic of equitemporality, a new relation between historical elements, without any suppression of the past in favour of the present'.² In their tendency towards generic hybridisation, O'Nolan's texts typify a mode of thought that 'rejects linear time'

in favour of the 'polychronic' temporality that Hassan associates with the postmodern condition.³ Little wonder, then, that in *The Dalkey Archive* (1964) De Selby should be able to discourse with Saint Augustine in such a straightforward manner (CN, 633–643; 749).

Bearing in mind this polychronic dimension of O'Nolan's post-modern project, this essay will relocate from these more familiar sites of investigation to examine two of the writer's lesser-known texts: the short story 'The Martyr's Crown' (1950) and the playlet *Thirst* (1942). The theories of Linda Hutcheon, Jean-François Lyotard and Ihab Hassan will serve as points of reference towards opening up and exploring these texts for signs of O'Nolan's approach to various epistemological and ontological problems in representing historical events. While they are doubtless comical or satirical in their purpose, I want to argue that in these short texts we are faced with a condensed version of the philosophy of history that informs O'Nolan's works in general. The added advantage in analysing exactly these texts is that they convey this proto-postmodern philosophy of history through O'Nolan's typically ironic representation of the actual historic conflicts of the Anglo–Irish War and the First World War, respectively. In these condensed representations, I claim, O'Nolan challenges the metanarrative of history not through his broader novelistic strategies of generic hybridisation, but rather through the more subtle Hassanian postmodern strategies of indeterminacy, decanonisation, ironic perspectivism, carnivalisation and constructionism.

Postmodern histories

To fully grasp what is at stake in O'Nolan's deceptively anecdotal and innocent-looking incursions into history, I first turn to Linda Hutcheon's seminal *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988). In this work, Hutcheon grounds the dialectical interaction of history and literature in a postmodern context in opposition to the advent of Leopold van Ranke's 'scientific history'. Considered one of the founding models of modern source-based history, Ranke's approach separated history and literature as disciplines, introducing such ideas as reliance on primary sources (empiricism), emphasis on narrative history and international politics (through the concept of *Aussenpolitik*). For Hutcheon, however,

it is this very separation of the literary and the historical that is now being challenged in postmodern theory and art and recent critical

readings of both history and fiction have focused more on what the two modes of writing share than on how they differ. They have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality.⁴

Ultimately, this train of reasoning challenges the very possibility of neutrality in viewpoints – the kind of neutrality which ideally should be immune to ideology, anachronistic ethical judgments, personal or collective bias, or ethnocentric prejudices – and places the stress on the final epistemological problem of objective reliability in the relation of referential facts through language and historical narratives. For Hutcheon, this ‘new skepticism’ is exemplified in a series of post-modern historiographic metafiction that share a ‘questioning stance towards [history and literature’s] common use of conventions of narrative, of reference, of the inscribing of subjectivity, of their identity as textuality and even of their implication in ideology’.⁵

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984), Jean-François Lyotard similarly observes that metanarratives such as political ideology, religion, enlightenment emancipation, scientific progress and history are increasingly called into question in the same sceptical trend:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. [. . .] The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements.⁶

In light of this incredulity towards universal ‘Grand’ narratives, Lyotard favours smaller-scale, fragmented, local, individual-based relations: ‘petites histoires’ that challenge and undermine such ‘Grand histoires’ by revealing both the heterogeneity of human experience and the power of the singular event. Echoing Lyotard’s dispersal ‘in clouds of narrative language elements’, I want to argue that it is in the burlesque distortion, derisiveness and ironic perspectivism of ‘The Martyr’s Crown’ and *Thirst* that O’Nolan’s satirical and questioning

treatment of the modern separation of fact and fiction, of history and storytelling, comes gloriously into play.

'The Martyr's Crown'

'The Martyr's Crown' is a short story published, under the pen name Brian Nolan, in February 1950 in volume 1.3 of John Ryan's *Envoy: A Review of Literature and Art*. It tells the story within a story of a brave Dublin woman ('a great skin in the Cumann na mBan'; *SF*, 78) who seduces a British officer in order to save rebels hiding in her house during the Anglo-Irish War in 1921. The comic twist occurs when Mr Toole – the 'shabby' mythomaniac relating the tale to his companion Mr O'Hickey as a means of exaggerating the glory of his alleged military past – claims that the 'young man of surpassing elegance' (*SF*, 76) they have just run into and saluted in the middle of a Dublin street was the son of that noble lady, Mrs Clougherty and the British officer.

In his introduction to *Modern Irish Short Stories* (1957), Frank O'Connor writes of O'Nolan as the 'outstanding figure' of the generation of writers succeeding the 'period of disillusionment which followed the Civil War' in which O'Connor, Seán O'Faoláin and Liam O'Flaherty wrote. In this context, O'Connor singles out 'The Martyr's Crown' for particular praise:

In Mr [Devin A.] Garrity's [1955] anthology [*44 Irish Short Stories: An Anthology of Irish Short Fiction from Yeats to Frank O'Connor*] he is represented by a story on the well-known Resistance theme of the woman who, to protect her hunted men, pretends to be a prostitute. It is probably as old as history but Mr O'Nolan must be the first writer to have treated it as farce.⁷

With his 'bright eye for elements of farce in the legendary heroic'⁸ established, we might note that, as regards history proper, 'The Martyr's Crown' deals with the events proceeding and precipitating the Irish Civil War (1922–23), namely the Anglo-Irish War or 'War of Independence' (1919–21). In a cultural materialist reading, then, the story can be interpreted with recourse to O'Nolan's political motivations and considerations at the time of the story's composition. In his aptly titled O'Nolan biography *No Laughing Matter*, Anthony Cronin writes:

Many of the contributions to *Envoy*, including [Patrick] Kavanagh's, had a strong anti-nationalist coloration, a more or less humorous form of protest against the tattered and cliché-ridden

nationalist triumphalism with its endless references to 'The War of Independence' and 'our unique Gaelic culture' which was the official ethos of the country; and it was to *Envoy* that Brian contributed the story 'The Martyr's Crown'. (172)

Cronin's contextualised Irish reading is well informed and apt, yet I will contend that the strategies employed by O'Nolan in 'The Martyr's Crown' have repercussions in excess of his engagement with his immediate sociohistoric context. Taken as a whole, the story's rhetorical strategies imply a broader vision of history that is caustically sceptical and typically postmodern in the sense that Hutcheon outlines.

The first movement towards a Hutcheonesque form of historical caution and scepticism can be seen in the characterisation of Mr Toole as a shabby-looking old man who compulsively invents glorious stories in which he re-casts himself as a war hero. His foil, Mr O'Hickey, only serves to further highlight this unreliability, as the two characters make up an ironic Socratic pair, probing the borders between history and storytelling:

'As you know,' Mr Toole began, 'I was Bart Conlon's right-hand man. We were through 'twenty and 'twenty-one together. Bart, of course, went the other way in 'twenty-two.'

Mr O'Hickey nodded and said nothing. He knew that Mr Toole had never rendered military service to his country. (*SF*, 77)

Toole's tall tales are clearly taken for what they are worth by O'Hickey, 'an older and wiser man, [. . .] well up to Mr Toole's tricks'. The dubiousness and pure performativity of Toole's tall tale is underscored by the revelation of O'Hickey's thought that 'Mr Toole at his best [. . .] was better than a play' (*SF*, 76).

Though such indeterminacy and incredulity would seem to definitively discredit Toole's (hi)story, the narrative goes on and is fed by what one could call the 'effects of verisimilitude' acting as so many pieces of pseudo-evidence. Dates and events are evoked by O'Toole to attest to the veracity of his yarn: 1921, 1922, 'a certain day early in 'twenty-one' (*SF*, 77). Real Irish or British place names are also mentioned: the War Office in London; Harcourt Street, Moore Street and Camden Street in Dublin; County Meath. Numerous names arise and the extent to which these correspond to more or less real or fictional people is often less than clear: Michael Collins becomes 'a certain character be the name of Mick Collins' (*SF*, 77), while

elsewhere we read of Bart Conlon, Mrs Clougherty and 'Martin Fulham's pub'.

'Bart then gives the order for retreat down the back stairs; in no time we're in the lane and five minutes more the six of us upstairs in Martin Fulham's pub in Camden Street. Poor Martin is dead since.'

'I knew that man well,' Mr O'Hickey remarked.

'Certainly you knew him well,' Mr Toole said, warmly. (*SF*, 77–78)

Historically genuine Irish republican and paramilitary organisations, such as Sinn Féin and Cumann na mBan, are also named (*SF*, 77–78). The whole description in itself could be realistic in its wealth of cultural and historical information. What draws the reader's attention, however, is the excess of gratuitously gruesome details characterising the operation led by Toole and Conlon: 'I never seen such murder in me life. Your men didn't know where it was coming from and a lot of them wasn't worried very much when it was all over, because there was no heads left on some of them' (*SF*, 77). The mixture of delighted complacency and heroic bombast only leads to a sense of mock-heroic fabrication or confabulation. This sense is reinforced by the shaky or contradictory terminology used by Toole when he says, for instance, that the six of them had to 'proceed in military formation, singly, be different routes' (*SF*, 78). It is difficult to imagine a military formation made of isolated men taking different routes, unless, of course, these 'heroic' rebels are simply running for their lives. Throughout Toole's tall tale, such elements of contradiction are carefully and consistently, instilled in the reader's mind alongside these seemingly historical references.

Eventually, O'Hickey and the reader learn that the widow, who supposedly hid the Irish rebels, including Toole, in her 'three-story house' on the 'south side' of Dublin (*SF*, 78), made the ultimate sacrifice to protect them by seducing a British officer who came to search the premises for the men. Much of the story's subject matter draws heavily from 'For Ireland Home and Beauty', a previous work by O'Nolan dating back to 1940, which until recently had remained unpublished (*SF*, 138–145).⁹ This earlier version of the story deals with the same fundamental themes of hubris, Irish nationalism and ironically implicit bawdy references, although the irony is fiercer and the treatment of sex is bolder and more direct than in the later *Envoy*

rendering.¹⁰ In the 1940 version the lady protecting the rebels – Mrs Hogan in the original draft – is supposed to have had sexual intercourse with two British soldiers at once: ‘Then I heard the two boys coming into the house and going into a room off the hall. They were inside for twenty minutes and then they came out and went away’ (*SF*, 144). The scene as rendered in ‘The Martyr’s Crown’ is less overtly transgressive than in ‘For Ireland Home and Beauty’, as the details are more implicit, to be inferred by the reader from a few scattered hints: ‘She was certainly a marvellous figure of a woman’ (*SF*, 78); ‘She had a big silver satteen blouse on her’; ‘She was a fine – now you’ll understand me, Mr O’Hickey [. . .] I seen her fingers on the buttons of the satteen, if you follow me and she leaving the room’ (*SF*, 79).¹¹ After whispering, the two unlikely lovers – a ‘young bucko out of the Borderers [. . .] with a headquarters captain of the Cumann na mBan!’ (*SF*, 79) – hole up in a room off the hall, below the anxious rebels’ lair. A ten-minute ellipsis follows and as the British military lorries eventually drive away, the reader is left with only these hints from which to reconstruct the story. Historian and reader alike are left having to concoct hypotheses to account for and fill in, lacunae and ellipses in the narration of facts. Moreover, the farcical dimension of the scene is amplified through the juxtaposition of sex and the religious piety, triviality and heroism in Toole’s punch line: ‘She’d saved our lives and when she come up a while later she said, “We’ll go to bed a bit earlier to-night, boys; kneel down all.” That was Mrs Clougherty the saint’ (*SF*, 80).

In his essay ‘Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective’, Hassan delineates eleven major features and concepts characterising postmodernism, namely: *indeterminacy*, *fragmentation*, *decanonisation*, *selflessness/depthlessness*, *the Unrepresentable/Unrepresentable*, *irony*, *hybridisation*, *carnivalisation*, *performance and participation*, *constructionism*, *immanence*.¹² While some concepts, such as *the Unrepresentable*, *immanence* and *fragmentation*,¹³ are clearly more relevant for O’Nolan’s early novels, most of these features also adequately describe ‘The Martyr’s Crown’. As we have already seen, *indeterminacy* is manifest in the text as the extent of fabrication in Toole’s yarn is unclear. Perhaps absolutely everything is false, yet the story’s real referents also serve to undermine and challenge this sense. *Decanonisation* is also cogent, in so far as the reader witnesses the triumph of anecdotes – representative of Lyotard’s ‘petites histoires’ or micronarratives – over the metanarratives or the

master codes of legitimate history. The story's framing devices stage the problem of verifying and reconciling individual and collective trajectories: here between Toole's anecdotal story casting himself as an ostensible nationalist fighter and would-be hero and the 'grand narration' of Ireland as a nation struggling for independence. Indeed, instead of dealing with freedom, emancipation, or decolonisation, the short story uses the 'War of Independence' to broach the bathetic subject of the connection between constipation and potential heroic death:

'There was one snag. We couldn't budge out. No exercise at all – and that means only one thing . . .'

'Constipation?' Mr O'Hickey suggested.

'The very man,' said Mr Toole. (*SF*, 78)

Microcosm and macrocosm, storytelling and history, are deeply intertwined. In O'Nolan's handling of Irish history, then, guerrilla warfare is soon turned into a grotesque analysis of the nationalist bowel movement.

Selflessness is also operative in the story, especially with regard to the character of Toole. Hassan defines this concept as 'self-effacement – a fake flatness, without inside/outside – or its opposite, self-multiplication, self-reflection'.¹⁴ While that loss of self and sometimes name, is clearly characteristic of the nameless narrator in *The Third Policeman*, Toole (whose name is revealing in its *instrumental* ambiguity) is also but an actor and trickster, whose 'real' life or identity is of no relevance. The story's main discursive strategy is one of foregrounding the notion of surface as the only level that matters. This dynamic implies *performance and participation*, which can be summed up by O'Hickey's consideration that 'Mr Toole at his best [. . .] was better than a play' (*SF*, 76). *Irony*, of course, pervades the text from the first line to the last. The peculiar relationship between Toole and O'Hickey is particularly indicative of this dynamic. O'Hickey's thoughts and asides turn out to be sarcastic in a curious way and the reader must surely wonder whether Toole, in turn, is aware that O'Hickey does not believe a single word he says. This blatant and hilarious lack of symmetry in knowledge introduces irony into the dialogue, in what is not said but implied and in what remains for the reader to infer and imagine.

While O'Nolan's programme of generic *hybridisation* is toned down in 'The Martyr's Crown' in comparison with his earlier novels, throughout the short text the past is revisited and made alive by the

shaggy dog story improvised by Toole, who taps into the genre of nationalist Irish rebel narratives to (re)create his past in the present circumstances. As Claud Cockburn notes, the story 'by no means fits any familiar literary slot or *genre*' as it stretches 'the notion of farce to include comedy, sharp characterisation, oblique satire and strong black threads of political realism with gunfire, blood and muddle'.¹⁵ Even more cogently, the modes of representation on display reveal a process of *carnivalisation*, as ludic and subversive impulses loom large. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, carnivalisation functions 'to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is [...] universally accepted'.¹⁶ Heroic death, freedom and other seemingly noble universal causes are broached with what is supposed to be an authentic thick accent translated by colloquial elements of Irishness – in expressions such as 'gawskogue', 'cattle-jobber', 'Sean a chara', 'I hope you get *me* drift', 'with *meself* and Bart', 'I never *seen*', 'blood-thirsty pul-togues', 'Shut up, ye nervous lousers' (*SF*, 77–79) [my emphasis] – as well as in the irreducibly local stereotypes of Irish pub culture. This parallelism is made all the funnier when Mr O'Hickey realises he is going to have to buy drinks for Toole to bribe him out of his mysterious silence: 'there is nothing for it but bribery – again. He led the way into a public house and ordered two bottles of stout' (*SF*, 77). Oscillating between blood and stout, heroism and constipation, the reader is left with a series of deliberate clichés: 'millions [...] of Irish men and women have died for Ireland' (*SF*, 80). These jarring carnivalesque elements distinguish themselves from indeterminacy, decanonisation and irony by establishing a more playful, positive dimension, which counterbalances the dark and oppressive weight of relativism. Thus, the very title of the story reads as a joyful travesty of symbolic sufferings – one cannot help but think of the actual martyrs' lives in Christian history. The kind of martyrdom that can be inferred from the text is, then, rather peculiar and directly connected with the conjunction of dramatic failure and sex, as O'Nolan recycles history and transmutes sufferings into basic textual pleasure and games.

This recycling of history towards carnivalistic ends brings us to the most crucial strategy at play in the story: *constructionism*. If history has a potential meaning, O'Nolan seems to imply, it cannot escape narration and interpretation, two inescapably subjective processes. As Hassan says, referencing Nietzsche: 'What can be thought of must

certainly be a fiction'.¹⁷ 'The Martyr's Crown' highlights that without language and its figurative power there is neither actual grandeur nor real ignominy: these are by-products of historic constructionism to O'Nolan. This stance culminates in the final hyperbolic vision of Irish history offered by Toole:

For seven hundred years, thousands – no, I'll make it millions – of Irish men and women have died for Ireland. We never rared jibbers; they were glad to do it and will again. But that young man was *born* for Ireland. There was never anybody else like him. Why wouldn't he be proud? [. . .] A saint I called her, [. . .] she's a martyr [. . .] and wears the martyr's crown to-day! (*SF*, 80)

The epanorthosis of Toole's speech ('thousands – no, I'll make it millions') only makes the reader more cautious, especially in a context of alcoholic stimulation. Eventually what is achieved is a hubristic, ambiguous and grotesque – though derisive – conception of history, which contradicts the notion of purity, be it racial or moral and opens up a multiplicity of theoretical standpoints against the grand, all-encompassing metanarrative: for in 'The Martyr's Crown' the elegant young man '*born* for Ireland' is every bit as British as he is Irish.

Returning to Hutcheon's definition of postmodern historiographic metafiction, we find that 'The Martyr's Crown' also takes an implicitly 'questioning stance towards' literature and history's 'common use of conventions of narrative, of reference, of the inscribing of subjectivity, of their identity as textuality and even of their implication in ideology'.¹⁸ As such, the dynamics of Toole's yarn seem to corroborate Hutcheon's sense that both literature and history 'derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth'.¹⁹ O'Nolan might have chosen to deal with this period and these symbols differently, but as with *An Béal Bocht* (1941) or various *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns, instead of opting for momentous metanarratives 'The Martyr's Crown' turns to impure and ambiguous anecdotes that emphasise the flimsy barrier between historical facts and fiction. This parodic view of a self-centred history that has to resort to grandiloquent and self-deflating myth-making, not to mention hoaxes, for its legitimacy is revealed through many subtle strategies, underpinning each of which we find the common thread of Blaise Pascal's creed that 'Imagination decides everything'.²⁰

Thirst

The one-act playlet *Thirst* was first produced at the Gate Theatre as part of a Christmas show called 'Jack in the Box' in 1942 and early 1943 (Cronin, 204–205).²¹ *Thirst* was written under the Myles na gCopaleen pseudonym as part of an effort by O'Nolan to transition from novel-writing to the theatre in the early 1940s. These tentative trials and forays into dramatic writing were far from commercially successful, with Myles's *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play* (1943) – an adaptation of Karel and Josef Čapek's *The Insect Play* (*Ze života hmyzu*, 1921) – running for only five nights at the Gaiety Theatre. Even *Faustus Kelly* (1943) – a more elaborate three-act satire on the Irish political world – was received rather tepidly by critics and audiences alike during its run at the Abbey Theatre. Yet it is worth noting that *Faustus Kelly* echoes 'For Ireland Home and Beauty' and 'The Martyr's Crown' in its exploration of the entwined themes of forgery and history, as witnessed in the play's many performative recitals of 'tall tales' by corrupt Irish nationalist politicians who offer little beyond insincere clichés or pompous and hollow rigmarole about 'Ireland'.²² Speechifying, like Mr Toole, on the topic of Ireland's 'seven dark centuries of oppression' (*PT*, 70), Kelly treats the 'stock Englishman', Captain Shaw, to a long-winded speech on the metanarrative of 'the historic and indefeasible Irish nation':

KELLY: [. . .] With what scornful word or phrase shall I stigmatise at the bar of history the interventions of successive British governments in the affairs of my own country [. . .] IRELAND, the lamp of civilisation at a time when Europe sat in darkness, cradle of the faith and home of the martyrs [. . .] to tamper with our historic race, [. . .] to steal therefrom, defile and destroy our melodious and kingly language [. . .] our only historic link with the giants of our national past – Niall of the Nine Hostages, who penetrated to the Alps in his efforts to spread the Gospel, King Cormac of Cashel, Confessor, Saint and lawgiver, heroic St Laurence O'Toole [. . .] and Patrick Sarsfield, who rode by night to destroy, no matter what risk to himself, the hated foreigner's powder-train at Ballyneety! (*PT*, 71–72)

Relocating from one site of Irish local politics and speechifying to another, *Thirst* stages an after-hours drinking session in Mr Coulahan's public house. When the drinkers are discovered by the

sergeant on duty, the publican relates a drawn-out, detailed account of his unbearable thirst while stationed in the overbearing heat of Shatt-el-Arab during the First World War. His ulterior purpose: to coerce the sergeant into drinking an after-hours stout with them and thus secure them from the force of the law. Here, we are faced with the same embedded structure that we observed in 'The Martyr's Crown': hyperbolic reminiscence and performance; alcohol-fuelled confabulation marked by indeterminacy; and grotesque historical anecdotes in a pub setting. Once again, we find O'Nolan employing proto-postmodern strategies of *decanonisation*, *carnivalisation* and *constructionism*, as distinctively local and burlesque 'Irishness' is set against 'Grand' historical events, narratives, themes. Alongside these thematic correspondences, I want to draw attention to the parallel between the hypocritical presentation and simplistic deconstruction of the Irish nation by Toole in 'The Martyr's Crown' and the hypocritical presentation and simplistic deconstruction of the Law performed by the Sergeant in *Thirst*.

Once again, the most striking aspect of the story is the collision of two modes of narration: the anecdotal story of the publican's great thirst in the desert and the grand narration of the First World War, revealed only through a distorted account of carnivalesque localisms and clichés: 'Them two Great Wars were desperate and ferocious encounters' (*PT*, 128). The Turkish or the Mesopotamian front is located in 'Messpott' or 'Messopotamia' (*PT*, 127–128) by the same publican, whose malapropisms reveal much about the vagueness of his own subjective landmarks and experience. This impression of vagueness is amplified by his analysis: 'And there was me fighting the Turks and the Arabs – fighting for small nationalities! That's the quare one, Sergeant' (*PT*, 128). This exclamation is all the more ironic in an Irish (post-)colonial context: what is construed as strange or 'queer' is the motif of the Irishman – a good representative of 'small nationalities' – serving as 'cannon fodder for British imperialism', as James Connolly famously put it.²³

Ironic perspectivism, as Hassan defines it, describes what is at stake in this sketch, as accumulation, exaggeration, hyperbole and baroque similes loom large to defuse the usual historical logic. We can pick out a few instances, such as the description of Coulahan's fellow soldiers 'Buzzin' and roarin' and twistin' and workin' away with the legs [. . .] like flies on a fly-paper' (*PT*, 129) due to their rubber-soled

shoes melting in the heat; or Coulahan's account of their landing in 'Shatt-el-Arab':

MR C.: [. . .] We thought the heat in the ship was bad enough – and so it was – till we landed! Nearly three thousand of us! (*Gasps.*) The first thing I feels walking down the gangway is a big rush of hot air up me nose. The heat was beltin' up outa the ground like smoke out of an engine. The air was so thin and so hot that you wouldn't feel yourself breathing it. It was [. . .] [t]hinned out be the heat coming at it outa the ground and outa the sky and all sides. It was dried and no moisture in it at all – like a withered pea. (*Pause.*) It was like putting your head into an oven and taking a deep breath. (*PT*, 128)

The same grotesque strategy is observable in Jem's description of the stench produced by the melting rubber: 'Did you ever throw a bit of rubber into the fire by accident? Begob, the hum off it would destroy yer nose altogether' (*PT*, 129). Again, the general pattern that emerges is a deliberate collision between the 'Grand' and 'petites histoires' of Lyotard's postmodern condition. Superlatives only result in a farcical vision of history transforming soldiers into mere puppets:

It was a march of only two hundred yards to our quarters – but it was the dirtiest – sweatiest – stickiest – and driest march we ever had. Every man in a lather of sweat, his clothes stickin' to his skin and his tongue hangin' outa him lika dog's. (*PT*, 130)

Eventually what is at stake is not the war's historical grounds or ideals, or even the justice of the war's outcome, but simply the outlandish heat allegedly experienced by the publican, who is striving to corrupt the Sergeant.

While 'The Martyr's Crown' deconstructs the metanarrative of the history of the Irish nation in order to reveal its constructedness, in *Thirst*, with its conflation of European or world history and this anecdote of the Irish pub, what is at stake is the relationship between history and the Law:

SERGEANT: (*Turning away from JEM's direction with great deliberation.*) What ye might do when me back is turned, is a thing I would know nothing at all about. (*PT*, 126)

SERGEANT: There might be murders and all classes of illegalities goin' on behind me back, but what I don't see I don't

know. [. . .] The Law is a very – intricate thing. And nobody knows it better than meself. (*PT*, 130)

As the discourse on the Irish nation in 'The Martyr's Crown' increasingly emphasises localised micro-narratives, so in *Thirst* the discourse on the Law is progressively twisted by the Sergeant's peculiar, relativistic and localised conception of justice. These declarations by the Law's representative foreshadow the play's predictable dénouement, when the Sergeant finally yields to the force of Coulahan's 'tall tale' of history:

(SERGEANT *comes to counter and takes three drinks, one by one, and drinks them.*)

SERGEANT: Tell me, lads. Tell me – does anybody mind if I sing 'The Rose of Tralee'?

(*They all sing.*) (*PT*, 135)

So much, it seems, for history, ideals, justice.

Conclusion

Having established O'Nolan's satirical and transgressive stance towards the construction and force of 'history', I will conclude by putting the rhetorical strategies employed in these shorter works back into their peculiar historical context. This might be profitably achieved by viewing them alongside the writer's career-long approach to 'journalism': usually the domain of 'facts'.

O'Nolan's first ludic foray into the pages of *The Irish Times* took place between October 1938 and June 1940. During this period the paper's 'Letter to the Editor' page was periodically invaded by O'Nolan and his friends – such as Niall Sheridan – under a variety of pseudonyms. Between the sincere musings of Seán O'Faoláin, Sean O'Casey and Patrick Kavanagh, these ciphers engaged each other in spurious debates, with absurd takes on Irish literature, national identity and history. As with Cronin's cultural materialist reading of 'The Martyr's Crown', Patrick Kavanagh again stands as the foil for O'Nolan's satirical dialectics. And as Joseph Brooker notes, Kavanagh's response to the hoax-makers offers an account of the nihilism of the whole post-independence generation to which O'Nolan belonged:

The correspondents, in Kavanagh's eyes, are young wits, callow, untested souls. His central charge is emptiness: O'Nolan can

generate verbiage from nothing, spin the most elaborate of forms around the most minimal content. [. . .] The ‘tragedy’ Kavanagh posits is the predicament of the writer in this time and place, faced with the complex realities of political independence rather than the impending dream of the Republic. [. . .] Kavanagh’s ultimate implication is that O’Nolan’s writing is already showing its decadence, its essential superfluity, [. . .] its essential inessentiality. He warns the readers, at the start of O’Nolan’s literary career, to watch for the tears of the clown.²⁴

Even if the strategies Kavanagh condemns as shallow ‘verbiage from nothing’ hint at a burgeoning engagement with a more profound kind of epistemological void through postmodern ‘play’, this contextualisation of O’Nolan in a period of disillusionment following the flamboyant rhetoric surrounding the foundation of the Irish Free State goes some way towards accounting for his peculiarly Irish postmodern treatment of ‘history’ as a never-ending source of ideological hangover.

Throughout the two-decade run of his *Cruiskeen Lawn* column in *The Irish Times* (4 October 1940–1 April 1966) – which arose out of the ‘Letters to the Editor’ hoaxes and ran alongside his composition of *Thirst* and ‘The Martyr’s Crown’ – Myles na gCopaleen explored constantly this dialogic interaction between history and anecdotes. Flore Coulouma succinctly underlines this central dynamic:

As a satirical chronicle, *Cruiskeen Lawn* publicly comments on the ‘great story’ of Irish politics and public events. As Myles’s inimitable collection of stories, it recounts the trivial (fictional) anecdotes of the Dublin common man. [. . .] Myles [. . .] blurs the distinction between history – the story worth publishing – and its ‘details’, targeting the authority traditionally imparted to the written word.²⁵

Throughout this longer running collection of ‘petites histoires’, Myles regularly directed his corrosive satire at the metanarrative of Ranke’s empirical science:

All science is meaningless unless referable to the human race. Physicists are deluded by the apparent orderliness of the universe. They do not realise that the forces of disorder – being energies residing in the human brain – are immensely more powerful than those of order and are such as to reduce planetary and other examples of order to inconsequence. [. . .] All major ‘scientific

discoveries' do not add to what is already known but merely push farther back the horizon of human ignorance.²⁶

Contrary to the demented physics of *The Third Policeman*, history possesses characteristics which should make it meaningful and eminently 'referable to the human race', through the concepts of progress and civilisation. Yet Myles undermines this possibility by reasserting the universal primacy of 'disorder' in human thought and affairs. This deep scepticism, found throughout O'Nolan's writing, is simultaneously both matter-of-fact and almost metaphysical. This tension conversely leads to a kind of dizzy void, best illustrated by the strange empty semantics of *The Third Policeman*. Whether in the policemen's odd tautological phrasing ('inside the interior of my inner head'; CN, 312) or in sheep that are defined by their 'sheepness' (CN, 294), language constantly turns against itself and becomes an object for never-ending speculation: a beautiful empty shell found on the shore of human imagination and reason. Given these attitudes to science, history and language itself, it is perhaps not surprising that in O'Nolan's work we should find atoms and the Anglo-Irish War to be equally chaotic and undecidable in their essence.

To grasp the full relevance of O'Nolan's negotiations with history and the void, I want, in concluding, to consider 'The Martyr's Crown' and *Thirst* alongside one of Myles's final columns, written shortly before his death, which deals with notions of progress and history:

It is seemly and proper that a man should exert himself politically to reduce and even seek to abolish hardship and hunger, but if he has the courage to raise his eyes and look sanely at the awful human condition, taking the world as his field of appraisal, he must realise finally that tiny periods of temporary release from intolerable suffering is the most that any individual has the right to expect.²⁷

O'Nolan's satirical stance often proves wilfully difficult to harness ideologically; viewed in this context, it would seem that politics in O'Nolan's texts could only be received as Sisyphean farce or tragedy-comedy. This I think may account for the writer's satirical and transgressive stance towards history. In O'Nolan's vision, due to 'the forces of disorder [. . .] residing in the human brain', history ultimately proves unaccountable, unduplicable and unmanageable. It is essential, then, to keep in mind this initial ambiguous darkness that

pervades all of his writing – all the better to make out those strange chuckles in the dark,²⁸ those ‘tiny periods of temporary release from intolerable suffering’ provided by O’Nolan’s ‘petites histoires’.

PART II

Inter/national contexts

6

IN SEARCH OF MR LOVE;
or, the internationalist credentials of
'Myles before Myles'*Ute Anna Mittermaier*

Brian O’Nolan’s use of a great variety of more or less fanciful pseudonyms for his writings has inevitably left students of his *œuvre* dependent on a considerable degree of speculation. While O’Nolan scholars have unanimously established the identification of O’Nolan with certain pen names like ‘Brother Barnabas’ or ‘Count O’Blather’, opinions differ about ‘the riddle of Oscar Love’s identity’ (Taaffe, 30). Mr Love was involved in the epistolary battles in *The Irish Times* that O’Nolan instigated together with his college friends in October 1938 before being commissioned to write the *Cruiskeen Lawn* column in the same paper two years later. The identification of O’Nolan with Oscar Love, who defended the Spanish Republican government in his letters to *The Irish Times* shortly before the victory of the nationalist insurgents in March 1939, has fuelled speculations as to whether O’Nolan was actually a man of two voices: that of the unhinged ‘licensed jester’ of Ireland, on the one hand and that of the serious, interventionist commentator on both national and international affairs, on the other. This essay questions the theory that Oscar Love’s commentary on the Spanish Civil War stemmed from O’Nolan’s pen. Drawing on evidence largely obtained from *The Irish Times* digital archive, it shows that Oscar Love was a real-life contemporary of O’Nolan’s, a fellow Dublin civil servant and indefatigable writer of letters to *The Irish Times*. Through the prism of the central question about Oscar Love’s identity, the essay will additionally tackle other underexplored issues of Brian O’Nolan scholarship. Starting with a discussion of O’Nolan’s position with respect to contemporary public discourse on Ireland’s political and cultural relations with the ‘outside world’, the essay goes on to explore the internal tension between national and international

perspectives in the author's early writing. Whereas critics such as Brendan P. O Hehir have limited their analysis of O'Nolan's internationalist credentials to his novels,¹ this essay broadens the scope of the ongoing critical debate by focusing on the writer's 'minor texts', including his contributions to the student magazines *Comhthrom Féinne* and *Blather*, his epistolary exchanges with Oscar Love and other correspondents in *The Irish Times* and his *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns.

The circumstance that O'Nolan's fame in Ireland mainly derived from the vast bulk of his *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns – which were so humorous in tone and contradictory in content as to make it impossible to credit him with a particular standpoint on any political or cultural matter – has led to O'Nolan's being labelled 'the licensed jester of the Dublin intelligentsia' (Taaffe, 127). According to his biographer, Anthony Cronin, O'Nolan already demonstrated his reluctance to take sides in public debates as a student at University College Dublin (UCD). At the meetings of UCD's Literary and Historical Society,

his stance was already that of the satirical observer who regards the pretensions, hypocrisies and falsehoods of all parties as more worthy of comment than their actual views and whose shafts are designed to puncture rather than to persuade. [. . .] He was a licensed satirist and jester whose aim was to deflate and amuse. (Cronin, 46)

This view of O'Nolan as the relentless jokester has occasionally been challenged by assiduous scholars unearthing evidence of a more serious side to the writer. In *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate* (2008), Carol Taaffe refers to an unpublished manuscript from the late 1940s in which O'Nolan castigates the Irish language revival movement and elaborates on the reasons for its relative failure by 1947 in an uncharacteristically sober, if also partly polemical tone.² In a chapter titled 'The Pathology of Revivalism' he takes issue with the propagation of an insular and xenophobic attitude by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), according to which 'things are either good (Irish) or bad (foreign)'.³ O'Nolan's irritation at the GAA's self-appointed role as guardian of Ireland's cultural purity becomes clear from his argument that

we have a body of men setting themselves up as an ultra-Irish organisation and existing on the basis that they are the genuine thing and that the majority of the inhabitants of this country (or

even, a large minority) who have other ideas about sport are decadent and degenerate. This extraordinary impertinence is endemic in the whole Gaelic movement.⁴

Cronin has highlighted passages from *Cruiskeen Lawn* dating from the 1950s which leave little doubt that the author behind ‘Myles na gCopaleen’ resented the isolationism and puritanism underlying the fanatical Gaelic revivalists’ campaign to ban the allegedly immoral English Sunday newspapers from Ireland. Thus, on 14 February 1951 Myles observed:

It seems to me that all national publications, of whatever country, gain in vitality by a process of interaction with imported papers. The same is true of Irish people’s blood. It is more and not less foreigners we want here. And there is no limit to our requirements of foreign mental germination.⁵

While O’Nolan evidently let his Mylesian mask of the apolitical humorist slip when it came to venting his anger at ‘professional Gaels’ making a farce of the Irish cultural revival, it has yet to be established to what degree he was ever moved to adopt a particular side in political or cultural issues of an *inter-national* rather than specifically Irish nature. Since during World War II, the rigid censorship of any comments threatening to violate the Irish Free State’s official stance of strict neutrality would have barred the author from openly backing either side in the conflict, it is more illuminating to turn to his writings from before the war for any clues to his political leanings and this essay will explore O’Nolan’s early student writings in *Comhthrom Féinne* and *Blather* to these ends. The search for cogent evidence of O’Nolan’s political beliefs in the 1930s, however, is complicated by the fact that he used myriad pen names and frequently engaged in literary collaboration with his friends from UCD.⁶ Literary ascription has proved particularly difficult with regard to the letters to the editor of *The Irish Times* published under the name of ‘Oscar Love’.

A lengthy epistolary exchange between Frank O’Connor and Seán O’Faoláin on whether the Abbey Theatre needed to be rescued from provincialism by a stronger orientation towards European models, publicly conducted in the letters pages of *The Irish Times* in October 1938, provided the first occasion for O’Nolan and his friends to invade the correspondence section of that newspaper with pseudonymous, mock-serious letters lampooning O’Connor and O’Faoláin’s pretensions to

the supreme guardianship of Irish literature. The next fake disputation fabricated by O’Nolan’s group, headed ‘The Three Sisters’, was sparked off by *Irish Times* reader ‘H.P.’, who wrote to the newspaper’s editor to lament the low attendance at a performance of Chekhov’s play at the Gate Theatre on 30 May 1940. Over the next two weeks the participants, this time including the ‘mysterious Oscar Love’,⁷ outdid each other in making increasingly preposterous assertions about world-famous writers such as Henrik Ibsen and Joseph Conrad. Agreeing with H.P.’s attribution of the lack of public interest in Chekhov’s play to the Irish fondness for American films,⁸ ‘Flann O’Brien’ ‘claim[ed] to endure more agony than [H.P.] from having to live in Ireland’, for he could look ‘back over a lifetime spent in the world of books’ and in the company of such illustrious writers as Henrik Ibsen, Algernon Charles Swinburne and Joseph Conrad, who had been ‘frequent visitors to [his] grandfather’s place’.⁹ Four days later ‘Lir O’Connor’ took issue with O’Brien’s allegation that he had once ‘noticed at table that there was dandruff in [Ibsen’s] tea’,¹⁰ for Ibsen ‘never indulged in anything but cocoa, [. . .] and as for the disorder of the scalp alluded to, he could not have possibly been a martyr to this complaint, since he was as bald as a coot’.¹¹ This elicited further corrections and additions of prodigiously absurd pseudo-biographical details from ‘Flann O’Brien’, ‘Whit Cassidy’ and ‘Paul Desmond’. Oscar Love entered the fray on 15 June 1940, explaining to ‘Mr O’Brien’ that the ‘samovar’, into which Ibsen’s wig had fallen, ‘was now used as a pot for a cactus plant in the Majorca cottage where Chopin resided with George Sand’. In his final paragraph, though, Love all but spoiled the fun by giving up the pretence that any of the claims in the ongoing letter controversy were to be taken seriously:

Mr Whit Cassidy’s reference to Dostoievsky is most appropriate. Has not George Moore written in the preface of Dostoievsky’s *Poor Folk*: ‘The least critical cannot fail to perceive that these letters are unlike real letters, that they bear no kind of resemblance to the letters that might have passed between a half-witted clerk and a poor girl over the way.’¹²

None of the other yarn-spinning correspondents associated with O’Nolan ever went as close to calling their bluff as Love. Indeed, Love put an end to the ‘Three Sisters’ controversy with his next letter, in which he abruptly switched sides from accomplice to detractor of his

fellow tale-tellers by asking, 'Now, who but a [Luna O'Connor] could deem this a highbrow discussion!'¹³

Exactly one month later the 'Literary Criticism' controversy was unwittingly unleashed by Patrick Kavanagh's offhand remark in his review of Maurice Walshe's novel *The Hill is Mine* (1940) that 'the boy scout represented civilisation at its lowest'.¹⁴ This new dispute oscillated between the playful and the serious in tone and content, covering the merits of the Boy Scout movement, the literary and sexual-moral standards of Kavanagh and other writers and a supposedly widespread preoccupation with sewerage issues among Ireland's *literati*. The disputation ran from 22 July to 7 August 1940, 'involving a full fifty letters composed by – ostensibly – almost forty different correspondents',¹⁵ including, once again, one Oscar Love.

Critical opinions differ on the identity of this irrepressible correspondent to *The Irish Times* letters page. While Anne Clissmann,¹⁶ Keith Donohue,¹⁷ Rüdiger Imhof,¹⁸ Thomas B. O'Grady,¹⁹ and Anthony Cronin (108) are among the critics listing Oscar Love as yet another pen name used by O'Nolan, Joseph Brooker,²⁰ John Wyse Jackson,²¹ and Carol Taaffe (30) have expressed doubts about the case for O'Nolan as the true identity of Oscar Love. Indeed, Wyse Jackson reckons that, of the contributors to the letter campaigns in *The Irish Times* of 1940, 'O'Nolan was certainly F. O'Brien, but he may also have been Whit Cassidy, Lir O'Connor, Luna O'Connor, Mrs Hilda Upshott, Judy Clifford and Jno. O'Ruddy. He was probably not Oscar Love and he was certainly not Patrick Kavanagh'.²²

Taaffe is the only critic to have pointed out that Oscar Love was also the putative author of several letters to *The Irish Times* commenting on the still ongoing Spanish Civil War in January 1939. At the same time O'Nolan and his college friends were engaged in the first letter controversy triggered by the argument between O'Connor and O'Faoláin over the future artistic direction of the Abbey Theatre. Taaffe suggests that it is well possible that O'Nolan would have participated in two separate epistolary debates under different names at the same time. Yet, noting the marked difference in tone and subject matter between Oscar Love's commentary on the Spanish Civil War and 'Flann O'Brien's playful provocation of O'Connor and O'Faoláin', she adds that 'if Flann O'Brien and Oscar Love were one and the same, then O'Nolan was already compartmentalising his authorial personality, using one pseudonym for facetious literary frays and another for more serious matters' (Taaffe, 30).

Taaffe is here alluding to an illuminating passage from a (pseudo-) autobiographical essay published under the name of 'Myles na Gopaleen' in the Belfast student magazine *New Ireland* in March 1964, in which O'Nolan explains what it takes to become a successful author:

Apart from a thorough education of the widest kind, a contender in this field must have an equable yet versatile temperament and the compartmentation of his personality for the purpose of literary utterance ensures that the fundamental individual will not be credited with a certain way of thinking, fixed attitudes, irreversible techniques of expression. No author should write under his own name nor under one permanent pen-name.²³

Myles's advice to aspiring writers to conceal their real identity and personal views hints at O'Nolan's own paranoia about being pigeonholed. His refusal to show his political colours, however, allows for divergent conclusions: it suggests either that he was writing purely in the 'carnavalesque tradition' of Rabelais, that he was in fact happily apolitical, or, perhaps, that he had very good reasons to be secretive about his socio-political views.

If O'Nolan really was the author of letters expressing support for the embattled Republican government of Spain, he might indeed have found it necessary to write them under a *nom de plume*. Flaunting pro-Republican sympathies during the Spanish Civil War in Catholic Ireland of the 1930s meant running the risk of being publicly branded as an atheistic Communist. The news of the outbreak of civil war in Spain on 18 July 1936 following the insurrection of the Nationalists led by General Franco against the democratically elected Republican left-wing government had elicited a massive public response in Ireland. Contrary to the situation in Britain, public opinion in Ireland was overwhelmingly pro-Franco. In standing up for the Spanish Republic, the Communist Party of Ireland and the Republican Congress, which together only had a few hundred members, were fighting a losing battle in Ireland. While between 150 and 200 Irishmen joined the pro-Republican International Brigades, General O'Duffy, the former Garda Commissioner and leader of the semi-fascist Blueshirt movement, recruited approximately 700 volunteers for his pro-Nationalist Irish Brigade, making Ireland 'the only country to send a significant force of genuine volunteers' to fight for the Nationalist insurgents.²⁴ This pro-Franco allegiance was mainly due to the fact that the Catholic Church

and the conservative press in Ireland interpreted the Spanish Civil War as a struggle between Catholicism and Communism. They hailed Franco as a Catholic crusader, whereas the defenders of the Republican government were denounced as 'godless Reds' seeking to destroy the Catholic Church in Spain. Sensationalist press reports of church-burnings and the brutal murders of priests and nuns in Republican Spain helped convince the majority of the Irish population that the war was indeed a religious struggle. Pro-Nationalist propagandists and Catholic clergymen set off a wave of anti-Red hysteria by warning that if the Communist tide was not stopped in Spain it would sweep the shores of Ireland next. Consequently, anyone drumming up military or moral support for the Spanish Republican government was liable to be suspected of plotting to convert Catholic Ireland into a Soviet Satellite State.²⁵

This is not to say that Irish writers of the time did not engage with the subject. O'Nolan's contemporary and pseudo-namesake Kate O'Brien and her lesser known fellow novelist and journalist Mairin Mitchell expressed anti-fascist views in their personal travelogues *Farewell Spain* (1937) and *Storm over Spain* (1937) respectively. Similarly, the Northern Irish poet, Louis MacNeice, poeticised his personal response to the Spanish Civil War in his verse diary *Autumn Journal* (1939). The Anglo-Irish poet Charles Ewart Milne's strongly autobiographical poems and short stories, inspired by his voluntary work for the Spanish Medical Aid Committee,²⁶ reflect Milne's gradual disenchantment with the Republican government following the persecution of both the Anarchist and revolutionary Marxist militia by the Communists from May 1937, while the three surviving poems of Charles Donnelly, an Irish volunteer in the International Brigades, are distinguished by a particularly high degree of detachment.²⁷ However, all the above-mentioned Irish writers were living in London during the Spanish Civil War. It is no coincidence that their writings on the conflict were much more balanced and artistically accomplished than the dozens of pamphlets and polemical poems produced by their fellow Irish war commentators who were holding their ground at home.²⁸ After all, left-wing principles were particularly *en vogue* in literary circles and popular opinion was largely pro-Republican in Britain,²⁹ so that Irish writers living there enjoyed a greater freedom to voice their support for the Republican government. In Ireland, by contrast, pro-Republicans like Peadar O'Donnell – who published his eyewitness

account of the outbreak of the war in Catalonia, *Salud! An Irishman in Spain* (1937), under his real name – were exposing themselves to violent attacks by pro-Francoist Catholic mobs. In this light, it is not all that implausible that O’Nolan would have opted to back the beleaguered Spanish Republic under a pseudonym just like the prolific satirist Diarmuid Fitzpatrick (alias ‘Somhairle McAlastair’) and numerous other authors of political prose or poetry on Spain appearing in the radically left-wing magazines *The Worker* and *The Irish Democrat*.³⁰

Significantly, in his letter to *The Irish Times* of 10 January 1939, Oscar Love alluded to the excessive anti-communist phobia in Ireland as the main factor militating against an honest, rational debate on the Spanish conflict in Ireland. Love’s involvement in one of the many letter controversies over the Spanish Civil War in *The Irish Times* had started on 7 January 1939, when he noted the incongruity of a pro-Francoist lecture given by the eccentric Trinity College Dublin lecturer, Dr Walter Starkie, at a recent charity event in aid of the ‘National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children’. Love’s comment that ‘cruelty to Spanish children has only been created since Franco’s troops spread the Gospel’³¹ incited another correspondent, Mr J.H. Hutchinson, to assure his readers that on his recent visit to Spanish territory held by Franco’s Nationalist troops he had seen nothing but perfectly ‘happy and healthy-looking’ Spanish children.³² In his response, Love found it hardly surprising that Mr Hutchinson was ignorant of Nationalist atrocities including the complete destruction of the Basque town of Guernica with the help of German bombers, given that he was viewing the situation in Spain through ‘red spectacles’. Love was convinced that ‘no reply of [his own] may please the eye of Mr Hutchinson, who views red so glaringly that he makes use of the word ‘red’ thrice in a short letter’.³³ Still, Love instanced several Nationalist attacks on unarmed civilians and accused Franco’s followers of fostering illiteracy among the Spanish people. In his next letter, Love refused to reveal his sources of information on Spain to his adversary with the explanation that ‘the unbeliever would not accept [any of the so-called] “authorities” cited by him anyway. Instead, Love referred to a personal visit to Zamora in 1934, on which he could convince himself of the Republican Government’s genuine efforts to improve educational standards in Spain.³⁴ How likely is it, one might ask, that Ireland’s ‘licensed jester’ ever commented on a foreign conflict in such a sober tone?

It can hardly be irrelevant that a fellow Dublin citizen and contemporary of O’Nolan’s with the rather fanciful-sounding name of ‘Oscar Love’ actually existed. According to the church records for the City of Dublin, Oscar Love was born on 28 February 1884. At that time his father Robert Crawford Love, a ‘commercial clerk’ and his mother Sarah Love were living in 5 Chalgrove Terrace, South Circular Road, Dublin.³⁵ Oscar Love’s first letter to *The Irish Times* of 17 September 1918 dealt with the regular diet of swans.³⁶ The wide range of topics touched upon in the dozens of letters to *The Irish Times* which were published under the name of Oscar Love over the next five decades can be glimpsed from the informal obituary appearing in the column ‘An Irishman’s Diary’ on 14 April 1967, almost exactly one year after O’Nolan’s death on 1 April 1966:³⁷

Mr Oscar Love, who died at his home in Greystones this week, made many contributions to the ‘Letters to the Editor’ columns of *The Irish Times*. When he lived in Blackrock Mr Love enjoyed his daily swim in the Forty-Foot at Sandycove. When Peeping Toms objected to early-morning swimmers without costumes, Mr Love took up the cudgels on behalf of his fellow-bathers and fought this issue as skilfully as he fought all others. [. . .] The letters of Oscar Love will be missed, because, whether he wrote of bird or plant, of furniture or china, or of first editions, he wrote well and interestingly, with indications of a wide knowledge.³⁸

A perusal of Oscar Love’s vast epistolary *œuvre* suggests that, apart from his professional occupation as a civil servant, he shared a number of interests and concerns with O’Nolan. He demonstrated his relish for O’Nolan’s irreverent, nonsensical brand of comedy not only by ostensibly contributing his own fanciful stories about the shady exploits of the likes of ‘Luna O’Connor’, ‘Judy Clifford’ and ‘Hilda Upshott’ to the 1939–40 letter campaigns in *The Irish Times*,³⁹ but also by welcoming Myles na gCopaleen’s venture, in the early *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns, to instil the Irish language revival with a much-needed dose of humour. Perceiving the protests against Myles’s ‘desecration’ of the Irish language in the letter columns of *The Irish Times* as symptoms of a general ‘decay of humour in Eire’, Love laments that ‘the Irish have not discovered that nonsense is a new sense. This sense is unknown to dictators. If present-day dictators possessed a sense of nonsense, the world might be rocked with laughter instead of shocked with bombs’.⁴⁰ Love’s attribution of the ‘decay of humour’ to ‘the spread of patriotism’

in Ireland⁴¹ expresses disenchantment with a self-complaisant, isolationist and at times racist Irish nationalism also noted in O’Nolan’s writings. Like Myles, Love resented the ‘Irish insularity which the Gaelic League enthusiasts strive[d] to impose upon all true Irishmen’.⁴² It is not least his defence of *Cruiskeen Lawn* that has made some critics assume that Oscar Love was yet another of O’Nolan’s numerous pen names. Anne Clissmann, for example, considers it ‘likely that both [‘Oscar Love’] and ‘West-Briton Nationalist’ were pseudonyms used by O’Brien to continue the correspondence about the column and to draw attention to it’.⁴³

Love’s habit of adorning his letters with literary quotations and his frequent participation in the more serious letter campaigns passing for ‘literary criticism’ display an ambition to come across as an eloquent, witty intellectual. Yet over the course of Love’s long letter-writing career, he displayed an increasing tendency to style himself as the conservative-bourgeois ‘respectable citizen’, outraged by the Irish government’s squandering of the taxpayers’ money on the erection of unsightly concrete buildings and superfluous highways for ‘speed motorists’. A similar development ‘from the nimble jester who mocked Dublin’s intellectuals and Plain People alike to the censorious satirist disdainfully coming to grips with the post-war world’ has also been detected in the character of ‘Myles na gCopaleen’ over the same timespan (Taaffe, 131). In addition, Love shared O’Nolan’s ‘declaredly misogynistic views’ (Cronin, 63), given his opposition to the Irish suffragette movement and his advocacy of the exclusion of women from parish councils and the jury service.⁴⁴ In other respects, however, Love’s political stance is no less difficult to pin down than O’Nolan’s. At twenty-five, he won the Church of Ireland YMCA essay competition with a paper on ‘The Church and Social Reform’, which was criticised by the Bishop of Down for its euphemistic representation of the ‘purely materialistic and commercial’ political creed of Socialism.⁴⁵ However, in later years his verbal exchanges with various correspondents who denied the political killings and the appalling living conditions for labourers in Soviet Russia make it clear that Love was no diehard Communist.⁴⁶ Not even in the letters taking the Republican side towards the end of the Spanish Civil War does he promote any of the socialist, anarchist, or left-liberal principles embraced by the various factions composing the Republican Popular Front government. Love’s defence of the latter against its pro-Francoist detractors

in Ireland and his condemnation of humourless dictators ‘shocking the world with bombs’ in October 1940 suggest that he had no Fascist sympathies. Yet, in his quite soberly worded contributions to the ‘Literary Criticism’ letter controversy in the summer of 1940, references to recent visits to Germany – where he could convince himself of the superiority of the German Hitler Youth to Irish boy scouts in discipline and moral outlook – are at best ambiguous and at worst reveal, in the words of the correspondent Harold C. Brown, ‘a shocking ignorance of boy psychology and of the lessons that have been written in the page of history in the last year’.⁴⁷

Recognising various ‘motifs that recur throughout *Cruiskeen Lawn*’ in the letters of Oscar Love – such as ‘the reference to obscure and antique texts’ and ‘the tendency to etymologise capriciously’ – Keith Donohue has rightly concluded that ‘if Brian O’Nolan did not write the letters of Oscar Love [. . .] someone who had the same habits of mind wrote them’.⁴⁸ Whereas the evidence from the Irish census and church records leaves no doubt that Oscar Love was not *just* a product of O’Nolan’s vivid imagination, the mindset manifesting itself in the two Irishmen’s numerous contributions to *The Irish Times* might result to some extent from their similar professional background and possible mutual acquaintance. In a small, congested city such as Dublin it is not at all unlikely that the two men knew each other. After all, they both worked for the Irish government, both lived in Blackrock for most of their lives (Cronin, 30),⁴⁹ and the fact that they both attended the funeral of *The Irish Times* editor R.M. Smyllie in 1954 indicates that they might have shared the same circle of friends.⁵⁰

Certainly, the existence of a contemporary Dublin civil servant named Oscar Love need not have deterred O’Nolan from borrowing the name for some of his own letters. After all, some of the names and addresses adopted by O’Nolan and his friends for their comic letters to *The Irish Times* of 1940 had been taken straight from Thom’s Directory.⁵¹ However, it seems quite impossible that O’Nolan wrote all of the letters to *The Irish Times* signed by Oscar Love and rather unlikely that he did so for the Spanish Civil War letters in question. First of all, letters signed by an Oscar Love from Blackrock appeared from as early as 1918, when O’Nolan was only seven years old, to August 1966, several months after O’Nolan’s death on 1 April 1966. As a regular reader and prolific correspondent of *The Irish Times*, Love would certainly have been quick to disclaim the authorship of any

published letters wrongly ascribed to him in one of his own letters. Moreover, the fact that O’Nolan acknowledged Oscar Love as an overzealous composer of letters to *The Irish Times* in his own contributions to the same newspaper makes it appear all the more improbable that the former used the latter’s name as a pseudonym, unless he intended to provoke a disclaimer from Love. Indeed, O’Nolan seems to have been irritated by Love’s constant urge to see his name in print. Writing in 1940 as ‘Flann O’Brien’, he hoped that his own letter might ‘assist in crowding out Mr Love, who must surely have another letter containing still another quotation on the way to you by now’.⁵² In 1950 ‘Myles’ called Oscar Love ‘the foremost of all indefatigable controversialists attached to the unofficial staff of this newspaper’ and took the occasion of Love’s recently published letter to *The Irish Times* editor concerning a frequently blocked zebra-crossing in Blackrock to follow the logic of Love’s complaint *ad absurdum* in typically Mylesian fashion.⁵³ Still, while the evidence suggests that the letters to which Myles na gCopaleen is responding are indeed from the pen of the real life Oscar Love, elsewhere in *Cruiskeen Lawn* Myles plays with the problems of authority and authorship to allow for the lingering possibility of foul play. Referring to an advertisement in an evening paper that read ‘WANTED, WIFE, copper-faced, any length, capable of being bent’ Myles begins to suggest that that ‘wife’ is a misprint for ‘wire’, before letting the conceit slip:

To be honest for a change, I invented this advertisement out of my head. It did not appear in any paper. But, if any reader thinks that any special merit attaches to notices of this kind because they have actually appeared in print, what is to stop me having them inserted and then quoting them?

Nothing, except the prohibitive cost. (BM, 114)

Perhaps more damningly, the letters about war-torn Spain are likely to stem from Oscar Love’s pen as they are characterised by the same stylistic flaws as many of his other letters, containing clumsy, presumably self-composed rhymes and unsupported claims in addition to *ad hominem* attacks. Love hardly did much to promote the Republican cause in Catholic Ireland by withholding his sources about alleged Nationalist atrocities and dismissing his opponent as a ‘red-spectacled’ unbeliever. Whereas Love clearly sided with the Spanish Republicans, but failed to argue their case persuasively, the only explicit statement

about the Spanish Civil War to be attributed to O’Nolan without any doubt expresses a neutral stance on the conflict. In the final paragraph of an otherwise wholly jocular contribution to the first fake letter controversy in *The Irish Times* of January 1939, ‘Flann O’Brien’ offers ‘a word about Spain’, reasoning:

Whatever the merits of the present disagreement and the advisability of non-interference, no well-disposed, reasonable person will question the sincerity of both sides, but thinking Irishmen the world over will unite in hoping that soon a formula will be found which will permit of writing ‘*Finis*’ to an episode that is as destructive as it is discreditable. In this year of grace I trust there is no one who will wish to see this fine old country a shambles and a grim memorial to the waywardness and the avarice of men.⁵⁴

Although the passage stands out for its surprisingly level-headed, placating tone, its sweeping scope indicates perhaps a deeper concern for ‘the waywardness and the avarice of men’ than for the individual fate of ‘fine old’ Spain. While O’Nolan does not seem to have issued any further comments on the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath, Love demonstrated a more enduring commitment by continuing to contradict Franco’s advocates in *The Irish Times* in 1945.⁵⁵ Love’s particular interest in Spain was informed by a personal acquaintance with the country, for he repeatedly mentioned visits to Spain before the civil war in his letters.⁵⁶ O’Nolan, by contrast, never went to the Iberian Peninsula, nor did he ever venture abroad except for his own dubious claim to have travelled to Germany in 1934 (Cronin, 68).⁵⁷ Whatever incited O’Nolan to undertake or invent a trip to Germany shortly after Hitler had become Chancellor and had launched his political and ethnic purging campaigns, it was probably neither a deep admiration for, nor a resolute condemnation of, Nazism. According to his contemporary John Ryan, O’Nolan was ‘politically naive’ and – ‘like many Irishmen [. . .] ambiguous in his feelings for Britain’s enemies, perhaps imagining that they might be Ireland’s friends’.⁵⁸ Cronin in turn records that O’Nolan ‘did not discuss German attitudes, still less politics’ and that ‘none of his writings at this period suggest more than a superficial grasp of any politics at all’ (69). Considering furthermore that the world beyond Ireland only entered O’Nolan’s novels to a very limited extent, as Brendan P. O Hehir demonstrates in his essay ‘Flann O’Brien and the Big World’,⁵⁹ it appears all the more unlikely that

O’Nolan would have displayed an active interest in international affairs by offering a well-informed commentary on the Spanish Civil War.

An examination of O’Nolan’s literary output from before 1939 for any revealing comments on Spanish politics in particular and Communism and Fascism as the driving forces behind violent clashes all over Europe in the 1930s in general, further confirms this impression. Spatial constraints only allow me to point to a small selection of relevant quotations from O’Nolan’s contributions to the student magazines *Comhthrom Féinne* and *Blather*. In the pieces featuring the adventures of the dubious sage, ‘Brother Barnabas’, composed in the early 1930s – that is, before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 – Spain and its socio-political troubles only figure marginally.

In a contribution to *Comhthrom Féinne* from April 1932, O’Nolan has the eccentric poet ‘Lionel Prune’ refer to ‘Mr Charles Donnelly’ as one of those ‘modern’ poets who want to divorce Art from Beauty and marry her to Anarchy, ‘The Poet’s Friend’ (*MBM*, 30–31). Charles Donnelly was O’Nolan’s fellow student at UCD. As well as an aspiring poet, Donnelly was a convinced Communist and an active member of the radically left Republican Congress. After the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War he joined the pro-Republican International Brigades and was killed in the battle of Jarama in 1937 at the tender age of twenty-two.⁶⁰ During his time at UCD, Donnelly had been evicted from his Catholic-conservative home for his political beliefs and had often appeared in college looking quite rough. Cronin reports that ‘one day when [Donnelly] came into the main hall Brian [O’Nolan] was moved to remark ‘Poets should be dipped every so often, like sheep’ (Cronin, 51). This frivolous comment indicates that O’Nolan was no admirer of Donnelly’s Communist beliefs, while the implied charge in his college magazine article that Donnelly was putting poetry in the service of political propaganda suggests that he had actually never read his fellow student’s poems, which were in fact remarkably apolitical and detached in content and tone. In the January 1934 episode, ‘A Brass Hat in Bannow Strand’, Brother Barnabas reveals that he is actually ‘a halfcaste Russian Jew’ and a former aristocratic landowner (*MBM*, 72–73). During the Russian Revolution he had fled to Spain, where he stayed for six years, until the growing signs of ‘the Russian disaffection’ reaching Spain drove him to Dublin, where he ‘was glad to note an almost entire absence of communism’ (*MBM*, 74). The absurd announcement in the editorial for the first issue in August 1934 that

Blather's aim was 'the inauguration of the *Blather* Communist Monarchy' (*MBM*, 97) is certainly not to be taken at face value, nor are O'Nolan's flippant asides about Hitler and *Mein Kampf* and his mock-serious deliberation in October of the same year on whether the *Führer* had overstepped the mark by banning *Blather* in Germany (*MBM*, 137). Like the letter campaign in *The Irish Times* which ran parallel to the exchange over Spain involving Oscar Love in 1939, O'Nolan's early student writings moved on a consistently facetious and derisive apolitical plain.

O'Nolan's doubtful authorship of a handful of letters expressing his support for the Spanish Republican government under the pen name 'Oscar Love' provides insufficient evidence to seriously challenge Cronin's suggestion that the author, while remaining a moderate nationalist and a Catholic believer all his life, was largely apolitical, conformist and certainly not declaredly left-wing or social-progressivist (52, 64, 157). At the same time, even an absolutely certain identification of the real Oscar Love as the actual author of the letters about Spain does not prove that O'Nolan never dropped his pose as the irreverent jokester with little time for serious (political) matters. After all, the author's frank critique of the Irish language revival in *Cruiskeen Lawn* and the cited manuscript can hardly be dismissed as apolitical banter. Moreover, from the suspension of the Draconian wartime censorship in May 1945 Taaffe has traced a growing readiness in 'Myles' to speak his mind in *Cruiskeen Lawn* not only on national politics, but also on international issues such as the atomic bomb, the Nuremberg trials and the British social welfare programme (Taaffe, 128–131), although his foreign commentary seems to have been outweighed by his rants on the various ills and deficits within Ireland's administrative machinery (and might actually have been composed by his frequent ghost-writer Niall Montgomery) (Taaffe, 127). Further research will be necessary to establish to what extent O'Nolan's attested frustration at the insularity and xenophobia displayed by the fanatical Gaelic revivalists in his home country incited him to counter these tendencies by commenting extensively on socio-political matters of international interest. No amount of research, however, is likely to invalidate John Wyse Jackson's observation that 'it is almost impossible to discover from O'Nolan's pseudonymous writings what the man behind them really believed'.⁶¹

MYLES NA GCOPALEEN

a portrait of the artist as a Joyce scholar

John McCourt

Even if James Joyce was *persona non grata* for the vast majority of Irish people in the decades before and immediately after his death, the Joycean absent presence on the Dublin literary scene was hard to miss. As Niall Sheridan put it in his ‘Brian, Flann and Myles’, ‘Joyce of course, was in the very air we breathed’.¹ To some extent Brian O’Nolan managed, at least initially in his career, to rise to the challenge of writing successfully despite the massive shadow of Joyce. *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) is, for all its debt to *Ulysses* (1922), triumphantly Flann’s very own, very unique work. Its initial critical and popular failure is to be blamed far more on World War II than on the various reviews that compared it negatively and with monotonous regularity, with Joyce’s work. Undoubtedly, however, it can also be argued that the pre-emptive Joyce presence became an increasingly tough one for O’Nolan to negotiate, particularly during the long silence that followed *An Béal Bocht* (1941), after his own novelistic career hit a wall so early on with the failure to publish *The Third Policeman* (1967; written 1939–40). To a large extent, Joyce became a useful scapegoat against whom O’Nolan could vent his literary frustrations and one to whom critics all too readily rushed in order to do the same in their belated attempts to render Flann some retrospective critical justice.

This essay will not follow the tradition of comparing the two authors with the inevitable conclusion that O’Nolan is a lesser writer, crippled and consumed by Joycean anxiety. A cursory glance at much of the early criticism of his work, written in the 1970s and 1980s, shows that too much of it was cast in these terms. Joseph C. Voelker stated that ‘O’Brien must have thought of Joyce as his inescapable brother’,² while Thomas B. O’Grady saw *At Swim-Two-Birds* as a wilful

'un-understanding', a 'misreading' caused by the 'high anxiety' of the 'belated' writer who refuses to allow his precursor's view of life and letters to stand unchallenged'.³ M. Keith Booker described O'Nolan as a 'lesser Joyce',⁴ while John Wain claimed that Joyce was O'Nolan's 'ultimate master'.⁵ In a similar vein, Joseph Browne reduced O'Nolan's career to an 'attack, trying to fly beyond his imagined, ineluctable Joycean nets [with] his heart going like mad saying yes I said yes I will yes'.⁶

In this essay I would like to examine Brian O'Nolan/Flann O'Brien/Myles na gCopaleen's attempts to come to terms with his Joyce inheritance by focusing mostly on Myles's writings in *The Irish Times* in the decades following Joyce's death. But first a proviso. The title which mentions Myles as a 'Joyce scholar' would probably have made him bridle: Joyce's writings, in his view, suffered at the hands of well-meaning but almost invariably misguided scholars. Perhaps a better description of his own role in Joyce reception would be a more variegated 'portrait of the artist as a Joyce reader/promoter/critic/defender/survivor'. O'Nolan played all of these roles and all jostle for position in his musings on Joyce written under a variety of pseudonyms. His *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns express a curiously ambiguous mixture of disdain and admiration for Joyce's writings (if not for Joyce the man), but are almost always hostile towards the growing army of (mostly American) Joyce critics. They were written in a context of general support and appreciation for Joyce in the *The Irish Times*. For example, in 1940 'this year of disgrace', an editorial in the paper backed the proposal, penned by Padraic Colum, M. Eugène Jolas and Thornton Wilder, that Joyce should be awarded the Nobel Prize. According to the editorial:

Joyce's contribution to literature is great beyond question and, while the supporters and antagonists of his new styles of expression may be divided as fiercely as any bands of religious fanatics, Joyce undoubtedly, as the recommendation says, has brought a new range of human experience into literature and in presenting that range has created a new technique for the novel. It is to be hoped ardently that a 1940 Prize for Literature will be awarded and we need not say how much we hope that, in these barren days of European culture, the winner will be an Irishman. There are thousands of people of sincere literary taste who regard Joyce as one of the greatest expressive writers of all time, who believe that his work is the first fruit of a new rich harvest in the world's literature; and, if

the Nobel Prize for Literature should be awarded to James Joyce, his honour will be shared alike by all his countrymen.⁷

Back in 1940, Myles does not appear to have had much to say about this proposal. However, some twenty years later, on 25 July 1962, he wondered why Joyce had not received the prize and suggested he would have been glad of it, if, for nothing else, for financial reasons. Furthermore, Joyce might have done the world a good turn and deprived an American of the honour:

Notwithstanding his origin, he was a creature of the European mainland while Faulkner was a nuisance from the Deep South, where one of the accepted sports is shooting niggers. Joyce would have been delighted to get that award, for a greater toucher and bummer never wore shoe-leather, even if his desultory slippers were of canvas.⁸

The following day Myles argued that Joyce was ‘of more general world significance than either Yeats or Shaw’,⁹ thus seeming to endorse the Joyce claim over those of the two Irish laureates.

What most appealed to O’Nolan was, very simply, Joyce’s humour and his ‘almost supernatural skill in conveying Dublin dialogue’.¹⁰ However, like many other supporters, he remained disenchanted with much of the later part of *Ulysses* and with all of *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Writing as Flann O’Brien in *The Irish Times* in 1962, he complained:

The supreme act of thumb-nosing, however, is the whole of ‘Finnegans Wake’; here the reader is presumed to embark modestly on a course of study, interpretation and humble guesswork, since mere reading does not arise. I seriously doubt whether anybody has got through that book, or earnestly attempted to do so. I personally bought it on publication and had given it away within a fortnight.¹¹

This mixed reaction from Myles needs to be contextualised and can probably be attributed to two principal elements. The first is that not all of the *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns were written by O’Nolan himself. A significant number were written by his close friend Niall Montgomery. In the article reporting Montgomery’s death in *The Irish Times*, the anonymous journalist rather delicately drew attention to this fact by noting his contributions to the *Cruiskeen Lawn*: ‘It is a little known fact that he would occasionally write O’Nolan’s “Myles na Gopaleen”

column for *The Irish Times* when Myles was indisposed'.¹² As Carol Taaffe shows in her brilliant *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate* (2008), 'Myles' was a construct of at least two writers – of Brian O'Nolan *in primis*, but also of his friend Niall Montgomery. According to Taaffe, O'Nolan did not write all or possibly even most of the *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns concerned with Joyce; Montgomery did – although it seems impossible today to apportion precise responsibility for individual columns (15, 163–166). In many ways, Montgomery had far more in common with Joyce than O'Nolan would ever have and he was arguably better equipped to offer criticism of his work. A leading architect as well as a part-time poet and sculptor, he had, like Joyce, been a pupil at Belvedere College S.J. He became president of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland in the mid-1970s and was hugely critical of Irish self-government which had brought, in his words, 'a cultural disaster' for Dublin: 'While hearts and minds are officially dedicated to the oneiric ideal of a Gaelic-speaking Ireland, a blind eye (literally) is turned to the country's sole 40-year old aim, i.e. profit'.¹³ Even more than Myles, he was part of the system in Ireland but at the same time deeply critical of its limits. Under his own name, Montgomery also contributed pieces to *The Irish Times* and beyond, which are written very much in the Myles idiom, such as the following article, which takes issue with American Joyceans:

In fact Ireland is not a poor country and Dublin, though it lacks the Babylonian splendour of Cork, is not quite the leper-haunted shantytown the Joyce pilgrims come to see. ('What ails James?' his father is reported to have asked. 'Is the boy all in it?'). [. . .] Perhaps Mr Joyce, member of a Cork family which overshot the town and landed in lower Drumcondra, never really saw Dublin. Drumcondra yes and the suburban fields! [. . .] But nowhere in his writing is a sign that he saw, much less enjoyed, the city's rare architectural quality, its urbanity.¹⁴

While Montgomery was anxious to claim back Dublin from Joyce, he was also anxious, like his fellow Irish Joyce critics and enthusiasts, to treat the author with a certain amount of aloofness, if not disdain, in order to maintain an independent stance which, he felt, American critics lacked in their mixture of scholarly excess and critical adulation. 'Idolatry' is the word used in an unsigned *Irish Times* review of Herbert

Gorman's *James Joyce: A Definitive Biography* (1941). The reviewer complains of 'an adulatory and uncritical approach to Joyce's work' – with, it must be said, some justification in this case.¹⁵ In a later piece, written in 1962, Montgomery concluded:

Mr Joyce is misnamed; he is joyless, despite the fun, sensorial not sensual. [. . .] Wilde speaks of those who know the price of everything and the value of nothing; Mr Joyce knew the meaning of everything and the enjoyment of nothing. To him, Dublin was people, but Dublin's Dublin is something more than the singing pub-crawlers and the economy-type brothels he describes. And so he can write of ' . . . the grey block of Trinity on his left . . . a dull stone set in a cumbrous ring'. And there I love him.¹⁶

Montgomery made a significant contribution to *Cruiskeen Lawn's* opining on Joyce and many of the more negative takes on Joyce seem to be in the columns he wrote rather than those penned by O'Nolan himself. At the same time, O'Nolan presumably never disapproved of Montgomery's views to the extent that he felt the need to correct them. In short, it seems that Montgomery, although he would go on to write critical scholarship explicating Joyce, was actually the more anti-Joycean of the pair. As early as 1941, Montgomery was praising Seán O'Faoláin, 'whose prose has done so much to lead literature out of the *cul-de-sac* which James Joyce built for it',¹⁷ an opinion that O'Nolan, with all his open antagonism towards O'Faoláin, was most unlikely to have endorsed. Myles's treatment of Joyce, it should be remembered, is positively benign when compared with his opinions on his closer contemporaries, Frank O'Connor and Seán O'Faoláin.

The second reason for the mixed reaction to Joyce in *Cruiskeen Lawn* is that the column was to some extent the fruit of O'Nolan's discussions with his intimate circle of Dublin friends, all of whom had axes to grind with Joyce. More often than not the ideas that would appear in Myles's columns had their initiation in the pub or were honed in conversation there. To a man (and they were all men), O'Nolan's drinking colleagues held deeply mixed feelings over Joyce and all his works. Even John Garvin – secretary of the Department of Local Government (where he was also O'Nolan's superior) but also one of the first Irishmen to pen a book of Joyce criticism¹⁸ – is riddled with doubts over Joyce, whom he believed had a 'talented but sick mind'. Anthony Cronin captures Garvin's attitude well:

the most remarkable thing about his first book on Joyce should be the (to all appearances life-long) hostility it exhibits towards its subject. He illustrates his criticism with reminiscences and anecdotes which he has evidently been at pains for a very long time to collect and not one of them is intended to do other than degrade Joyce in the reader's eyes. His favourite word for the author of 'Ulysses' is 'solipsist': and nowhere does he show any clear realisation of what Joyce's stature as an artist was. [. . .] Dr Garvin is at positive pains to show that Joyce was not only a misguided writer who merely indulged his own 'association mania' but in some ways a very unpleasant one as well.¹⁹

Cronin quotes Garvin:

My own opinion accords with that of Stanislaus who wrote, 26th February, 1922: 'I suppose "Circe" will stand as the most horrible thing in literature . . . Everything dirty seems to have the same irresistible attraction for you as cow-dung has for flies'.²⁰

It would be wrong, however, to reduce Garvin to the role of a purely puritan critic of Joyce. He was, as Donal Foley pointed out, 'a man of Victorian taste and temperament' but one, like his friends in 'literature-minded groups, particularly in the Smyllie club – a sort of Johnsonian coffee-house', nevertheless fascinated by the ghost of Joyce, which 'was an inescapable quarry for debate and disorder'. Garvin's attempt to come to terms with Joyce's works was life-long, 'there was no stopping John on his journey into the labyrinths constructed by an extraordinary genius'.²¹ Although Brian/Flann/Myles never took the trouble Garvin took with Joyce, much of this description fits him well: the Victorian taste and temperament that was so much part of his make-up often clashed with its counterpart, the devilish amusement he derived from stoking debate and creating critical disorder.

If, on the one hand, there is an openness, on the other, there was a conservative, anti-intellectual resentment among these Irish Joyceans, who were almost inevitably middle-class, Dublin-based, Church-going and all very much part of the power élite in the country, even if they were often critical of and at odds with, the crushing political closure of the times. Men like Donagh McDonagh, a district justice, Denis Devlin, a civil servant in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Garvin himself, were all inherently conservative. Joyce, it might be argued, was probably not well served by these 'supporters', who were conscious of

his significance on the world stage, but were riddled with doubts and prejudices arising from a collective annoyance at Joyce's self-containment, his obsession with his authorial self, his voluntary exile from Ireland and the increasing difficulty and supposed obscenity of his works roughly from the 'Circe' episode of *Ulysses* on. Montgomery, for instance, spoke for many when he declared that he found 'the Nighttown episode and the Molly Bloom interior monologue shocking',²² by which he meant dirty and licentious.

Whatever their doubts, Montgomery and Brian O'Nolan were amongst Joyce's most important supporters in Dublin. In 1954, they supported the founding of the James Joyce Society, which had been initially proposed in a letter to *The Irish Times* by R. Shelton Scholefield. Scholefield was, in the words of Seamus Kelly in his *Irish Times* Quidnunc column, 'a decent Dublinman called Sam Suttle'.²³ Kelly encouraged this appeal in his column and received 'a most heartening response'. Those interested enough to write inquiring about the projected society covered Ireland from Clonakilty in Co. Cork to Castleblayney in Co. Monaghan. Oddly, there were no letters from north of the border – probably the only writer recognised there is the great and late Amanda M'Kittrick Ros'.²⁴ Within months, a group had been assembled to organise and participate in Dublin's first Bloomsday celebration. In the words of *The Irish Times* journalist, the

oddest 'pilgrimage' Dublin has ever seen took place on June 16. [. . .] In a vintage cab Joyce devotees and one distant relative of the writer visited all the places mentioned in the book to mark the 50th anniversary of 'Ulysses day'. The rest of Dublin took no notice.²⁵

According to Quidnunc:

The original Council, as far as I remember, was made up of Suttle; Niall Montgomery; the blushing violet who writes authoritatively about Joyce over the nom-de-plume of Andrew Cass; Dr C.P. Curran, Joyce's friend and contemporary; Lennox Robinson; the present writer [Seamus Kelly] and a transient called Ernie Anderson. Anderson, an American who had spent a great many years in Europe, was included because he was one of the few Americans who had ever come to Dublin without claiming that he knew Joyce well in his Paris days. Again from memory, I'm pretty sure that another member of the first council was the hydra (or malta) headed monster who calls himself Myles na Gopaleen, Flann O'Brien or Brian O Nualláin.²⁶

Brian O’Nolan was there, but, like the rest of the coterie, he had his doubts. Doubts that stretched back to this group’s formative years in Dublin. There is a sense of a disoriented generation of writers and intellectuals who, in the thirties and forties, looked to later Joyce as the only light at the end of the tunnel, but a light that blinded as much as it illuminated. A light that was dazzling in both senses of the word. In UCD during the 1930s, something of a cult of Joyce formed, led by figures such as Charles Donnelly, Donagh MacDonagh, Denis Devlin, Brian Coffey, Niall Sheridan, Liam Redmond and Brian O’Nolan.²⁷ These writers had few models at home capable of expressing anything like an alternative to the vision of a Catholic–Nationalist Ireland that was increasingly predominant, but in Joyce and especially in the biting humour of the Joyce of *Ulysses*, they found a writer who gave expression to their own desires to mock and rebel. They did not, however, engage in any kind of simplistic hero-worship and were very much engaged in finding their own space and form as writers while at the same time leading public attempts to celebrate their great predecessor in Ireland. It could well be argued that part of the difficulty of Joyce’s reception in his own country lay in the fact that those same figures willing to celebrate him – all writers attempting to establish themselves – were also suffering in his shadow, a shadow they themselves did much to lengthen.

A repeated trait of the criticism of Joyce by this 1930s generation was its assault on the Joycean cult of personality, of individual achievement. In 1962, Flann O’Brien wrote of Joyce’s ‘boundless intellectual arrogance allied with apparent contempt for the reader’s taste or convenience’.²⁸ Often, it might be argued, O’Nolan took Stephen for Joyce and gave Joyce little credit for always being a step ahead of his earnest creation. Joyce, for O’Nolan (here writing as Myles), erred towards presumption when making his works too literary, too experimental:

Joyce’s attainment on the positive side was that he was a truly great comic writer and, conversely, that he could be as affected, arid and boring as the late Charles Garvice.²⁹ He often committed that least excusable of follies, being ‘literary’. His attempted disintegration, dissipation and demolition of language was his other major attainment, if you can call it that. What would you think of a man who entered a restaurant, sat down, suddenly whipped up the tablecloth and blew his nose in it? You would not like it – not if you owned the restaurant. That is what Joyce did with our beloved tongue that Shakespeare and Milton spoke.³⁰

At some level, O’Nolan could never forgive Joyce for abandoning real-life responsibilities at home in Ireland in order to serve his art by living abroad. An art divorced in this way from real, domestic and even national life, O’Nolan could not fully condone. It was little more than a game divorced from lived experience, the fruit of one obsessive, individual, egotistical imagination. Such obsession was never an option for O’Nolan or his acquaintances, who initially conceived of their literary endeavour in a more collective manner. Niall Sheridan’s memoir makes it clear that he considered himself part of a group of writers and he invokes O’Nolan’s proclamation that ‘the principles of the Industrial Revolution must be applied to literature. The time had come when books should be made, not written – and a “made” book had a better chance of becoming a bestseller’.³¹ Thus Sheridan, O’Nolan, Donagh MacDonagh and Denis Devlin planned to collectively write ‘the Great Irish Novel’ to be called *Children of Destiny*.³² As writers they would attempt to follow a very different model to that of the heroic individualism lived by Joyce to the point, they believed, of approaching madness. As Anthony Cronin has written, Joyce’s

challenge would be defused by making him a mere logomachic wordsmith, a great but demented genius who finally went mad in his ivory tower. Admittedly he was a great low-life humorist as well, but he was one whose insensate dedication to something called art would finally unhinge him. (52)

The collective ‘Great Irish Novel’ to rival or at least outsell *Ulysses* never got written, but Sheridan would play a crucial role in ‘correcting’ Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds*.³³

If this group saw Joyce as ‘great but demented’ they looked to the growing army of Joyceans as simply demented. While supporting Joyce’s enterprise, most of these writers resented the so-called ‘Joyce industry’ that was consolidating in the United States. Joyce should be brought back down to earth, returned to Dublin where he belonged and where his works could find a readership capable of understanding him. Only ‘Irish’ readers could adequately understand the author and ‘get’ the vital humour in his work. This was the belief that underpinned the 1951 special issue of the Irish literary periodical *Envoy*, commemorating the tenth anniversary of Joyce’s death and reflecting the attitudes and opinions of his fellow countrymen towards their illustrious compatriot. This volume, edited by O’Nolan, sought to claim

Joyce for Catholic Ireland and for Dublin. The contributors brought what they could bring to the international debate – and what they brought, essentially, was an innate understanding of his Irish Catholic background and his deep connections with all aspects of Dublin life, which they too knew instinctively and intimately. Theirs was a legitimate pitch to win a role in Joyce criticism and reception internationally with the only hand they had to play and it was also an attempt to wrestle the writer out of the hands of the professional academics and claim him for the real or hoped-for province of ‘the Plain People of Ireland’, the so-called ‘common reader’.

The grudging tone is set by the editorial note, ‘A Bash in the Tunnel’, penned by O’Nolan – calling himself, in this instance, Brian Nolan. In his note, Nolan voices his reservation about Joyce’s self-absorption and his choice of exile, his intolerance of the astonishing self-belief and arrogance that allowed Joyce to put his artistic mission at the centre of his entire life. In a mixture of defensive posturing, faint praise and open disparagement, Nolan celebrated Joyce’s humour and his linguistic playfulness with a description which can also be applied, perhaps more fittingly, to his own work: ‘Humour, the handmaid of sorrow and fear, creeps out endlessly in all Joyce’s work. [. . .] With laughs he palliates the sense of doom that is the heritage of the Irish Catholic. True humour needs this background urgency’ (SP, 208). Like Patrick Kavanagh, O’Nolan emphasises Joyce’s Catholicism, claiming that he ‘emerges, through curtains of salacity and blasphemy as a truly fear-shaken Irish Catholic’, rebellious towards the Irish Church instead of God or the Church as a whole (SP, 207). Later, in 1962, as Flann, he would argue:

His readiness to parade obscenity and blasphemy is commonly accepted as evidence of a complete break with the Catholic Church or any other form of Christian belief, yet few other writers dealing in serious matters display such dour preoccupation with the faith and awareness of its dark side. It is obvious that Joyce was no agnostic. Blasphemy can be taken as an inverted affirmation of belief and he was, *malgré lui*, an apostle of sorts. An attitude of abiding ambiguity was dear to his heart. I suspect he was a deeply religious man and certainly his personal morals have never been called in question.³⁴

Not for the first time, O’Nolan’s pronouncements read more like a self-portrait than an accurate or even fair depiction of Joyce and his religious

position. At best the commentary can be read as wishful thinking on O’Nolan’s behalf. But it was a position that he persisted with, dragging it back up in *The Dalkey Archive* (1964), where he has Joyce himself describe *Ulysses* as a ‘dirty book, that collection of smut’. O’Brien’s Joyce discloses that Sylvia Beach was in love with him and had *Ulysses* ‘concocted, secretly circulated and [had] the authorship ascribed to [him]’ in order to make him famous. Joyce finds the bits of *Ulysses* which he has read ‘artificial and laborious stuff’, ‘pornography and filth and literary vomit’ (CN, 762–763) and will only admit to having written *Dubliners* with Oliver Gogarty (who subsequently gave him a bad name with his ‘scurrilous and blasphemous tongue’) and some religious pamphlets for the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland (CN, 761).

O’Nolan’s *Envoy* article, on the other hand, concludes, more felicitously, by celebrating Joyce’s innovativeness and playfulness:

Perhaps the true fascination of Joyce lies in his secretiveness, his ambiguity (his polyguity, perhaps?), his leg-pulling, his dishonesties, his technical skill, his attraction for Americans. His works are a garden in which some of us may play. All that we can claim to know is merely a small bit of that garden.

But at the end, Joyce will still be in his tunnel, unabashed. (SP, 208)

In *The Dalkey Archive*, Mick Shaughnessy, a Catholic civil servant like O’Nolan himself, gives a largely analogous assessment of Joyce:

I have read all his works, though I admit I did not properly persevere with his play writing. I consider his poetry meretricious and mannered. But I have an admiration for all his other work, for his dexterity and resource in handling language, for his precision, for his subtlety in conveying the image of Dublin and her people, for his accuracy in setting down speech authentically and for his enormous humour. (CN, 697)

A good description, this, of Joyce, but once again a better portrait of its own author as an older man who shared with Joyce a brilliant ability to render with extraordinary humour the patterns of Dublin speech.

Sometimes O’Nolan enjoyed being bracketed with Joyce. He stated, more than once, that he had met Joyce in Paris, although there is, of course, no evidence to suggest that such a meeting actually took place. In 1950, he claimed that Joyce had asked him ‘to make some confidential inquiries on business and family matters’ but refused to produce

evidence of this.³⁵ He also never hesitated to report when others associated him with Joyce, as when nationalist critic Daniel Corkery attacked them collectively in 1947. Myles's riposte reads as follows:

Professor Daniel Corkery is a man after my own heart. [...] Recently he put out an article on Peasants, wherein he had many digs at the expense of myself and James Joyce (i.e., Ireland's non-peasant class). We are called 'Philistines' and elsewhere there is mention of 'corner-boys', no doubt again our good selves, for it is only in cities one finds corners. Well, time will show whether we merited such reproaches. At least Joyce and I never compromised in our detestation of people who cannot exist without being 'from' somewhere; *we were here*, that's all and in our early university days we were rowing men.³⁶

O'Nolan never missed an opportunity to mock Corkery and his two most distinguished disciples from the Cork school of letters, Frank O'Connor and Seán O'Faoláin; in particular to accuse them of provincialism and of not having the wit to take certain Joycean pronouncements with a necessary pinch of salt. The following is but one of many humorous examples:

On March 6, 1903, Mr James A. Joyce, then living in the city of Paris, made this note in his journal, haunted apparently by the fear that he might forget it [...]:

'There are three conditions of art, the lyrical, the epical and the dramatic. That art is lyrical whereby the artist sets forth the image in immediate relation to himself; that art is epical whereby the artist sets forth the image in relation to himself and to others; that art is dramatic whereby the artist sets forth the image in immediate relation to others . . .'

Joyce was a great joker as we all know, but Mr O'Connor seems to take this piece of solemn drool and translated it into . . . Irish, is it? – thus:

'But drama is of a younger house. Poetry is about yourself and other people in relation to yourself; drama is about other people and only about yourself in relation to other people; and it is only occasionally that the subject which makes for poetry also makes for drama . . .'

How felicitous that first 'only'! *Seo ceist* – if Shakespeare as a young man had known Corkery, would he have written *The Mirchint of Ennis*? Would Turgenev have written *A Nest of Simple Folk*?³⁷

O'Faoláin and Myles are referring to Joyce's pronouncements in his very early Paris notebook, while the latter enjoys a literary joke with his allusions to Shakespeare and to O'Faoláin's *A Nest of Simple Folk* (1933), the title of which was openly derived from Turgenev's *A Nest of Gentle Folk* (1858).

The Joyce with whom Myles identified was very different to the figure he saw emerging in the sometimes-pious academic criticism he deplored. He admired the Joyce who challenged the stultifying political and religious *status quo* in Ireland, whose writings engaged with and put it up to, 'the Plain People of Ireland', of whom, in many ways, Myles always felt he was a member. He was little interested in the very different Joyce that was emerging from America through the work of successive generations of critics led by the likes of Stuart Gilbert, Harry Levin, Richard Ellmann, Adaline Glasheen and Hugh Kenner. In June 1949, he warned his readers of the '4,000 strong corps of American simpletons now in Dublin doing a "thesis" on James Joyce'.³⁸ He was still at it ten years later when the publication of Stuart Gilbert's *Letters of James Joyce* led him to rail against those 'poor demented punkawns' responsible for 'a veritable deluge of thremendious illiteracy foaming' over 'Joyce's pedantry, aridity and tourdeforcicity',³⁹ before returning to the subject two years later to denounce the 'shower of gawms who erupt from the prairie universities to do a "thesis" on James Joyce'.⁴⁰ On another occasion he suggested that

the Irish Government would be in order in refusing a visa to any American student unless he had undertaken, by affidavit on oath, not to do a 'thesis' on James Joyce and subsequently have it published as a book. All literature has been defaced by so many such abortions.⁴¹

On 7 July 1953, Myles announced that no less a personage than Richard Ellmann was in town to complete the 'grim task' of writing a book on James Joyce. If Ellmann tries to contact him, Myles pledges, 'I guarantee I will frighten the life out of him by the disclosure of the state of *my mind*'.⁴² In 1958 Myles addressed 'the latest item in the silly American "literary" drip about James Joyce', Adaline Glasheen's *A Census of Finnegans Wake*:

The book goes right from A to Z through all the difficult words in Finnegan, a book I have not read and do not intend to: I am not too sure that Mrs Glasheen has read it either, though she may have

examined it with her literary tongs for the purposes of dissertation for a yankee Ph.D. [. . .] Only Americans can write like this and the title pages remind me that it is published originally by Northwestern University, so I suppose there must be cowboys lurking in the purple sage.⁴³

Even as Irish a critic as Vivian Mercier gets tarred with this brush in a review of a book about Joyce 'to be published soon in America'. According to Myles's review:

Joyce, it seems, had a hand in the Koran. Ah, yes. He also did the Aeneid, the Bhagavat-Ghita, most of Dante's stuff, King Lear, all the quartets of Beethoven as well as a few things of Seumas's. (There's not a word, however, about him founding the Mount Street Club, the Hammond Lane Foundry and the old Theatre Royal! Or about doing the frescoes in my study at Santry!) This book is published as far as I can make out by two Americans Mr Seon Givens and Mr Vivien [sic] Mercier and it's called *JAMES JOYCE: Two Decades of Criticism*.⁴⁴

Myles was certain that Joyce would have shared his views on the matter of 'Joyce scholars':

I do not think I have ever heard or read comment on Joyce's work that did not seem to me to be fundamentally mistaken and the man himself – whom I once met – was by no means the last to be amused by the pre-occupation he had become with eggheads. He disliked Americans, as do most Europeans.⁴⁵

For all his annoyance and perhaps envy at all the attention Joyce was receiving, O'Nolan greatly identified with the older writer's use of humour and parody which was used with such great effect to undermine Irish pieties. In a *Cruiskeen Lawn* column titled 'J-Day', Myles complains that 'parts of "Ulysses" are of unreadable boredom' before celebrating the novel's humour, writing of 'the utterly ignored fact that Joyce was among the most comic writers who have ever lived. Every time I get influenza I read about the Citizen and his Dog; penicillin has nothing on them'.⁴⁶ Perhaps his straightest appraisal of Joyce, published under his Flann O'Brien pseudonym, is the commemorative piece titled 'Enigma', which was written to mark the opening of the Sandycove Tower as a museum in 1962. Again he mixes complaint with celebration, describing the 'Oxen of the Sun' episode of *Ulysses* as 'tedius [sic] and boring', claiming that the 'Nighttown episode does not seem to

justify its complexity and tortuousness', while applauding Joyce's 'achievement as a superb comic writer', which derives from an 'uncanny accuracy in recording the idiom and idiosyncrasy of Dublin speech'.⁴⁷

Much of the ambivalence to be found in the column is reiterated in *The Dalkey Archive*, where O'Nolan resurrects his old quarrel with Joyce as though seeming not to realise that it was a battle he had already won, having himself written a body of work deserving of the utmost respect on its own terms. He does himself few favours in this last novel, staging what is a funny if slightly juvenile form of revenge on Joyce, who is considered as a 'holy Mary Ann' by his neighbours, by leaving him at the Jesuit house in Leeson Street. By this point in the novel, Joyce, reduced to being utterly harmless, has been renamed as James Byrne and warned not to mention his murky past to the Jesuits. Mick's final remarks show O'Nolan gleefully borrowing the metaphor of paralysis from Joyce as he describes him in a death-like state. Joyce is 'unnaturally still in his chair, as if dead [...] Mick thought furiously in this situation of paralysis' (CN, 779). O'Nolan has finally got Joyce where he wants him, trapped, as Dotterer puts it, in his own 'archival fiction [. . .] locked in a paralytical, pious humility'.⁴⁸

But if this was a victory it was pyrrhic. If this novel was written to allow O'Brien to run free, sadly he had very little running left to do. *The Dalkey Archive*, a flawed and uneven novel, was published in 1964 and O'Nolan would die just two years later. Furthermore, he claimed to have been less than satisfied with how he dealt with Joyce in the novel, writing: 'I'm not happy at all about the treatment of Joyce: a very greater mess must be made of him. Would one of his secret crosses be that he is an incurable bed-wetter?'⁴⁹ This dissatisfaction with the take-down of Joyce in *The Dalkey Archive* would suggest that O'Nolan's Joyce anxiety was one he never fully removed. Much as he loved to hate him, O'Nolan remained convinced by his sense of Joyce's vast achievement and did that same achievement much service throughout his career, arguably at a cost to his own literary ambitions.

As his own life lurched to a premature close, Brian/Flann/Myles sent out mixed signals with regard to Joyce. Just when he was writing his attack in *The Dalkey Archive*, he was also publicly proposing that Joyce's body should be repatriated.⁵⁰ This idea of bringing Joyce home suggests a sense of closure which contradicts the continued scrapping being enacted in *The Dalkey Archive*. The repatriation letter of 1962, which followed a speech to the same effect and the aforementioned

'Enigma' article of the same year, affords an alternative conclusion to the Joyce–O'Nolan relationship, which tempers the rather antagonistic stance suggested in *The Dalkey Archive*. O'Nolan opens his 'Enigma' piece as follows:

James Joyce is a most unsatisfactory man to try to write about, as he was himself unsatisfactory to talk to, for a queer, ineffable, masked personality has largely eluded those who have written books about him and his work.⁵¹

In a 1938 letter to his literary agent A.M. Heath and Company, O'Nolan characterised *At Swim-Two-Birds* as a 'very queer affair, unbearably queer perhaps'.⁵² 'Queer' is a word that pops up more than occasionally with regard to himself and his work and the qualities O'Nolan ascribes to Joyce in this appraisal apply with equal aptness to himself – indeed it is almost as if he is directly describing himself in this piece. And in a way he was. His row with Joyce was, in more ways than one, little more than a mask for his own deeper and more personal life-long battles as a writer, battles he both lost and won.

‘A TRUE STORY’

The Third Policeman and the writing of terror

Tom Walker

Some years ago I met a friend for a drink in a London pub, tucked behind the Royal Courts of Justice. A man approached us with a Kerry accent and a lively conversation ensued. Somehow *The Third Policeman* (1967; written 1939–40) came up: ‘It’s a true story’, he said, ‘it happened in Clare, a policeman was killed by the IRA in the thirties. My friend Jim Cusack could tell you. It had to do with his uncle’. Jim Cusack, it emerged, was the security correspondent for the *Sunday Independent*; the man we were talking to was Sean O’Callaghan, a former high-ranking member of the Provisional IRA who had acted as an informer for An Garda Síochána – experiences recounted in his rather well-written memoir *The Informer* (1998).

Later I started searching for information about Garda officers killed in Clare and came across the unusual death in 1929 of Detective Timothy O’Sullivan. The *Weekly Irish Times* report is unflinching:

On the morning of Tuesday, 11th inst., there was delivered by post in the usual way at the Knock Guards Station a letter addressed to Detective Driscoll. He did not get the letter until he returned off duty at about 8 p.m. The text was sufficient to send him off again on his bicycle.

It was to the effect that the writer, who signed himself ‘Farmer,’ had found a box of ammunition and papers in a butt of hay in the haggard. The times were so dangerous that he was afraid of keeping it near the place and threw it inside the hedge at Lahiff’s Cross, in Ardill’s meadow. He wanted the detective to take it away as quickly as possible, as he did not want to get into trouble with the people around there. The detective was asked to burn the letter.

THE FINDING OF THE BOX.

[. . .] Detective Driscoll cycled to the spot described and in the corner of the meadow found the box. This was, in dimensions, about 16 inches by 10 inches, in the shape of a cash box and well made of wood about half an inch thick. The detective wrapped it in his overcoat and as it weighed only about four pounds, found no difficulty in cycling with it to the main Kilrush road. On the road, in the vicinity of a protection post established on a disputed farm belonging to a Mr Daly, he met Guard John Cusack, who was on cycle patrol from Kilmihil. Driscoll and Cusack dismounted and while they were conversing Driscoll set the box down by the roadside.

A TRAP SUSPECTED.

Detective O'Sullivan of Kilmihil Station, who had been in Kilrush on duty, then arrived and joined the others. Driscoll read the letter from 'Farmer' which he had received. In that letter the contents were described as 'ammunition and papers.' That was obviously to give the detective the impression that 'Farmer' had opened the box and that the operation could be performed again with safety. Despite this, the three Guards were suspicious that a trap was concealed in it and decided on a rough test. They brought the box inside a gate close by and behind a sort of old mud hut. Then, detaching from the fence adjoining a piece of barbed wire about five yards in length, they attached one end to the hasp by which the box seemed to be fastened.

From the partial protection of the corner of the hut they tugged for some minutes in the hope either of opening the box or of setting off any trap that might be hidden in it. Nothing resulted, except that the box rolled over on its side repeatedly.

EFFECT OF THE EXPLOSION.

The absence of result, together with the impression given in 'Farmer's' letter, decided Detective O'Sullivan that the box might be opened with safety [sic]. He went up to it, while his comrades came out of the protection of the corner of the hut. Getting down on his right knee O'Sullivan pulled at the hasp, whereon there was a great explosion. O'Sullivan received the full force of the blast. Kneeling in front of Cusack and O'Driscoll, his body partially shielded them. His boots and clothing were blown off, part of his left leg was torn away and both hands were blown off from above the wrists. The wooden handle of his revolver disappeared, a wristlet watch that he wore has not yet been recovered although

the leather strap was found and some of his shattered bones were embedded in adjacent woodwork in the hut.

Detective O'Driscoll received numerous wounds, including a deep gash in the throat, two deep wounds in the chest and still more serious wounds in the thigh. Guard Cusack suffered gravely from shock, but his other injuries were confined to a superficial wound on the wrist.

One curious feature of the explosion was that a newspaper which O'Sullivan had in a pocket was converted into dust, whilst apparently all the woodwork of the trap box was forced into his body in splinters. So far no other trace of the box has been found.¹

No perpetrators seem to have been caught, but the *Irish Independent* noted residual IRA activity: 'There had been agrarian unrest in the district and in recent months several outrages, in one of which at least firearms were used, have occurred'.² As his Chief Superintendent also stressed at the inquest and significantly in relation to this essay, O'Sullivan prior to independence had been 'actively engaged in the struggle for Irish freedom' while serving as a captain in the Volunteers.³

Contacting Jim Cusack, he confirmed that John Cusack was his uncle; he had died in the 1970s. He recollected the former colleagues at the funeral: 'old-school, big, tough guards, nearly all country men. They all knew John and my father were great friends throughout life and knew I was young Jim. I remember them crushing my hand as they all came over to say hello. O'Brien's description of the guards and the conversation caught them perfectly, big, genial and surprisingly clever'. Jim Cusack had made the connection between the 1929 incident and the novel while working in Belfast for *The Irish Times* during the 1980s and had written a speculative column about it – which unfortunately seems to have slipped through the cracks of the newspaper's digitised archive.

That the murder of Timothy O'Sullivan in 1929 is a source for *The Third Policeman* seems probable. The involvement of three policemen and the killing of the third to arrive are transposed into the novel's title and trio of policemen, Pluck, MacCruiskeen and Fox (who disconcertingly resembles the murdered Mathers; CN, 389). The wooden box, which contains the booby-trapped bomb, recurs in the black box that is central to the novel's plot – as cash-box, booby-trap bomb and container of four ounces of omnium. The prominence of bicycles in

the real-life incident is also reflected in the importance attached to the bicycle by the policemen in *The Parish*. The parallels between the novel and the murder are striking.

The Irish bicycle and republican life-writing

Commentators have linked *The Third Policeman* to Irish social and cultural history. Keith Hopper argues that the bicycle motif might be read as ‘a metonymic discourse of repressed sexuality and Catholic catharsis; an index of social ideology in a new, post-colonial state’.⁴ Carol Taaffe traces the novel’s ‘estranged and slightly surreal version’ of the Irish landscape and the ‘boredom and stagnation of the Free State years’, as well as pointing to several possible Irish literary predecessors (78–83). The novel is replete with historical and cultural resonances. However, that the source for several of *The Third Policeman*’s central characters and objects – the policemen, the booby-trapped bomb and the bicycles – seems to lie in the circumstances surrounding O’Sullivan’s murder opens up a further Irish historical context: terror. Applying this term to the revolutionary turmoil of the War of Independence, the Civil War and beyond is a controversial matter.⁵ What might be classified as an act of terror, as opposed to other, more justified, forms of warfare? Who were its perpetrators, whether republicans, forces of the Crown, or of the Free State? That one person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter is no less true for being clichéd. Yet the admission of terror as a category experience at large in the period is useful in foregrounding the violence born of political conflict that impressed itself on the bodies and minds of many people in Ireland.

Reflecting on the ongoing trauma of Doris Hunt, a compulsive shoplifter caught in 1934, who as a child had seen her father – a temporary cadet in the Auxiliary Division of the Royal Irish Constabulary (hereafter RIC) – shot dead in a Dublin Hotel, Anne Dolan suggests that there is a need in Irish historiography for a ‘different chronology of terror’ beyond the end point of the conflicts themselves.⁶ This notion is reinforced still further by the political violence that occurred sporadically in the decades that followed the Civil War. Terror was a nightmare recurring in actuality. Indeed, the period of *The Third Policeman*’s composition had seen the IRA increase its activity: during 1939 there was a campaign in Britain – the Home Secretary Samuel Hoare informed the House of Commons in July

that there had been 127 incidents that year – and December 1939 saw a raid mounted on the Irish Army’s magazine fort in Phoenix Park, centred again around a bicycle.⁷

Past terrors and ongoing traumas left their mark on Ireland’s culture. A sense of this legacy can be gleaned by excavating further the cultural history of the Irish bicycle. During the Revival, the Gaelic Athletic Association had included cycling within its sporting programme, and the Gaelic League had started its own cycling association.⁸ The poet Alice Milligan paid tribute to the importance of the bicycle to the language revival in *Hero Lays* (1908). Extending its preceding treatment of mythic and historic heroes, its penultimate poem ‘The Man on the Wheel’ valorises an Irish teacher travelling through the country:

And the fire he has brought to-night through the winter rain and
storm
Is the rallying hope that our race shall live and shall yet prevail;
See the eyes of the young man glisten and the aged lean to listen
To the glorious glowing speech of the yet unconquered Gael.⁹

George Moore similarly memorialises Æ (George Russell) riding across rural Ireland as another hero on a bicycle, awakening and unifying the downcast country and its people: ‘he rode throughout Ireland, preaching the doctrine of co-operation and dairy-farming from village to village, winning friends to the movement by the personal magnetism which he exercises wherever he goes. [...] Protestants, Catholics, Presbyterian, Methodists – all united in loving Æ’.¹⁰ A sense of the bicycle as a vehicle for Irish emancipation was furthered during the War of Independence. Frank O’Connor describes Michael Collins’s daring in ‘cycling unguarded’ around Dublin ‘as though the British Empire had never existed’.¹¹ The bicycle also became closely associated with the workings of the IRA’s campaign and several memoirs subsequently depicted it as an instrument of war. For instance, Dan Breen in *My Fight for Irish Freedom* (1924) writes of his ‘first encounter with the enemy’:

We were cycling home from Tipperary and the front wheel of my bicycle went flat [...] when I had pumped the tyre and mounted the bicycle, I was immediately pulled off by a burly Peeler. In my left hand I carried a small iron bar which was useful for forcing locks. I tried its magnetic effect on the crown of his head. The bar

got the better of the argument [. . .] I dashed up the lane, mounted the bicycle and made my escape.¹²

The endurance of such associations in the cultural memory can be seen in Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* (1999). Doyle has his protagonist Henry Smart be told by Collins that he needs 'Men on bicycles', after which Smart steals 'one left against the railing of Trinity College, a grand big Protestant bike' (a symbolic touch as light as cement) and spends three years travelling the country on his 'Arseless Horse' as an assassin.¹³

The Third Policeman was being written into a context in which the bicycle was associated with the cultural revival, revolutionary violence and ongoing IRA activity. Crucially, the bicycle had been written about in such terms too – as MacCruiskeen comments in relation to the protagonist's entrance to The Parish on a 'no-bicycle' and in ironic reversal of prevailing Irish literary trends: 'that is a story that would make your golden fortune if you wrote down in a book where people could pursue it literally' (CN, 281). The role played by bicycles in the novel before the protagonist's death and entry into The Parish reflects such a context. The opening sentence reports that John Divney 'knocked old Mathers down by giving him a great blow to the neck with a special bicycle-pump which he manufactured himself out of a hollow iron bar' (CN, 223). When the murder is recounted at greater length, the bicycle's role is prominent:

Divney said that we should bring our spades tied on the crossbars of our bicycles because this would make us look like men out after rabbits; he would bring his own iron pump in case we should get a slow puncture. [. . .]

Our bicycles were hidden. I was leaning miserably on my spade and Divney, his iron pump under his arm, was smoking his pipe contentedly. [. . .]

The old man turned his head to look and 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. (CN, 231)

The iron-bar pump suggests that Breen's real-life act of bicycle-enabled violence might be another source for the murder of Mathers. Ernie O'Malley's memoir *On Another Man's Wound* (1936) also features bicycles prominently, including incidents that are possible sources for O'Brien's novel. O'Malley's own terrifying yet comic

encounter with a policeman seems to prefigure the moment when the protagonist first encounters the enormous Sergeant Pluck and is asked, 'is it about a bicycle?' (CN, 267):

I was halted by a police patrol, all of them huge men, but perhaps the darkness and my imagination heightened their stature. I had no light on my bicycle. They questioned me in deep-sounding weighty voices. What was my name? Where did I reside? What was my occupation?

'Gallagher,' I said, 'from Killybegs.'

'How long are you in Killybegs?'

'Not long – some months, I came from Letterkenny.'

'But you don't belong to Letterkenny. What part of the South do you come from?' This in a Southern accent.

My clipping of words did not amount to much. 'I'm from Castlereagh,' I said. I held my bicycle with my left hand and drew my revolver. I held it by my side wondering if the .38 bullet would go through a heavy police greatcoat. There was a pause.

'I think there's too much water in the lamp, because the acetylene does not seem to work,' I said. 'I'd be the last to go without a light on this switchback road if I could avoid it.'

'All right, Mr Gallagher; but don't let us find you out with an unlighted lamp again. Good-night.'¹⁴

Pluck's subsequent revelation that there are 'people in these parts who nearly are half people and half bicycles' (CN, 296) might draw on O'Malley's description of himself after two years as a travelling guerilla. The man and the bicycle are almost merged, as he transforms into a semi-human machine of war:

I had to carry all my belongings on a bicycle when I moved and what clothes to discard and what books to bring was often a problem. In winter I wore a heavy trench which clung to my back and sides with rain, sweat or heavy misery, my clothes splashed with mud and water. Cycling up and down hills with a pumping throb or downhill in the night with a swish, my boot on the front tyre as a brake. Cycling in the dark with the help of my maps, mending punctures in match or candle-light, making the best of borrowed bicycles, some smooth running, some faulty with tight jibbering brakes, uneven camel-humped saddles and slightly buckled rims.¹⁵

Beyond bicycles, *The Third Policeman's* centring of hell in a police barracks also has parallels with the history of Irish terror and its

textualisation. During 1917–21, the RIC and their barracks were the focus of a sustained campaign of violence.¹⁶ In autobiographical and fictional accounts of guerrilla activity, the ambushing of a barracks is often given sustained treatment. O'Malley's accounts of two burnings out in South Tipperary are horrifying, yet a comic tone is evident:

Séamus and I looked at each other. The hair was burnt off his head, his face was black, red and blistered; he had no eyebrows. My face felt strange. My eyelashes and eyebrows had gone; there were raised ridges on my face and head and on the back of my neck; my hands stung most of all. Our clothes were burnt in patches and soaked with oil and petrol. We laughed at each other whilst we wrung our hands in pain.¹⁷

In Peadar O'Donnell's first novel *Storm: A Story of the Irish War* (1926), begun while a prisoner during the Civil War, an ambush leads to laughter:

'Surrender now,' he demanded, 'or I'll blow you up.'

The answer was a Verey light, another and another. The rifle duel kept on but was not so intense. Using the megaphone again Eamonn got silence.

'I'm pushed for time,' he said, 'but I'll remove your wounded, if you'll promise not to fire meantime.'

'Who's speaking?' some person shouted from within.

'Oh, have a heart,' Eamonn replied impatiently.

Besieged and besiegers laughed, even one of the wounded men was heard to chuckle.¹⁸

An unsettling combination of the terrible with the comic is something that O'Brien's novel seems to mimic. As the protagonist is condemned to death due to the happenstance of being in the barracks and the misfortune of having no name, his soul Joe comments: '*This is amusing*' (CN, 322). MacCruiskeen's skewing of logic to justify the extrajudicial hanging, as well as his subsequent threatening of the protagonist and Gilhaney with a pistol, is suggestive, too, of acts of terror inflicted outside the law during the War of Independence by members of the RIC, including infamously the British-recruited 'Black and Tans' and Auxiliary Division. It has resonances with the killing of three men already in custody in Dublin Castle on Bloody Sunday, 21 November 1920, in seeming revenge for the assassination of British intelligence operatives. Frank Crozier, the commandant of the Auxiliary Division,

wrote scathingly in 1932 of the fake ‘evidence being given by the police’ before the military enquiry that ‘the unarmed and closely guarded men attempted to “overpower” the guard (in a guard room inside “The Castle” which was itself closely guarded) in an attempt to “escape”’.¹⁹ Extra-judicial killings were a feature of the Civil War as well, most notoriously in the summary execution by the Free State, ‘without any pretence of legality’, of four already imprisoned republicans on 8 December 1922, in response to an attack on two Teachtaí Dála.²⁰

Flann O’Brien and Irish aesthetic discourse

In the light of such historical and textual parallels and possible sources, on what terms and to what ends is *The Third Policeman* engaging with recent Irish terror and its representation? After the novel’s murderous opening, the events that follow might be read as an allegory of the aftermath of the War of Independence. Divney murderously betrays the narrator, his partner in crime, representing an act of civil war. The strange world of The Parish represents a version of the Free State. The bicycle drives the protagonist towards murder and then his own death, as well as becoming the locus through which Sergeant Pluck and his colleagues exert control over the rural community. In this Dantesque hell, the protagonist’s fate is a transposition of his sin, being accused of the wrong murder. The bicycle is also transformed into a symbol for Ireland’s journey towards the strange logic and unjust menace of The Parish. It represents the opposite of its cultural associations, becoming ironically poignant in embodying the hope of freedom and its failure. Once unleashed, violence’s monopolisation, legitimisation and punishment are an ongoing nightmare. The novel’s *dénouement* – in which the protagonist returns to haunt his collaborator and killer Divney sixteen years after the original crime (a suggestive time-frame in a novel written sixteen years after the end of the Civil War), scaring him to death before they enter The Parish together to repeat the whole interchange about bicycles with Pluck – might be seen as a dystopian response to the IRA’s 1939 return to widespread activity.

The novel is clearly neither a coherent allegory nor a more direct representation, however, offering the more ‘flickering, fragmented world’ of an open-ended parable, echoing with a wealth of possible intertexts and resisting any single ‘absolutist’ interpretation.²¹ Taaffe suggests that ‘self-reflexive nonsense’ is the dominant mode, though underpinned with satiric and parodic elements (67, 79). This essay’s

historical excavation suggests political symbolism and more thoroughgoing targets of satire and parody too. As well as capturing something of the Free State's janus-faced mixture of boredom and terror, a possible target of criticism is the manner in which Ireland's political violence of the 1910s and 1920s had been written. The contemporaneous draft short story 'For Ireland Home and Beauty' (1940) – later revised and published as 'The Martyr's Crown' (1950) – overtly parodies such writing. The narrator meets a Mr Cullen who reminisces on his fighting days and tells the story of laying low at Mrs Hogan's, where she saves the men by sleeping with two raiding officers, so producing the only man to have ever been 'born for Ireland!' In its original form, the story highlights its present profitability – 'If you wrote down the inside story of what happened there you would make a fortune in America' – as well as making clear its untruthfulness: the narrator knows that Mrs Hogan's supposed son is in fact the son of the pub's landlord (*SF*, 144–145). More obliquely, *The Third Policeman* also parodies attempts to tell the story of the revolutionary wars; like *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) and *An Béal Bocht* (1941), the novel is a response to the textual as well as the actual Ireland.

Brian O'Nolan's 'revulsion' towards the realism pursued by several Irish writers during the 1930s has been noted.²² The pseudonym Flann O'Brien first emerged as 'a *nom de guerre*' in response to a spat in *The Irish Times* between Seán O'Faoláin and Frank O'Connor, together with Liam O'Flaherty probably the most prominent of the realists and a portion of the pseudonym's satiric genius surely lies in its sounding so similar to these other writers' names (Cronin, 97). *The Third Policeman* in turn seems to inhabit the plots of their early fiction. O'Connor's first collection of short stories, *Guests of the Nation* (1931), is filled with terrifying and violent events that transform individuals' lives and haunt their consciousnesses. Its second story, 'Attack', focuses on three guerrillas hiding in a house waiting to besiege a police barracks. One recounts the fate of the son of the house, who five years previously had accidentally killed another man and supposedly been smuggled away to the USA. In a chilling twist, the men discover that the father has been hiding his son. Mixing the comic and the horrific, the devilish father and the 'simple' fighter Lomasney exult in their realisation that the impending attack on the police could save from prosecution this 'emaciated, half-savage' figure, down whose beard 'heavy, silent tears' roll.²³ O'Connor's second collection, *Bones of Contention and Other Stories*

(1936), contains stories – ‘The Majesty of the Law’, ‘Peasants’, ‘In the Train’ – that register rural communities’ post-independence distrust of the state’s legal institutions. O’Brien possibly parodies such subject matter in Sergeant Pluck’s tale of a village’s proposed extralegal treatment of the balloonman Quigley: ‘That is a nice piece of law and order for you, a terrific indictment of democratic self-government, a beautiful commentary on Home Rule’ (CN, 366).

Plot elements from O’Faoláin’s first volume of stories, *Midsummer Night Madness and Other Stories* (1932), also seem to recur in O’Brien’s novel. ‘The Death of Stevey Long’ tells of how Stevey charms his Black and Tan jailer at Macroom Castle, through his fantastical story-telling, into aiding him in a breakout – including arranging for bicycles to be ready for their getaway. On escaping, the Tan and Stevey are met by his IRA comrades, who then tie up and shoot the Tan (something Stevey cannot bring himself to do). Stevey cycles to Cork City, apparently to his freedom, not knowing that the city is now subject to a curfew. Once in the hellish city, now terrorised by the forces of the Crown, he manages to escape into a house. There an old lady is mysteriously dead and unbeknownst to Stevey the house is a bomb factory, abandoned when the woman was accidentally shot – as is recounted in the collection’s previous story, ‘The Bombshop’. When the house is raided and the bombs and body discovered, he is charged with the murder, as the revolver he is carrying (earlier used to kill the jailer) coincidentally is of the calibre that killed the woman. He tries to explain his actions away as a response to having been fired on by Sinn Féiners:

‘I fired at them, once, twice. And then, I’m sorry to say, I ran.’

‘To Cork?’ asked the colonel sarcastically.

‘I got a bike,’ said Stevey sullenly.

‘Where?’ asked the president, leaning forward. ‘Can we substantiate that?’

‘Well, to tell the truth,’ said Stevey, ‘I – I stole it.’

‘Like this money we found on you? You admit you stole that, too?’

‘Yes, I stole it, I took it,’ admitted Stevey.

‘Can we even confirm that you stole the bike?’ asked the president. ‘Where did you steal it? Where is it now?’

Stevy told six more lies in his efforts to avoid admitting the bicycle was in a ditch on the wrong side of the city. The old colonel lost his patience here.

'Where did you steal the bike?' he roared.
'It was in the dark I stole it,' muttered Stevey and the court
rocked with laughter.
'It's true,' wailed Stevey.
'Remove the prisoner,' said the old colonel in disgust.²⁴

Yet again, the parallels are numerous: the escape from incarceration, murderous betrayal, being punished for a murder one did not commit and the questioning about the bicycle. On a meta-fictional level, such echoes of memoirs and works of fiction depicting the War of Independence and the Civil War seem to satirise a literary subject matter and method that has by 1939 passed into cliché. Irish literature, Flann O'Brien's novel suggests, is currently condemned to a circular hell of murder, policeman and bicycles.

However, the terms of O'Nolan's public hostility to these writers suggest that more is at stake than just the mocking of cliché. The prolonged campaign of pseudonymous letters to *The Irish Times* baiting O'Faoláin and O'Connor, running from October 1938 to January 1939, did not only lampoon 'the vanity and self-importance of the Irish writer [. . .] as represented by the unlucky Seán O'Faoláin' (Taaffe, 28). More specific targets were in view. Flann O'Brien's first letter on 15 October returns at several points to these writers' use of aesthetic discourse:

the whole interest of the controversy derives from the avalanche of maxims and critiques of art and drama that has been brought about in an incidental way [. . .] Mr O Faoláin's best effort is to effect that art (blessed word!) is not art because it is life, but the opposite, *i.e.*, life is art because it is art. This is a most misfortunate dictum, because it is hard to get the right way of it [. . .] Let us have art for breakfast and away with rashers. Dublin at present is crawling with artists and art-critics and art-mothers and art-factors [. . .] Life is art and art is life with my hey down a derry.²⁵

O'Brien mimics O'Faoláin and O'Connor flailing around art's relationship to life, issuing forth unsustainable distinctions, opaque tautologies and category errors. Three days previously, on 12 October, both had attempted to distance themselves from a simplistic adherence to realism: O'Faoláin had written of loathing 'naturalism, or photography, or representationalism'; O'Connor regretted that Irish 'audiences, actors and writers' had 'been brutalised by sheer representation'.²⁶

Shortly afterwards O'Faoláin's contribution to a Dublin Literary Society symposium on 'Are Novels Telling the Truth?' was reported: 'Irish novelists [. . .] waste half their spirit in protecting themselves against the venom of provincialism, nationalist and religious obscurantism', when such 'artists' should 'devote themselves to their own undisturbed vision of life'.²⁷ O'Brien responded:

What Mr O Faoláin did not mention was the spiritual amortisation of the realist (as distinct from naturalistic) novel as a result of the decadent vogue of representationalism. [. . .] Why not send the Abbey on circuit and establish branches of the Dublin Literary Society or the PEN Club in every town and village, each branch to be in charge of a genuine pallid spirit-deficient novelist of either the naturalist, representationalist or realist schools?²⁸

This letter parodies the rhetorical energy put by O'Faoláin into trying to distinguish between various schools of literary verisimilitude, as well as his overreaching sense of culture's role in Irish life – realism and the aesthetic moving towards an aestheticisation of the real. These letters show O'Nolan's impatience as regards the truth claims of these writers and their use of aesthetic discourse.²⁹ O'Faoláin's turbulence around the question of realism is apparent in his subsequent review of *At Swim-Two-Birds*. After charging it with having a lack of 'depth', he praises 'a much better novel' – the now obscure *Uncle Lawrence* (1938) by Oliver Warner – the quality of which 'cannot be conveyed. All one can do is to lay it down, saying: "Oh, how true! How good!"'³⁰

It is unlikely that such provocation would have passed O'Nolan by. On entering *The Parish*, *The Third Policeman's* protagonist offers a wealth of description:

The road was narrow, white, old, hard and scarred with shadow. It ran away westwards in the midst of the early morning, running cunningly through the little hills and going to some trouble to visit tiny towns which were not, strictly speaking, on its way. It was possibly one of the oldest roads in the world. I found it hard to think of a time when there was no road there because the trees and the tall hills and the fine views of bogland had been arranged by wise hands for the pleasing picture they made when looked at from the road. [. . .]

The air was keen, clear, abundant and intoxicating. Its powerful presence could be discerned everywhere, shaking up the green things jauntily, conferring greater dignity and definition on the stones and boulders, forever arranging and re-arranging the clouds

and breathing life into the world. The sun had climbed steeply out of his hiding and was now standing benignly in the lower sky pouring down floods of enchanting light and preliminary tingling of heat. (CN, 251–252)

O'Brien warps pathetic fallacy to a point at which natural phenomena are not so much ascribed human feelings as a curious mental and physical agency; this is joined to a painterly sensibility, pushed towards perceiving the landscape as having been 'arranged' to produce such a 'pleasing picture'. Such descriptions recur and Taaffe points to their 'peculiarly contrived nature', reading them as anticipatory of *An Béal Bocht's* parodying of Irish language tales of the Gaeltacht, without themselves yet amounting to a consistent parodic mode (Taaffe, 78–79). On a stylistic level, O'Connor's preoccupation with replicating oral storytelling, his offering of narrative primarily through action and dialogue, with little symbolism or description of landscape and physical characteristics, are clearly parodied in 'For Ireland Home and Beauty'/'The Martyr's Crown'.³¹ In *The Third Policeman*, however, it is the manner of O'Faoláin's early stories that is mimicked. 'Midsummer Night Madness' is filled with painterly descriptions as the narrator escapes a claustrophobic Cork and opens his senses up to the countryside's aesthetic pleasures:

the cold, yellow sky behind [Henn's house] was turning a most marvellous red as of blood and the scarlet light blackened every leafless twig and already rain-black and rain-green tree-trunk that stood against it and every ditch and scooped riverbank and lastly the road and the very sky itself became swarthy and there was light only in the waves curling the river and the potholes of the road.³²

The title of 'Fugue' signals a Paterian inter-arts aesthetic, pursued in the aural and visual impressions that counterpoint its narrative of two guerrillas on the run: 'We remained in the little wood for many hours, listening to the bass-viol of the falling water, to the wind pulling at the larchtops and shaking the tender rowan'.³³ Reflecting decades later on these stories, O'Faoláin anatomised their style: 'full of romantic words, such as *dawn, dew, onwards, youth, world, adamant* or *dusk*; of metaphors and abstractions; of personalisations and sensations which belong to the author rather than to the characters [. . .] trying to write a kind of verbal music to convey feelings that the mere sense of the words cannot give'.³⁴ O'Brien's parody exposes how with such

romanticism perception moves towards contrivance and meaninglessness. O'Faoláin's hyphenated distinctions of colour, for instance, seem to be turned into a tautology: 'yellow-brown brown-yellow water' (CN, 296); his apprehensions of sound are literalised to the point of absurdity: 'A bird sang a solo from nearby, a cunning black-bird in a hedge giving thanks in his native language. I listened and agreed with him completely' (CN, 358). When following on from one of these strange scenes, O'Brien's protagonist describes it as 'real and incontrovertible' (CN, 296), an underlying irony may be O'Faoláin's aestheticised realism and his critical pronouncements.

O'Malley's *On Another Man's Wound* may also be stylistically in play in *The Third Policeman*, in ways that illuminate the critique implied by such ironies. The memoir's exploration of the relationship between the self and the nation is an artistic affair. The 1916 rebellion, for instance, ushers in a literary education worthy of a *künstlerroman*:

P.H. Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh and Joseph Mary Plunkett were poets. Volumes of their poems and plays were republished. Dr Brown of Maynooth, Ella Young, Francis Ledwidge (then at the Front), Seamus O'Sullivan, James Stephens wrote poems about them. I reconstructed their work and their ideals. I bought and read everything that breathed their spirit: Connolly's *Labour in Irish History*, a vigorous work, overthrowing national idols; the works of Ethna Carbery, Alice Milligan and other poets and writers.³⁵

Aestheticism is signalled by the titles for the book's three sections – Flamboyant, Gothic and Romanesque – and again its painterly prose: 'white or colour-washed walls were lifted out of a mountain side by rain'.³⁶ A recurring theme is also O'Malley's increasing sense of isolation and failure, such as in the above-quoted scene in which he does not pull the trigger. The memoir attempts to understand culture's radicalising role in O'Malley's and Ireland's history, as well as seeing the aesthetic as a source for subsequent critical perspective. Part of what drives O'Malley towards fighting for Ireland is culture; yet the aesthetic as a category of experience also offers escape from the isolation, failure and horrific violence this fighting entails.

Not dissimilarly *Midsummer Night Madness and Other Stories* also narrates several instances of aesthetic education. In 'The Bombshop', following the woman's accidental killing, two of the bomb makers slink off, leaving Norah and Leo, who expounds:

‘There must be beauty in a thing to make it worth fighting for,’ he said trying to make her argue. ‘A man won’t die for a mere abstraction. Keats said Truth was Beauty. I say Freedom is Beauty. Christ was not really the son of the God of Love, he was the Son of the God of Freedom. He freed men because He knew that in Freedom all beauty has its source. Shelley was wiser than Keats, more human, more true. If Keats had not been a poet, a sensuous youth, he would have been an abstract rationalist. With his “truth is beauty”!’³⁷

In response to this treatise, Norah walks away disgusted. In an intricate irony, the subsequent plot of the story seems to imply the sheer confusion of Leo’s reasoning. He misunderstands Keats’s maxim – a discovery of ‘beauty’, an apparent abstraction, in the actual, ‘truth’ – and attempts to hold onto Shelley’s revolutionary abstract ideal, ‘freedom’. His subsequent actions, though, seem to follow Keats’s sensuous stress on truth as beauty: he kisses Norah and leaves with her rather than staying in the death-filled bombshop. In the plot’s trajectory a Keatsian conception of the real overcomes a Shelleyan abstract rationalism in the contrary manner to Leo’s initial muddled articulation of such an opposition. Yet stepping back from the story’s own implicit argument, O’Faoláin’s depiction of a journey towards an apprehension of reality’s beauty is being conducted through an abstract and convoluted aesthetic argument, framed in very literary terms: Keats versus Shelley; a tangible truthful romanticism, beauty in the actual, versus an abstract inhuman romanticism, freedom. The story, like O’Malley’s memoir, acknowledges culture’s role in driving individuals towards conflict, but also tries to rehabilitate the aesthetic as a category of experience that may guide the individual beyond violence.

The Third Policeman’s initial mimicry of ‘a sheaf of *faux naïf* literary accounts of Irish childhoods’ offers a *bildungsroman* of sorts (Taaffe, 81). This narrates not so much an aesthetic coming-of-age story as an education away from reality and towards abstraction, the execution of terror and its eternal punishment. The protagonist’s solipsistic immersion in the ideas of the philosopher-scientist de Selby – an all-encompassing rationalism – literally drives him towards his ‘greatest sin’: the murder of Mathers to fund the publication of the ‘De Selby Index’ (CN, 229–231). A wider satire on the limits of reason and the hubris of knowledge is at work. Yet as J.C.C. Mays outlines, the novel contains several intertextual references to J.K. Huysmans’s *À Rebours* (*Against Nature*, 1884), including a possible overlap between its

central character Des Esseintes and de Selby.³⁸ When this central work of late nineteenth-century aestheticism is placed alongside the intertexts and sources outlined above – a real-life instance of terror, the textual memorialisation of the Troubles, O’Faoláin’s and O’Malley’s romanticised realism, the attempts to square aestheticism and reality contemporaneously at large in Irish critical discourse – a picture emerges in which a romanticised conception of culture, whether as a body of abstract knowledge or as a mystifying mode of aestheticising perception, becomes implicated in the past and continuing violence of Irish history. ‘The long list of borrowings from *À Rebours*’ does not only testify ‘to O’Brien’s identification with its thematics, right down to the existential/ontological crisis at the closure of both texts’.³⁹ In conjunction with the references to the writing of Irish terror, such an intertextual presence suggests culture’s instrumental place within such terror. The novel is an echo chamber of possible allusions and parodies which accumulate to suggest that one of Ireland’s past transgressions in 1939 might be art itself, a bicycle that it continues to ride in its present hell.

MYLES NA gCOPALEEN, FLANN O'BRIEN,
AND AN BÉAL BOCHT
intertextuality and aesthetic play

Neil Murphy

The satirical relationship of Myles na gCopaleen's *An Béal Bocht* (1941) with Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An t-Oileánach* (1929) is a well-established feature of Brian O'Nolan scholarship. Myles openly declared in *Cruiskeen Lawn* that he 'wrote a parody of [*An t-Oileánach*]' in a week, which he described as a 'prolonged sneer'.¹ Critics such as Anthony Cronin, Anne Clissmann and Keith Donohue have closely considered the precise pitch of the author's satirical impulse, while simultaneously observing what appears to be genuine admiration on O'Nolan's part for Ó Criomhthain's novel. Myles's attitude to *An t-Oileánach* was characterised by the paradox that frequently governs O'Nolan's response to given narrative forms: a fusion of mockery and admiration.² He was openly positive about *An t-Oileánach* on many occasions and Ciarán Ó Nualláin attests to this admiration while claiming that *An Béal Bocht* 'has its roots in exuberance, not malice'.³ Nonetheless, there is malice a-plenty in his clear satirical dismissal of the pretensions of the Gaeligores, fixed notions of Irish heroism and what Brian Ó Conchubhair calls 'the cultural nationalist cant that permeated the vast majority of novels in Irish during the Free State'.⁴ It is also important to distinguish between Ó Criomhthain's novel and Robin Flower's 1934 English translation *The Islandman* (re-issued in 1937). Myles was repeatedly scornful of the translation in *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns throughout 1941, often mimicking what he saw as the wooden style of Flower's translation.⁵

Yet *An t-Oileánach* is but one text that Myles references in *An Béal Bocht*. Many critics have pointed to the novel's parodic relationship with the works of Séamus Ó Grianna, Muiris Ó Súilleabháin, Peig Sayers, Peadar Ó Laoghaire, Tomás Ó Máille and with the *Immram*

Curaig Máele Dúin (*The Voyage of Máel Dúin*) saga. And it goes far deeper than this. The specific level of engagement with each of the above, as well as with authors such as W.B. Yeats, John Millington Synge and Brian Mac Giolla Meidhre (Brian Merriman), invites one to reconsider *An Béal Bocht* as a complex network of intertextual references that governs its structural and aesthetic design in a multiplicity of ways. Acknowledgement of this intertextual network, in turn, affects the way that we ultimately respond to the novel, both in terms of its role as O’Nolan’s only Irish novel and as a complementary work to his other radically experimental novels, *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman*, both of which were composed, if not published, during those same richly productive few years (1939–1941).

Myles na gCopaleen (trans. ‘Myles of the little horses’) was not only a variant of the pen name that was to become Brian O’Nolan’s *nom de guerre* in his *Cruiskeen Lawn* column in *The Irish Times* for the next two decades, it had also been borrowed (and adjusted) from a tissue of connected sources. Gerald Griffin’s novel *The Collegians* (1829),⁶ featuring one Myles na Coppaleen, is the source text for Dion Boucicault’s play *The Colleen Bawn* (1860), which was in turn adapted as the opera *Lily of Killarney* (composed by Julius Benedict and co-written by Boucicault, 1862) and later adapted for the film *Lily of Killarney* (directed by George Ridgwell, 1929), again featuring Myles na Coppaleen. While Myles is a character of little real significance in Griffin’s novel, he emerges as a figure of note in *The Colleen Bawn*, as ‘a poaching scoundrel’ and a ‘horse stealer’,⁷ but one who is misunderstood and ultimately accidentally saves Eily’s life. A stage-Irish rogue who transforms into an unlikely heroic saviour. Boucicault, in fact, acted as Myles in the first production of the play in New York in 1860. It is here that O’Nolan’s Myles has his textual origins and would thus already have been well known to Irish audiences. So, in a sense, the supposed ‘editor’ of *An Béal Bocht* comes to us fully formed – a variation of Trellis’s ‘aestho-autogamy’ theory in *At Swim-Two-Birds* (CN, 37) – already a shaping spirit on readers as they enter the textual tapestry of the novel.

That Myles’s novel overtly parodies *An t-Oileánach* is immediately clear from the fact that the subtitle to the Gaelic original, *An Béal Bocht*, was *nó An Milleánach* (‘or, The Fault Finder’), which rhymes with the title of Ó Criomhthain’s autobiography. In addition, in *An Béal Bocht* there is frequent repetition of the phrase ‘mar ná beidh ár

leithéidí arís ann' ('Our like will never be there again'), with which Ó Criomhthain concludes *An t-Oileánach*. O'Nolan clearly has Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa overuse the phrase throughout his memoirs for comic purposes, consequently stripping it of its pathos and rendering it a comic riposte to a perceived Irish culture of complaint. However, Ó Criomhthain's is but one of a host of texts that are parodied, echoed and plundered and in each case O'Nolan inverts, or re-shapes the source texts to his own end.

Peadar Ó Laoghaire's *Séadna* (1904), a version of the Faust myth, is explicitly named in *An Béal Bocht* in what is effectively a satire of the 'guid buiks' (CN, 447; 'na dea-leabhair', ABB, 56), or fixed notions of Irish behaviour. The version of the world that Bónapárt takes to be a true reflection of reality from listening to the Seandúine Liath (the 'Old-Grey-Fellow') strongly echoes the tales and character types in *Séadna*. Just to emphasise the point, our naïve narrator informs us that 'One knows not why but that is how it was. He who thinks I speak untruly, let him read the guid buiks' (CN, 447),⁸ in effect asserting the primacy of a particular kind of textuality that shapes his existence. The role of comic exaggeration and inversion ensures that it is not, however, a simple transference of textually received material, as the Old-Grey-Fellow's citing of *Séadna* comes across as a sharp rebuke to the calcified traditions that rule the lives of the inhabitants of Corkadorkey. Similarly, several incidents are borrowed from Peig Sayers's autobiography *Peig: A Scéal Féin* (*Peig: Her Own Story*, 1936), such as the heroic rock-lifting episode, which is blackly parodied in *An Béal Bocht* when the Old-Grey-Fellow's feet are badly crushed in a similar event (CN, 482), although there is little mention of his disability thereafter. The crushing of the Old-Grey-Fellow's feet openly mocks the heroism of *Peig's* celebration of male physical prowess, in turn a representation of the noble Celtic warrior myth. Some of the stories of 'Máire' (the pen name of Séamus Ó Grianna, from Donegal) are also directly pillaged. As Jane Farnon points out, Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa's first day in school, during which he is compelled to use the name Jams O'Donnell, is based on the opening episode of Ó Grianna's *Caisleán Óir* (*Golden Castle*, 1924), in which Séimí Phádraig Duibh is forced to adopt the name 'James Gallagher', at the insistence of the schoolmaster.⁹ Ó Grianna's episode registers a sincere criticism about the implication of imposing the English language on Gaelic-speaking areas, but Myles's version exaggerates the critique by naming the *entire*

male population Jams O'Donnell, in effect emasculating the identity of a male hero whose 'other' name is, after all, Bónapárt.

Peig Sayers, Muiris Ó Súilleabháin, Séamus Ó Grianna, Peadar Ó Laoghaire and Tomás Ó Criomhthain all offered O'Nolan rich source material with which to play, invert and satirise.¹⁰ However, the depth of the intertextual forces that hold the fabric of *An Béal Bocht* together is far more extensive and nuanced than a simple satire of the Gaelic autobiographies and their variants. In addition to an entire chapter being devoted to a reconstitution of some elements of the Old Irish *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin*, Jane Farnon also convincingly argues that the structure of *An Béal Bocht* resembles the *Immram* as much as it does *An t-Oileánach* and echoes many motifs and themes that are found in the Middle Irish text. Farnon points particularly to the episodic nature of both texts and argues that no chapter of *An Béal Bocht* is interdependent with the others.¹¹ She also observes that O'Nolan inverts the original so that Bónapárt himself resembles the original Máel Dúin more than the Maoldún Ó Pónasa figure whom he encounters on 'Hunger-stack mountain', particularly in terms of their shared family histories. There are questions about each of their mothers and their fathers are both vague figures. One effect of this inversion is that we begin to view Bónapárt as an unlikely voyager-hero, like the original Máel Dúin of the *Immram*, while Maoldún is merely a comic reflection of his mythic origins (CN, 476–477). This strategy again represents a deflation of the heroic, but it also demonstrates irreverence towards textual authority, a common feature in O'Nolan's fiction, even on a structural level. In fact, O'Nolan was acutely aware of the potency of the textual over received experience:

It has occurred to me many a time that momentous concepts and events would be quite forgotten if the name they went by got, by some chance, quite lost. The name can sometimes transcend the thing.¹²

While the episode from the *Immram* that features most strongly in *An Béal Bocht* is that which recounts the discovery of Maoldún on the miraculous mountain, Farnon also alerts us to the motif of mysterious abandoned houses that is found in both texts.¹³ If one, in turn, considers this particular parallel in the context of O'Nolan's penchant for intertextual game-playing, some curious connecting threads become visible. For example, Bónapárt and the Old-Grey-Fellow steal a necklace from

an abandoned house during their thieving excursion (itself a dark inversion of the righteous heroism of the heroic voyages of the antecedent text) – a direct intertextual inversion of the fact that Máel Dúin’s foster brother, in the source text, was punished for stealing a necklace. The ironic inversion is clearly significant to our understanding of the nature of the parody that is being effected. The boundaries between the two texts are also blurred so that an item from a ninth-century myth manages to materialise intertextually in *An Béal Bocht*, in a different context. In a manner that echoes the breaking of fictive boundaries in *At Swim-Two-Birds* and many other postmodern texts (what Brian McHale calls, ‘worlds in collision’),¹⁴ Myles leads us further and further into his intertextual universe, far beyond a simple parodic re-writing of the Gaelic autobiographies. In addition, like many medieval tales, *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* is itself a pastiche of other sources and as such O’Nolan is not simply borrowing as much as acknowledging and writing within a very specific tradition. David Wheatley suggests that

Immram Curaig Máele Dúin is itself an extremely hybridised cultural product. It dates from a period of painful tension and development in Irish writing [. . .] *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* begins as a revenge tale, in the tradition of the older Ulster cycle, but completely and unaccountably loses the thread of its revenge motif at the end.¹⁵

So, not only does Myles’s satirical, inverted variant echo the hybrid nature of its source text, it also simultaneously mirrors its loss of generic moorings. As with the *Immram*, *An Béal Bocht*’s voyage – Bónapárt’s trip up the mountain – loses its focus and our narrator ends up in jail as a result of a series of botched lies, ignorance and the inability to render his own knowledge into speech. Furthermore, the authorship of the tale bears a certain correspondence to Myles na gCopaleen’s own dubious ontological status.

O’Nolan’s complex reaction to this classical Irish tale reveals that his level of engagement with a far wider network of texts is both nuanced and far-reaching. Richard T. Murphy points to Breandán Ó Conaire’s suggestion that *An Béal Bocht*’s ‘closest relation is the Middle Irish “Aisling Meic ConGlinne”, a satire of the allegorical vision poems which O’Brien disliked for their formulism and “self-indulgent sorrowing after the language and historical events”’.¹⁶ Murphy raises the point, as does Ó Conaire, that O’Nolan was in fact engaging with

a canon that is itself multivocal, a resource with which to oppose, rather than confirm, attempts to define Irishness in the present. If this rescues the idea of a canon by reaching back to earlier sources of authority, it is only to establish a kind of anti-traditional tradition that identifies the 'Irishness' in past literature as its heterogeneity and self-critical spirit.¹⁷

Of course, Myles na gCopaleen is also the authorial half-brother of Flann O'Brien – whose earlier *At Swim-Two-Birds*, in particular, is an extended experiment in multi-vocal or polyphonic expression – so it is of little surprise to find him allowing a plethora of voices into his Irish experiment. It is also noteworthy that satire had long been considered a major genre in both Gaelic writing and Irish literature in English. Farnon observes that '*An Béal Bocht* belongs to the genre of satire, which from the earliest times has maintained a very significant and feared position in Gaelic literature'.¹⁸ Sean O'Casey responded to reading *An Béal Bocht* by suggesting that it had 'the swish of Swift's satire' (qtd. in Cronin, 129), although the targets of Swift's satires were altogether clearer than those of O'Nolan's multivocal universes.¹⁹

The nature of O'Nolan's absorption of his multiple sources in *An Béal Bocht* is crucial to understanding his aesthetic achievement. For example, Carol Taaffe, among others, notes the textual connections between Maoldún's story and those of the shanachie Feardanand Ó Rúnasa, whom Bónapárt has already met in the Rosses (Taaffe, 109).²⁰ Echoing the various suggestions in the novel that the Gaels are inextricably bound to tradition and to the 'guid buiks', the satirical implication is that the stories of the Gaels have not changed in centuries, nor has their capacity for progress or rejuvenation. But the implications are more complex. Not only are these characters the architects of their own entrapment, they are also expressions of the essentially text-bound nature of all people. As Joseph Brooker claims of *An Béal Bocht*, 'Like *At Swim-Two-Birds* it is highly intertextual and explores the importance of narratives with heavy irony'.²¹ Brooker further suggests that the central purpose of the intertextual texture of the novel is to remind the reader that the lives of the Gaels have 'been written over and over again in the same way. The Gael has become a groove, a convention, a cliché'.²² The implications of the heavy textual borrowing extend beyond a commentary on the Gaels and beyond Bónapárt as a kind of Gaelic literary Frankenstein, as Taaffe has it (104).

Myles's satire is not simply a Swiftian ethical corrective. Rather, as Denis Donoghue points out, making reference to Hugh Kenner, the novel's human dilemmas are treated as 'essentially epistemological, not ethical comedies'.²³ *An Béal Bocht* is profoundly focused on the uncertainty of human knowledge systems – inflexible and unchanging worlds of story and tradition – in the moral frames that shape lives and in the unyielding trap of language with which Flann O'Brien is very familiar in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Speaking of O'Nolan's fiction in general, Flore Coulouma points to the defining exuberance inherent to the author's aesthetic playfulness, an exuberance that is conditioned by

its polyphonic and intertextual dimension, sometimes akin to literary collage and whose self-conscious quality always reminds the reader of the artificiality and arbitrariness of language. The constant polarity between exuberance and void in Flann O'Brien's work echoes the deconstructive tensions of post-modern writing balancing proliferation of references on the one hand with absence of meaning on the other.²⁴

When Bónapárt and the Old-Grey-Fellow steal a necklace that was last seen in a ninth-century *Immram*, one can detect such aesthetic exuberance. Or when the Myles na Coppaleen of *The Colleen Bawn* saves Eily O'Connor, it is noticeable that he observes the impending crime from a solitary cave where he is making whiskey, a direct antecedent of Maoldún Ó Pónasa's whiskey fountain in *An Béal Bocht*. In this we have yet another comic in-joke, yet such incidents also serve to remind us of the textual trap that confines our linguistic and intellectual universe. The layers of gamesmanship and intertextually webbed connections speak of a far more complex engagement than that of a satire of a single literary genre, the Gaelic autobiography. In this context, Brian Ó Conchubhair argues that *An Béal Bocht* is far more than the sum of its borrowings and suggests that it deserves recognition in its own right:

the issue of the most appropriate genre in which to situate *An Béal Bocht* and its creative, narrative and structural debt to other texts – primarily *An t-Oileánach* – has dominated and obscured critics' ability to see it as its own independent text. Awareness of the literary, linguistic and cultural backdrop is essential, but it is, nevertheless, an independent work of art.²⁵

Intertextuality is as much subject here as formal system. The novel structurally demonstrates the obsessive circling around the textual

issue with which the characters themselves are engaged, both wittingly and unwittingly.

The texture of the fictional universe that is woven from Myles's literary appropriations is that of a fictive stylised non-realist space that is also compromised, in a referential sense, in numerous other ways. Right from the outset, Bónapárt's attempt to recall his youth is compromised by imperfect memory:

I cannot truly remember either the day I was born or the first six months I spent here in the world. Doubtless, however, I was alive at that time although I have no memory of it, because I should not exist now if I were not there then and to the human being, as well as to every other living creature, sense comes gradually. (CN, 413)²⁶

This is a direct parody of the opening to Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An t-Oileánach* in which the speaker informs us, 'I was born on St Thomas's day in the year 1856. I can recall being at my mother's breast, for I was four years old before I was weaned'.²⁷ The nature of the parody in *An Béal Bocht* is significant both in its negative assertion of the incapacity of memory and in the farcical representation of the boy's ignorance of his own condition: 'I was very young at the time I was born and had not aged even a single day; for half a year I did not perceive anything about me and did not know one person from the other' (CN, 414).²⁸ In one sense this is simply parodic rebuke, but it is also part of a progressive dismantling of the regularised order that one expects from a realist account and as such offers an indication of the deep levels of intellectual subversion and disorientation that are at work (and play) in the novel.

The same desire to disorient the reader is evident in the way that the narrative voice constructs the landscape. The authenticity of the location is severely compromised in the novel because normal spatial relations do not function as they should. For example, from the windows of Bónapárt's house he can (impossibly) see the western coast of Donegal, the peninsula Bloody Foreland, Gweedore, Tory Island, West Galway, Kilronan on the Aran Islands, the Great Blasket and Dingle town on the west coast of Kerry. Bónapárt's house offers an extremely odd vantage point that challenges one's imagination to envisage exactly where Corca Dorcha is, although it clearly echoes Ó Criomhthain's *Corca Dhuibhne*. As with *The Third Policeman* and *At Swim-Two-Birds*, the legitimacy of spatial location is compromised in

the service of fictional invention. In fact, throughout *An Béal Bocht* the reader is exposed to a series of physically impossible scenarios, all of which compromise one's spatial sense, including when Bónapárt attends school for the first time and offers some detail about his fellow students: 'some of them were crawling along the road, unable to walk. Many were from Dingle, some from Gweedore, another group floated in from Aran. All of us were strong and hearty on our first school day' (CN, 424).²⁹ Bónapárt's schoolmates have apparently crawled, walked and floated from various places along the west coast of Ireland to get to the same school, in the process diminishing the size of the country to a cardboard cut-out, much like the spatially problematic police station in *The Third Policeman*. Not only is this a rewriting of the thematic core of the opening of Séamus Ó Grianna's *Caisleáin Óir*, it is also a radical distortion of spatial and geographical location and a destabilisation and distortion of all authentic representational narrative elements. This point is also emphasised by the outline of the Sea-cat that Bónapárt draws, which resembles a rotated miniature map of Ireland (CN, 455; ABB, 67), again transforming the physical locus into a comic textual copy.

In fact, *An Béal Bocht* is peopled by what Declan Kiberd calls 'parodies of thinly disguised refugees from the writings of Tomás Ó Criomhthain and "Máire"'.³⁰ To this we can add reconstituted stage-Irishmen, generic types from a broad selection of Gaelic autobiographical fiction and works of moral instruction, intertextual wanderers from medieval Irish vision poetry, mythology and Irish writing in general and characters whose parodic names all rhyme (Ó Cúnasa, Ó Bánasa, Ó Sánasa, Ó Pónasa, etc.). The characters inhabit a textual world in which the geographical and spatial loci are continually shifting. For example, echoing the tales of the Tuatha Dé Danann and other Irish 'otherworld' tales, Sitric Ó Sánasa, tired of his misery-laden impoverished life, elects to take up residence in a large underground cave embedded in rock beneath the sea where he can both have the company and the nutritional value of the seals: 'Where he was, he had freedom from the inclement weather, the famine and the abuse of the world. Seals would constitute his company as well as his food' (CN, 470).³¹ Ó Sánasa chooses to live among the creatures of the sea rather than live among the half-living on shore, which spurs stories among Bónapárt's neighbours that Ó Sánasa has turned into a sea-creature, a playful inversion of the Silkie tales from Irish and Scottish lore. The

'otherworldly' aspect of Sitric's new home mirrors the spatial irregularity of Policeman Fox's police station within the wall of Old Mathers's house, the temporal and spatial loop that one encounters in 'Eternity' in *The Third Policeman* and the underwater encounter with St Augustine in *The Dalkey Archive* (CN, 635–643). The result is a stylised, highly self-conscious intertextual universe, in which the spectre of the textual is everywhere evident. This ontological condition is, of course, also evident in *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman*, in which any semblance of directly representational prose is swiftly abandoned, with the former being an elaborate *mise en abyme* and the latter largely a tale from the dead-zone, in which none of the usual realist regulatory factors can apply. *An Béal Bocht*'s elaborate pastiche has a logic similar to its two predecessors, and the extensive pillaging from previous texts echoes the novelistic injunction offered by the student-narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, who openly argues that characters 'should be interchangeable as between one book and another. The entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required' (CN, 21).

As a result of such intertextual play, persistent transgressions of realist boundaries and self-evidently fake marionette-characters, *An Béal Bocht* is, as Brooker suggests, 'powerfully self-conscious'.³² Brian Ó Conchubhair goes further when he suggests that *An Béal Bocht* 'is analogous to *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) and anticipates and incorporates many of the stylistics, tropes and techniques that would become fundamental to postmodern aesthetics' and that the novel's dismissal of national myths and framing stories provides grounds for considering it the 'first post-modernist Irish-language novel'.³³ That *An Béal Bocht* largely frames itself within a Gaelic tradition is clear, but the ultimate sense of dislocation and dismissal of all authoritative centres of meaning is not dissimilar to the dissolution of knowledge systems, the deconstruction of all framing myths and the representation of humanity as absurd that one finds in all of the novels written by Flann O'Brien. Even within the context of how Flann's/Myles's major characters are presented or view themselves, the first three novels offer striking similarities. The unnamed primary narrators of *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman* appear to differ from the named narrator of *An Béal Bocht*, yet Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa's name is a coupling of a ridiculous inflation – Bónapárt and a fake surname. He is also

transformed into 'Jams O'Donnell' in school and in prison, thus rendering him no more than a parodic type, which effectively strips him of meaningful identity. Furthermore, there are direct echoes between the sense of self that Bónapárt feels during his 'voyage' and that of the narrator of *The Third Policeman*, in which, late in the text, the narrator's intellectual, bodily and spiritual presence almost evaporates:

Lying quietly and dead-eyed, I reflected on how new the night was, how distinctive and unaccustomed its individuality. Robbing me of the reassurance of my eyesight, it was disintegrating my bodily personality into a flux of colour, smell, recollection, desire – all the strange uncounted essences of terrestrial and spiritual existence. I was deprived of definition, position and magnitude and my significance was considerably diminished. Lying there, I felt the weariness ebbing from me slowly, like a tide retiring over limitless sands. The feeling was so pleasurable and profound that I sighed again a long sound of happiness (CN, 325, 327).

In this moment of near extinction, O'Brien approaches a stripping away of definition, of epistemological systems and allows his character a moment of freedom from the limits of being a human, of sensory perception and psychological longing. Similarly, in *An Béal Bocht*, Bónapárt experiences a deep sense of near-erasure of self, when he awakens on the mountain top:

I do not know whether I allowed a large part of the day to slip by in sleep or in semi-consciousness, but if it were thus, it amazes me that I ever woke again [. . .] By this time I had lost all my blood and was on the point of bowing to fate, lying willingly in the mud and setting my face towards heaven when I noticed a little light shining weakly far away from me, half-lost in the mist and sheets of rain [. . .] This, I thought, was all that lay between me and the mouth of perpetual eternity. (CN, 476–477)³⁴

The narrative emphasis on a loss of self extends throughout both sequences in the two novels, stressing the erasure of normality that one encounters, whether via the extreme anti-rationalist elements in *The Third Policeman*, or by virtue of Bónapárt's stylised intertextual, spatially-compromised landscape in *An Béal Bocht*.

Similarly, while *The Third Policeman* does not extend the Chinese-box fictive space of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, its imaginative range of hellish, carnivalesque elements ensures that the novel retains the

central anti-realist focus of the first novel. Within the primary frame of *The Third Policeman* there are several spatial and temporal levels, including the series of in-between spaces, or zones, like the 'Eternity' to which the narrator journeys with Sergeant Pluck and Policeman Fox's tiny police station. The construction of several such spatial zones echoes the Chinese-box narrative of *At Swim-Two-Birds* in that the multiple, competing levels of reality occupy the central ontological frame of the novel and ultimately contribute to a deep sense of illusion, or otherness. Similarly, in the elaborate pastiche that is *An Béal Bocht*, the presence of multiple ontological levels proves to be deeply unsettling to the prospect of a linear, one-dimensional reality. Sitric Ó Sánasa's comic refuge beneath the sea, of course, contributes to this uneasiness, as does the parody of Maoldún's enchanted mountain and the fact that we experience a whole pantheon of intertextual ghosts and puppets from other fictions, with the effect that the multi-layered fictional zones produce an overwhelmingly self-conscious fictive narrative space.

That Myles na gCopaleen was engaged with the same complex issues surrounding the status of the Irish language in *An Béal Bocht* as those that occupied his attention in the *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns is certain and in many respects the novel can be traced back to those bitter debates.³⁵ Nevertheless, Myles na gCopaleen, the novelist, was also clearly committed to constructing a narrative, in Irish, that was equally engaged with the kinds of issues that had driven *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman*. Like these radically subversive predecessors, *An Béal Bocht* is a highly self-conscious text by virtue of its overt intertextual framing, its persistent compromising of mimetic fiction, its construction of marionette-characters who are self-evidently fictional and by its deeply embedded textual games. Ultimately, *An Béal Bocht* remains a parodic satire, but one that operates on several levels simultaneously. Fredric Jameson differentiates between pastiche and parody suggesting that pastiche is devoid of a specific focus: 'Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter'. Jameson insists that one is thus left with nothing but 'a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm'.³⁶ This position is largely derived from Jameson's frustration at the perceived lack of ideological engagement by some

postmodern fiction. However, there are other kinds of engagement and *An Béal Bocht's* elaborate pastiche is a parody precisely because it is driven by the same intent as Brian O'Nolan's other early masterpieces. It presents a radically subversive deconstruction of a whole range of textual norms and assumptions in Irish literary and political culture without offering a replacement narrative – and this is crucial. The negative dialectical statement is the defining condition of its epistemological position and is thus its philosophical centre. Of course, issues related to Irish peasants, the role and responsibility of Irish speakers (native or Gaelgeoir), the imposition of the English language and various obvious resonances for postcolonial discourse are all significant contributory factors in much the same sense that science and mathematics are to *The Third Policeman*, but the complex way that all such subjects are appropriated by the aesthetic subversive organising mind closely corresponds to *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman*. *An Béal Bocht* deserves to be considered in the same terms, as a radical, multi-layered, intertextual masterpiece of early postmodern Irish writing.

‘DID YOU PUT CHARCOAL ADROITLY
IN THE VENT?’

Brian O’Nolan and pataphysics*

Ondřej Pilný

DEFINITION. *Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments.*

[. . .] pataphysics will be, above all, the science of the particular, despite the common opinion that the only science is that of the general. Pataphysics will examine the laws governing exceptions and will explain the universe supplementary to this one; or, less ambitiously, will describe a universe which can be – and perhaps should be – envisaged in the place of the traditional one.¹

Railing against the tyranny of the mundane, this is how Alfred Jarry (1873–1907), the ur-father of pataphysics and progenitor of the infamous Père Ubu, summarised his alternative doctrine. In his view, scientific laws were mere ‘correlations of exceptions, albeit more frequent ones, but in any case accidental data which, reduced to the status of unexceptional exceptions, possess no longer even the virtue of originality’.² It is originality above all that is to be sought by true pataphysicians, by the attribution of potential qualities to objects and the consequent depiction of a desirable virtual world. That world is to be thrown in the face of the unexciting one which we currently share, while Jarry notes with roguish reassurance that ‘universal assent is already a quite miraculous and incomprehensible prejudice’.³

Pataphysics, as practised by Jarry in his multifarious literary works and in his life, is a discipline that stretches beyond metaphysics in the same etymological sense as the term metaphysics originally denoted that which comes after physics. At the same time, it is a (super)imposition upon physics and metaphysics alike, dismantling both from without and from within in a punk gesture of radical liberation

(‘Mordre!’, in the words of Père Ubu’s greeting to the world). It is an anti-discourse and as such it is impossible to capture either by a definition – as apparent from the one provided above – or by an exhaustive list of features. Any outline of the discipline would involve the following, however:

- Pataphysics is umbilically connected with science: pataphysical writing delights in bold theories, bizarre experiments and convoluted technological inventions.
- Pataphysics has a strong propensity towards the grotesque, in the original sense of the term, which is associated with things that are incongruous and repulsive at the same time, while having the attraction of the lurid.
- Pataphysical writing is radically anti-authoritarian (science being the ultimate authority) and more specifically anti-bureaucratic, satirising any state apparatus in an exuberant manner: witness Jarry’s abhorrent, absurd figure of Ubu Roi or that of Panmuphle (‘all-snout’), the assiduous bailiff of Jarry’s *Exploits & Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician* (*Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien*, 1911), the envoy of a district court who gets briskly enslaved as an oarsman by the able Doctor for the purpose of the latter’s travels in the Parisian oceans and is ultimately drowned without mercy.
- Pataphysical texts display a relish in language: they abound in puns, neologisms, linguistic jokes (often involving scatology or sexual innuendo) and ostentatious allusions.
- As pataphysics is an anti-discourse, works that employ its elements are characterised by fragmentation. Moreover, pataphysical features typically go hand in hand with formal experimentation that radically modifies and often explodes the conventions of the genre. Staying with Jarry, the outrageous combination of a Shakespearean history play, puppet theatre and vulgar schoolboy dramatics in the Ubu plays may stand as an example. Similarly in *Exploits & Opinions of Doctor Faustroll*, ostensibly a novel, a surreal quest narrative, a mock-scientific treatise, a piece of art criticism and an intellectual manifesto are encompassed within a narrative structure that makes the rhapsodic nature of Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) look like the epitome of coherence.

A number of elements of Jarry’s pataphysics have been embraced or paralleled by various later avant-garde movements. Most remarkably, the attraction of the grotesque was shared by the Surrealists and the juxtaposition of writing and modern technology became a cornerstone of

Futurism; the glorious race between a multi-seated bicycle and a steam engine depicted in Jarry's novel *The Supermale* (*Le Surmâle*, 1902) is a particularly vivid foreshadowing. Furthermore, the legacy of Alfred Jarry has been continued overtly by numerous pataphysical bodies set up all over Europe and in Argentina in the second half of the twentieth century. The first of these is the French Collège de 'Pataphysique established in 1948. Among its chief dignitaries were François Le Lionnais and Raymond Queneau, who, in 1960, founded the Oulipo, a school of writing in which linguistic brio and creative experimentation with scientific methodology reached a remarkable peak.⁴ The anti-totalitarian politics of pataphysics proved, in turn, immensely attractive in parts of the Eastern Bloc. In Czechoslovakia a 1964 production of *Ubu Roi* became one of the principal highlights of the theatre of the decade.⁵ Around the same time, a group of broadcasters, screenwriters and actors invented the savant Jára Cimrman – a personage from the same gene pool as Dr Faustroll, Slawkenbergius, Des Esseintes, or indeed Flann O'Brien's de Selby – whose popularity resulted in his being voted the 'Greatest Czech of All Time' in a national survey initiated by Czech Television in 2005.⁶ Finally, the 1980s saw the inauguration of a Czech samizdat journal of pataphysics titled *PAKO* (lit. 'blockhead'; the title is, in fact, an abbreviation for 'Pataphysical Collegium', resident in the town of Teplice). The journal was succeeded some time later by *Clinamen*, a periodical which quotes in its title a principal Epicurean concept of indeterminacy, as adapted by Jarry from Lucretius.⁷ Turning back to the Anglophone context, Anthony Adams has recently pointed out how pataphysics inspired steampunk – a genre defined in the 1980s – and has convincingly linked steampunk to *The Third Policeman* (1967; written 1939–40) by Flann O'Brien.⁸

The following discussion of Brian O'Nolan's work does not intend to examine direct influences. For one, no evidence has been found so far concerning the extent of O'Nolan's familiarity with Jarry's *œuvre*. It can be reasonably conjectured, on the one hand, that the existence of Père Ubu was not unknown to him, as O'Nolan was widely read in the most outlandish areas of literature and scientific discourse alike; on the other hand, had he come across any of Jarry's prose works it would have been by mere chance since they did not appear in English before the mid-1960s, while the circulation of his French editions up to the late 1940s was limited.⁹ What the present essay wishes to focus on instead is a remarkable similarity in the use of particular techniques

and motifs by two outstanding innovators and thereby to highlight a certain aesthetic line that may be traced in a significant amount of experimental writing in modernity.

Like Adams, I am going to focus on Flann O’Brien’s masterpiece, *The Third Policeman*, as the most extensive elaboration of the pataphysical anti-discourse. Nevertheless, in my reading of the novel, Adams’s conclusion that its ultimate effect is one of laughter ‘at the awful contiguity of sense and nonsense’ and of a delightfully persistent confusion at the combination of ‘the humdrum and the sublime’¹⁰ comes across as rather too light-hearted. Prior to arguing my point about the allegorical significance of the atomic interchange between people and their bicycles, however, I would like to point out that a fascination with science and technology is in evidence throughout O’Nolan’s work. As a rule, this theme appears in tandem with the author’s creative concern with language. The *Cruiskeen Lawn* column, written under the *nom de plume* of Myles na gCopaleen/Gopaleen between 1940 and 1966, provides a prime example. The first book-length selection from the column, *The Best of Myles* (1968), contains an entire section titled ‘Research Bureau’, which focuses on a variety of Sir Myles’s scientific inventions, while all kinds of innovative gadgets and improvement proposals appear in other sections of the collection as well. The more delightful of these include Myles’s patent ballet pumps, designed so that overweight ballet dancers will not lose their place in the ballet corps. The shoes are ‘fitted with three diminutive land mines [. . .]. If you give a little hop and take care to land on one mine [. . .] the mine will go off and you will be sent flying through the air with the greatest of ease’ (*BM*, 26–28). In another example, Myles invents a complicated machine called a ‘snow-gauge’, which is devised to melt snow into a bucket. It eventually turns out that this machine’s only purpose is to combat intellectual snobbery: ‘Supposing some moon-faced young man who reads Proust happens to be loitering about your house, blathering out of him about art, life, love, and so on’ and sighing ‘*Mais où sont les neiges d’antan?*’ Here is Myles’s advice: ‘Seize the nitwit by the scruff of the neck, march him out to the snow gauge, and shout: “Right in that bucket, you fool!”’ (*BM*, 112–113). There is a series of pataphysical inventions and schemes, moreover, intended to alleviate war-time material shortages. These include a detailed plan to obtain fuel for railway engines by cutting turf directly from the Irish bogs beneath the train with a

‘patent scoop apparatus’ and shifting the turf right into the engine’s furnace. Or a proposal to light the streets of Dublin by sewer gas: ‘It burns with a brilliant orange flame which is practically odourless’ (BM, 114–117). Last but not least, the laboratories of the Myles na gCopaleen Central Research Bureau are seen to be developing a new kind of ink called ‘Trink’, intended to make even the worst news literally intoxicating. Once *The Irish Times* gets printed with it, ‘You get a lightning pick-me-up not only for yourself and your family but for everybody that travels on your ’bus. Any time you feel depressed, all you need do is to read the leading article; if you want a whole night out, get down to the small ads’ (BM, 118–119).

In most of these hilarious contributions, Myles’s purpose is to provide much needed entertainment in the dreary times of the ‘Emergency’: as much as the column may be based on irony, its aim primarily is to trigger laughter rather than operating as a vehicle of satire. The employment of pataphysical elements in *The Third Policeman* is significantly more complex. Much has been written about the satirical treatment that is given to science in the novel. As Keith Hopper has noted, O’Brien’s parody of science is largely Swifitean in nature and forms a seminal element of the Menippean satire which is one of the fundamental strands in the novel (157–158).¹¹ The satirical commentary on the universal ambitions of science is concentrated in the figure of de Selby, the eccentric polymath whose theories are outlined by the nameless narrator in the main body of the text, as well as in the famously extensive footnotes. It is his desire to publish a definitive commentary on de Selby’s work that drives the narrator to murder and robbery, after which he finds himself in the incomprehensible world of The Parish. Virtually all commentators on *The Third Policeman* have noted that a substantial part of the narrator’s punishment consists in the fact that de Selby’s bizarre theories are actually valid in The Parish and the doomed protagonist has to face their consequences.¹² The list of memorable precursors of the bold savant has been outlined as including most prominently Walter Shandy, Hafen Slawkenbergius and Huysmans’s Jean des Esseintes (Hopper, 224).¹³ It may be argued that the crucial omission in the list is Jarry’s grotesque pataphysician Dr Faustroll, the questing sailor on a specially designed sieve made out of a brass bed, who certainly shares not only de Selby’s eccentricity and scope of research, but also the ambition to master the governing principles of the universe. Faustroll characterises his activities as follows: ‘I

do not perform secular experiments, have nothing but contempt for continuity and consider it more esthetic to keep Time itself in my pocket, or the unity of time, which is its snapshot’. The ‘snapshot’ in question is the interval provided by the sound of a specially adjusted tuning fork.¹⁴ Such a mechanistic view of time that goes hand in hand with the desire to master it is reminiscent of the famous passage in *The Third Policeman* concerning de Selby’s views on time and space, which result in his attempted journey from Bath to Folkestone by means of locking himself in a room and examining postcards of the places that he would need to pass through on his way (CN, 264–265). Other memorable points of contact between Jarry’s anti-novel and O’Brien’s work include: (1) the incorporation of a ‘quest narrative’, which in Faustroll is possibly inspired by *The Odyssey* or *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, while in *The Third Policeman* the sources seem more likely to be Old and Middle Irish voyage tales (Hopper, 200); (2) the grotesque appearance of Dr Faustroll that finds a curious parallel in the distorted appearance of Sergeant Pluck; (3) the fact that Dr Faustroll is said to have been born at the age of sixty-three,¹⁵ somewhat like Mr Furriskey of *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), who, according to the narrator, ‘had one distinction that is rarely encountered – he was born at the age of twenty-five and entered the world with a memory but without a personal experience to account for it’ (CN, 5).

Apart from its satirical treatment of de Selby, a substantial part of the critique of universal science in O’Brien’s novel is vented through the uncanny trinity of the policemen: grotesque Sergeant Pluck, ingenious Policeman MacCruiskeen and awe-inducing Policeman Fox. Most notably, it is the policemen who unravel the Atomic Theory to the narrator-protagonist, according to which the atoms of people merge with those of their bicycles (CN, 293–299). Seemingly misguided, the theory is again shown to be a plausible description of what really occurs in The Parish, eventually resulting in the hilarious erotic outburst that the narrator experiences towards a feminised bike (CN, 378–379). Moreover, it is Policeman MacCruiskeen, rather than de Selby, who creates frightening inventions such as an infinite series of diminishing trunks, a spear with an invisible point that still perceptibly pricks the skin and a mangle that turns light into sound. The policemen are ultimately in charge of powering the infernal Parish by operating the erratic machinery that is hidden in the underground realm of Eternity – as opposed to Jarry’s ‘Eternity’, a

neologism the author introduces in *Faustroll* as an extravagant alternative term for the ever-lasting presence of the novel, as well as a means by which to mock religion. In the spirit of true pataphysics, these fantastic developments of science are accompanied by unique linguistic creativity, as particularly Pluck speaks in a seamless mixture of colloquial Dublinese, the language of state bureaucracy and that of a would-be erudite ‘scientist’, interspersed with peculiar malapropisms or idiosyncratic jargon, which is hard to comprehend. This technology-related verbal unbridledness may be instantiated by the puzzling way in which the narrator is asked to give his name – ‘What is your pronoun? [. . .] What is your cog? [. . .] Your surnoun?’ – or, in turn, the manner in which technology permeates the Sergeant’s query as to the provision of fuel to the hellish mechanism: ‘Did you put charcoal adroitly in the vent?’ (CN, 269, 313).

When concocting the quirky universe of *Faustroll*, Jarry made inspired use of the original ideas and experiments of the heroes of his student days, the late nineteenth-century British scientists Lord Kelvin, James Clerk Maxwell, Sir William Crookes, Arthur Cayley and C.V. Boys (especially the latter’s popular volume on the properties of soap bubbles).¹⁶ O’Nolan had distinctly more to play with in 1940. In particular, Einstein’s theory of relativity appears to have influenced the chief general characteristic of *The Parish*, namely the wildly relative experience of time and space there. While Hopper has soundly observed that it makes little sense to claim that O’Nolan applied Einstein’s theories in *The Third Policeman* in a coherent manner (196–206), there are still a few remarkable passages in which aspects of special or general relativity receive genuine pataphysical elaboration. One of these concerns the narrator’s first approach to the police barracks, which at first appears frighteningly two-dimensional, despite the narrator’s knowledge that there are people inside it. As he slows down, the house turns seemingly triangular with its apex pointing towards the visitor and once he has stopped, terrified, in front of it, it appears as a perfectly ordinary house (CN, 266). One way of explaining the bizarre phenomenon is by reference to the shortening of space when objects travel close to the ultimate speed limit (in the real world, the speed of light), as outlined by Einstein. Needless to say, the gradual ‘popping up’ of the house towards the narrator is very much O’Brien’s embellishment, as is the fundamentally altered velocity at which the shortening of objects happens.¹⁷

One must consider the impact of quantum physics on O’Brien’s craft along the same lines. One of the most vibrant new disciplines of science at the time, the incredibly complex postulates of quantum physics radically changed the very foundations of how the world is to be perceived. Both Hopper and M. Keith Booker have commented on the use of quantum physics in *The Third Policeman*,¹⁸ a most significant manifestation of which appears in the nature of omnium, the universal matter revealed to be contained in the black box that becomes the goal of the narrator’s quest in *The Parish*. Omnium is said to ‘come in waves’ (CN, 319), a feature that has most likely been derived from quantum physicist Erwin Schrödinger, as noted by José Lanter.¹⁹ As I have outlined elsewhere, O’Nolan had most likely met Schrödinger during the time when the latter was working at the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies. Despite Myles na gCopaleen’s accusatory comments on the physicist’s public lectures, O’Nolan and Schrödinger are said to have ‘remained on friendly terms’ by Schrödinger’s biographer, which is also apparent from the fact that O’Nolan subsequently consulted the physicist over his version of the Čapeks’ *The Insect Play*.²⁰ Schrödinger may be seen as the originator of the idea that – in an accessible wording – atoms ‘can all be composed of waves’.²¹ Hence the wave-like nature of omnium in *The Third Policeman*, while the same notion is utilised by O’Brien in devising Policeman MacCruiskeen’s pataphysical contraption that mangles light into sound: if anything is indeed a wave, an appropriate change of frequency can presumably result in such a radical transformation. Moreover, Dermot Diamond and Fergus Cronin have noted that the famous ‘Schrödinger’s cat’ paradox, formulated in 1935, finds a striking parallel in the terrifying conversation with Old Mathers, whom the narrator knows well to be dead.²² Diamond and Cronin’s observation may be extended to the narrative situation of the entire novel: what transpires in the end is that the narrator/protagonist is dead, while being simultaneously alive and narrating his story.

Nevertheless, the use of these aspects of quantum physics still occurs firmly within the framework of a Swifitean satire on the age-long obsession of philosophers and scientists, from the Pre-Socratics onward, with the discovery of the primary matter of which the universe is composed, or the quest for the magic formula that provides the secret key to a universal theory of everything.²³ O’Brien thus

gleefully elaborates, true to pataphysical grotesquerie and Swifitean satire alike, that possessing a mere four ounces of omnium does not only make one an omnipotent Master of the Universe, but also facilitates the miraculous re-decoration of a police station, the production of an infinite amount of prime-quality strawberry jam and the convenient boiling of eggs (CN, 392–397). As for MacCruiskeen's miraculous mangle, its inventor is pictured as similarly delighting in the variety of uses that the machine could be put to; however, he cannot get much further with it, since he is unable to tell whether the sound that comes out is a railway station announcement, the shout of a bookmaker, or the cry of a fruit vendor (CN, 316–317).

The Third Policeman, then, clearly displays all the basic features that are typical of pataphysical anti-discourse: (1) the novel delights in bizarre developments of scientific notions and eccentric inventions and seamlessly blends the serious and the ludicrous; (2) it abounds in grotesque elements; (3) it satirises the state bureaucracy, as represented by the peculiar police force who control The Parish; (4) it relishes linguistic experimentation; and last but not least (5) it radically alters the genre of the novel by positing a dead narrator in a cyclical narrative that is characterised by unexpected temporal ruptures. However, there is a fundamental difference that concerns the context in which the elements of pataphysics appear: in O'Brien's novel these elements are firmly part of a critique that is framed within a moral allegory of corrupt humanity. *The Third Policeman* is primarily a story of crime and punishment, in which a fraudulent individual is set on a never-ending greedy hunt for a mysterious cash-box. Taking as its model Christian allegories such as the quest for the Holy Grail and medieval Irish voyage tales,²⁴ *The Third Policeman* focuses on a modern Everyman whose unlimited worship of absurd science has led him to violent crime.²⁵ As a result, he is deprived of his identity (i.e., he loses both his name and his memories, though some of the latter keep surfacing erratically in his mind) and is punished by having to exist in a hellish world characterised by ever-frustrating relativity and unpredictability. O'Brien's novel may thus share the exuberant inventiveness and the intellectual boundlessness of Jarry's pataphysical creations; however, it is far from sending the same message of radical liberation. Where Jarry is intent on exploding the reign of the respectable, the commonplace and the accepted, O'Brien constructs an exuberant hell that is based on a

bitterly ironic view of the corruption of the everyday. In O’Brien’s Parish, man is on his way to becoming a bike (as in the slang expression for ‘whore’) and the grotesque, dogmatic police force governs the place with an iron hand.

PART III

Critical perspectives

‘BANJAXED AND BEWILDERED’
Cruiskeen Lawn and the role of
 science in independent Ireland

Alana Gillespie

I said to de Valera, very early in the war,
 You are neutral, by the book and to the letter,
 But diplomacy alone is not sufficient any more
 Some sub-atomic physics might be better.

[. . .]

An amateur enthusiast advises me, it's true,
 And you can't imagine what a help he's been.
 What genius dilettante am I so beholden to?
 Why, obviously Myles na gCopaleen.

—*Erwin Schrödinger*¹

During the war years, Brian O’Nolan’s journalistic persona Myles na gCopaleen became embroiled in a complex debate about the role of science in shaping a modernising, independent Ireland. This debate had long occupied educationalists, ecclesiastical and political leaders and O’Nolan too had intervened in it before. Throughout his *Cruiskeen Lawn* column in *The Irish Times* (4 October 1940–1 April 1966), Myles displays a variety of conflicting attitudes to what role science should play in modern Ireland: in schools, in industry and in international research and relations. These attitudes together represent and reflect a complex of official, political, ecclesiastical and popular attitudes towards science as a modernising or destabilising force in a country that during the 1940s, was not only still trying to shape its institutions and identity in a way befitting a stable, independent nation, but also to define its place in a rapidly changing technological and political world. In Ireland, the science debate was characterised by a tension between tradition and modernity and saw several key figures of Irish cultural memory facing off with seemingly unlikely opponents. Indeed, what has St Patrick got against theoretical physics?

On 10 April 1942, *Cruiskeen Lawn* attacked the work of two well-known scholars of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (DIAS): Celtic Studies scholar, Thomas O’Rahilly and Austrian Nobel prize-winning theoretical physicist, Erwin Schrödinger.² Myles reported on the accomplishments of DIAS, stating that all it had done since its establishment in 1940 had been to show ‘that there are two Saint Patricks and no God’.³ He went on to say that ‘the propagation of heresy and unbelief has nothing to do with polite learning and unless we are careful this Institute of ours will make us the laughing stock of the world’.⁴

DIAS issued a writ for libel against *The Irish Times*, which avoided a larger scandal and paid the damages, telling Brian O’Nolan not to mention DIAS again.⁵ Though he would continue to tease Schrödinger and make jokes about DIAS, this was the height of the scandal. Myles’s accusation was significant, not least because of the involvement of Schrödinger, but also because it betrayed the structure of ongoing cultural debates surrounding the role of science in independent Ireland in the early to mid-twentieth century.

Religion, science, education, tradition and anxieties about Ireland’s international reputation, each of which factored significantly in the science debate of this period, all come together in this particular *Cruiskeen Lawn* column. For one, it represents the debate as one in which science is incompatible with belief in God. But to reduce the terms of the debate to religion versus science is to overlook many of the complex national and ideological pieties, misconceptions and motivations that underlay it at that time.

In order to explore some of these complexities in the context of the 1940s, I will consider what I regard as the Menippean mode of O’Nolan’s journalism. Myles adopts a sceptically dialogic perspective to cultural negotiations about the role of science in independent Ireland. Sceptical dialogism is a concept I employ to analyse dialogic relations in my reading of O’Nolan’s project. Dialogism, derived from Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on the novel, is inherent in the testing function of Menippean satire in which ‘philosophical debate is made three-dimensional as the reader follows “the adventures of an idea or a truth in the world”’.⁶ In addition to providing an excellent overview of the Menippean characteristics of O’Nolan’s fiction, M. Keith Booker has also shown how in *The Third Policeman* (1967; written 1939–40) ‘radical skepticism toward epistemology can lead, not to impoverishment, but to richness’.⁷ Ken

Hirschkop modifies the definition of how to view dialogism in the novel, arguing that the ‘pure dialogue’ of exchange of which Bakhtin wrote is actually impossible and that language ought to be viewed as ‘unevenly structured, full of forms which don’t respond, as in a dialogue, but cite and represent’.⁸ In *Cruiskeen Lawn*, O’Nolan cites and represents, but is unique in carrying on a dialogue with his readers and (often) responding directly to them, bringing disparate discourses and opinions into conflict and colloquy. I maintain that his work promotes sceptical dialogism as the only fair and ethical approach to anything or anyone. Scepticism and dialogism are required to avoid falling into the trap of monologic discourse or thinking ‘*in black and white*’: that dualistic form of thought against which *The Dalkey Archive’s* St Augustine warns us.⁹

I will examine some of *Cruiskeen Lawn’s* interventions into the science debates as they pertain to the impact of the new physics on modern Irish culture. I will develop my argument in light of the controversial establishment of DIAS, an institute which poetically exemplified the paradoxical development of an emergent, distinctively Irish modernity in its two schools: those of Celtic Studies and Theoretical Physics. Cultural and political debates about DIAS sparked further discussion about science in primary and secondary education, an aspect also considered here, as *Cruiskeen Lawn* incisively showed how the advancement of science was hindered by, among other educational concerns, the official language revival. Multiple viewpoints about the appropriate role for science in the context of national identity and industry converge around education. As a consequence, education is made the nexus of the debate about the ideal role of science in independent Ireland – a role that would serve the nation and facilitate modernisation, but would do so in a way which fit the national cultural agenda and was, in many ways, more informed by the so-called backward glance than a viable view of the future.

Myles voices at least four different attitudes to science in Ireland, ranging from the suspicious and derisive to the curiously open-minded. Generally, these are critical attitudes. Often, they are reflections or versions of attitudes existing in the Irish public sphere – against the establishment of DIAS, for example, or a more prominent role for science in education or industry – on the basis of religious or economic objections. By representing the debate in the microcosm of the newspaper, itself intended as a reflection of society, O’Nolan tests these different attitudes dialogically and invites his readers to do the

same. The dialogic juxtaposition of the different perspectives in individual columns or on different dates enables us to see intersections and divergences within various attitudes, while also providing insight into O’Nolan’s criticism of and contribution to, a debate on the desired role of science in Ireland.

Two prominent and often intersecting attitudes are *suspicion and derision* and the passive-aggressive *what’s the point?* attitude. A more rare but positive *keeping an open mind* attitude exists as well, along with the often jocular but sometimes dismissive *science is eccentric* attitude. Below I will consider the import of the dialogic interaction established by Myles between (1) some of the official points of view regarding the question of what role science should have in Irish education and society; (2) some reference to Dáil discussions of DIAS; and (3) the significance of physics research to the man on the street.

On 3 August 1942, Myles expressed his grave reserve towards a remark made at a colloquium held in Dublin earlier that summer. Sir Arthur ‘Adding-One’ of Eddington number fame announced that ‘There are less than a thousand people in the world who really understand the Einstein theory of relativity and less than a hundred people who can discuss it intelligently’.¹⁰

This disturbing statement [. . .] is nice news for those of us who have to fork out every year to maintain our grandiose university establishments. We have perhaps 30 or 40 well-paid savants whom we have always taken to know all about physics or mathematics or whatever kindred subject they profess. Now we are told that these people know nothing about Einstein’s discoveries and cannot make head or tail of his sums. What would we say if a similar situation were obtained in relation to, say, plumbers? [. . .] That would be bad, but not at all so bad as this relativity mess, because leaking taps constitute only one [. . .] compartment of plumbing practice and complete ignorance in regard to it does not necessarily impair the plumber’s competence when he is faced with a ruptured cistern; whereas Einstein’s discoveries entail the radical revision of conventional concepts of time, space and matter and a person who undertakes to discourse on such subjects while ignorant of Einstein must necessarily rely on premises shown to be inadmissible: he must, therefore, be held to be talking through his stetson.¹¹

The first attitude displayed here is *what’s the point?* Exponents of this attitude considered more science in Ireland to be unnecessary and

even evil in some cases. This stance was often supported in reference to Irish economic dependency on agriculture, which apparently had no need of modern technology or methods. The old gripe about researchers being underworked and overpaid often raises its head in the *what's the point?* attitude. Theoretical science without evident practical application struck many as either futile or sheer folly. Myles voices this attitude in direct relation to DIAS on 10 April 1942: 'Talking of this notorious Institute (Lord, what would I give for a chair in it, with me thousand good-lookin' pounds a year for doing "work" that most people regard as an interesting recreation)'. More generally, openly displaying the *what's the point?* attitude was a way of showing disdain for the filthy modern tide.

According to Myles, Eddington's analysis of the professorial understanding of relativity expands the futility of scientific investigation or practice to include the absurdity of physics or mathematics professors lecturing students 'on the nature of the universe as if Einstein had never existed': a situation Myles analogises with the absurdity of having those who hold that the earth is flat lecture to twentieth-century students. At the same time, Myles argues that it is pointless to teach the incomprehensible to contemporary pupils not fit to understand it anyway, since they have not been taught the fundamentals necessary to comprehend a theory even half as complex as relativity theory.¹² Indeed, in 1934, algebra and geometry were made optional subjects in the majority of Irish schools, with the exception of those in larger towns.¹³

From 1939, Éamon de Valera's government not only sought to modernise Ireland and prepare it for the post-war world, but had succeeded also in carving out a substantial niche for the Gaelic, rural past and some of its attendant traditions, albeit in a form modified for the present and future. The same is true in the case of science in Irish society. The conflict arising between these two priorities was in many ways a catalyst for innovation. De Valera and supporters of DIAS saw it as a prestige institute that would help to remove any remaining doubts as to Ireland's modernising intentions. *The Irish Times* happily reported that the institute served as evidence to the rest of the world that Ireland was 'leaving behind at last its parochialism, its suspicions and its petty jealousies; that, instead of prattling childishly any longer about imagined slights and ill-treatments, it intends to take its entitled place as a free adult among its neighbour nations'.¹⁴ Another key purpose of DIAS, as perceived by de Valera, was to form an addition to

university education. The Advanced Institute would encourage Irish students to pursue university courses that would enable them to repair the post-war world and provide excellent professors for the country's universities, who would also give public lectures and promote awareness of science amongst interested members of the public. Unfortunately, scientific or technical courses were scarcely available in Ireland and at any rate were discouraged, if not officially, by social ignorance and peer pressure. Who were the brilliant science students who would benefit from DIAS? Opponents of DIAS based their opposition on either dislike of what they thought were Dev's pretensions, or what they perceived as the total lack of necessity for yet another Celtic studies institute, let alone a school for 'Theoretical Physics'.

Fine Gael's General Richard Mulcahy was the most vocal opponent in the DIAS debates held in the Dáil between 1938 and 1940. Mulcahy took up a large amount of Dáil time expounding the *what's the point?* view which Myles echoes here and elsewhere. Summarised, his arguments ran thus: (1) de Valera's references to Irish mathematical giants like Sir William Rowan Hamilton were wasted on the 'Pat Murphys' (Mulcahy's own 'Plain People of Ireland') of the country; what did they care about mathematical concepts such as quaternions?; (2) mathematics was no longer a compulsory subject in the majority of schools so there would be no one to study mathematics or physics at third level; (3) there were already enough bodies engaged in Celtic studies, another would only be superfluous; and (4) agricultural science was the only science worth pursuing in Ireland for obvious reasons.¹⁵

Point (2) is, I think, of particularly shocking interest. It is also ironic given de Valera's insistence on telling the Dáil that he believed mathematical physics was 'peculiarly suited to Irishmen'.¹⁶ Mainly shaped by pre-independence educations, themselves shaped and executed by the Catholic Church, the generation in power inevitably tried to insert their cultural and political agenda into a framework modelled on their own educational backgrounds – and they largely let the Church lead the way in determining what constituted the ideal education for Irish pupils. Tom Garvin notes that for this generation, the idea 'that priests should control education appeared natural, inevitable and desirable'.¹⁷ Perhaps surprisingly, 'doubting' General Mulcahy would later hold the post of Minister for Education for eight years.¹⁸ In the 1950s, Mulcahy summed up the dominant Irish view of Catholic social teaching with regard to education when he said that 'the State approach to education

in the Irish Republic is one which unreservedly accepts the supernatural conception of man's nature and destiny. [. . .] It accepts that the foundation and crown of youth's entire training is religion'.¹⁹ Religion, then, was more important than maths or science – a view wholeheartedly shared by the Church. Not only was mathematics no longer compulsory, but agricultural or 'nature science', long-championed as the most useful science for Irish purposes, had been made optional in 1934 to make more room for Irish-language instruction. The Church's educational monopoly supported the state's ideas on the importance of teaching the Irish language, history, religion and a bit of song.²⁰ However, despite their claims that teaching more science and maths was actually a waste of the pious Irish child's time, the same generation was genuinely concerned with the future of the nation – which, after all, would be the inheritance of the young. Ironically, the dispensation did want more science, but not too much, lest the young become alienated from their spiritual upbringing, which, along with patriotism, seemed to be the only thing that truly mattered.

The problem of education was not, as Myles once described it, 'the employment of trees as optical aids in the examination of sylvan developments',²¹ but rather how to strike a balance between spiritual values, national values and practical skills. Spiritual values were part and parcel of national values and practical skills were necessary to maintain national values, prosperity and self-esteem. Lay and ecclesiastical educationalists agreed with the State that primary education should prepare young people for jobs. Since the Irish economy was based on agriculture, it was only logical that education should prepare pupils for life on the farm. But more education than was strictly necessary was considered to have the potential to give people ideas and aspirations above their station and beyond the job opportunities Ireland had to offer them. Tom Garvin notes that several ministers openly showed their support for this idea and the accompanying sentiment that too much learning left emigration the only option for over-educated graduates – and Irish education wasn't even preparing them for that, some argued.²² To complicate matters further, science and particularly physics, challenged the Church's worldview. Nicholas Allen explains that the 'consolidation of atomic theory to religious belief caused particular problems since particle theories of matter suggested a universe ordered by a physical, not spiritual, power'.²³ We will see more about this and the supposedly sinful dimension of physics below.

The importance of practical skills is highlighted in the column of 3 August 1942 in connection with plumbing. Comparing plumbing to relativity theory is a practical illustration of the fundamental relevance of Einstein's theories to physicists and average citizens alike. The implications of Einstein's theory of relativity could drastically change the way the average man viewed the world around him. This is brought home to the plain people in a very base but modestly roundabout appeal. The message, though carnivalesque and couched in a disparaging tone, is that relativity theory affects everybody, just as everybody needs plumbing. This may seem dismissive and thus illustrative of the *what's the point?* attitude, but the equation of plumbing with high learning can be read in at least two ways.

Myles may, in fact, be saying that it is lucky this controversy is taking place out there in the universities among scientists, instead of actually affecting real people's daily lives and worldviews in the way that plumbers who practise but do not understand plumbing would affect them. The attitude displayed here belongs to the category of *science is eccentric*, but the positive attitude of *keeping an open mind* is also evident: likening physics to plumbing shows that, yes, there are things outside our understanding that influence our lives in ways we cannot begin to understand. The *what's the point?* attitude expressed in the worry that the 'well-paid savants' in the universities cannot understand Einstein's theories, which will presumably change the way scientific research is conducted the world over, is at least partly valid then, although it may be a premature judgement since these things take time. However, this reasoning overlooks the fact that the way relativity theory changed physics is comparable to how electricity changed the way in which people bathed. At stake is not the utility of science, but the circumstances in which it is useful.

Most people know that (good) plumbing makes their lives easier, even if they cannot fix a cistern themselves. They understand it well enough even to take it for granted, but they have yet to see the practical effects of physics, even though its applications can also improve or destroy their lives. Therefore, those who are unable to discuss time, space and matter without themselves understanding Einstein's theories are not 'talking through [their] stetsons'. They have merely fallen on the wrong side of what Thomas S. Kuhn describes as a paradigm shift in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). One paradigm emerges and supplants the theories that were previously believed to be

normative in a particular scientific discipline. Time, space and matter were there before Einstein, before Newton and so on. Theories, Kuhn explains, are often misinterpreted by the public as working only independently of previous theories – Einstein’s relativity theory does not make Newton’s system of motion less valuable.²⁴ It is still only one theory among many. No text or theory emerges from a text-less or theory-less vacuum. The savants Myles criticises may have still believed in outmoded theories of space–time and their lectures may have been accurate according to those theories. As with so many of O’Nolan’s literary creations and characters, their logic is sound in the right context. They just still had to conform to the new paradigm before learning to discourse on space–time in accordance with Einstein’s theory of relativity. The statement is still true if we substitute Newton for Einstein in Myles’s assertion that a person who attempts to talk about subjects related to gravity, space–time and matter is only talking nonsense as his so-called sense has been shown to be inaccurate. Like theories, the *what’s the point?* attitude makes one point among many possible points, but it contrasts starkly with other attitudes to science and belief Myles adopts elsewhere.

This column’s critique of establishments of higher learning and the state of Irish education extends further than branding Irish university professors inadequate. It also represents an attitude of *suspicion and derision* to science and higher education that was not uncommon in Ireland (or Britain) at the time.²⁵ This attitude is also evident in General Mulcahy’s objections to the establishment of an Advanced Institute, as well as in a number of ecclesiastical articles and editorials on the subject of teaching science in school. One reason for suspicion was the idea that scientific speculation might contest religious truth. A favourite target of O’Nolan’s, the controversial Catholic apologist Alfred J. O’Rahilly, posited that, unlike the teaching of Christ, which was intended for all men, ‘science [. . .] is essentially aristocratic and exclusive’, pointing out that one Galileo ‘is more important to science than a whole nation of ordinary mortals. But not so to the Church’.²⁶ Rahilly worried that the pronouncements of scientists, by no means proved and unassailable, would prematurely and ‘rudely shatter’ the religious worldview of ordinary people: ‘Which is worth more: the science of Galileo or the faith and happiness of thousands?’²⁷ In a different column, referring to a piece Einstein had published in response to Schrödinger, Myles writes that physics is not even a science, but ‘a

department of speculation' working with incomplete and erroneous materials which are further complicated by human observation. Because this department 'purports' to investigate 'the causation of life according to rational criteria, it is sinful'.²⁸

Apart from being suspicious about the 'propagation of heresy and unbelief [having] nothing to do with polite learning', Catholic educationalists objected to making (agricultural) science mandatory since it did not affect all pupils and would therefore steal valuable time from other subjects.²⁹ The ironic similarity of this objection to arguments against increased Irish-language instruction is inescapable.

The most damning critique of Irish education in this column is hardly one of mathematics instruction, as we might expect in this context. Instead, Myles criticises Irish-language education and the general bad state of affairs in the schools, pointing up the pettiness inherent in each negative attitude that totally denies the utility of science. Likening the promotion of understanding of relativity theory in Ireland to the popularity of chess in Russia – a phenomenon attributed to chess's presence on Russian primary-school curricula – Myles suggests that teaching Einstein's theory in Irish national schools could solve the problem of no one understanding relativity theory: 'Make it compulsory and have it taught through Irish. Probably we would have a lot of squealing about compulsory relativity and the side-splitting joke about children being illiterate in two languages would be altered to read "illiterate in four dimensions"'.³⁰

This oblique yet scathing attack on the method of teaching Irish in national schools ends with Myles reassuring his readers that 'some time or the other', somebody would understand relativity theory enough to 'probably be able to discuss it intelligently'. Who knows, maybe a committee of national school teachers would even 'produce a weighty report on such a departure in education', as they had done on the issue of Irish teaching and the problems facing teachers who taught through Irish.³¹ The column ends on a pessimistic *what's the point?* note, with sad echoes resounding of O'Nolan's scepticism regarding whether anyone undergoing compulsory Irish in the schools would ever be able to speak it with any semblance of intelligence or skill.

This particular column's main criticism turns on two issues: the inability of an apparent majority of mathematicians and physicists to explain or even comprehend the theory of relativity and the issue of education for all versus education for those that can understand it

when they can understand it. The ‘side-splitting joke’ indirectly criticises the government’s efficacy in making such important and influential decisions, casting grave doubt on their motives for wanting to set up high-level scientific research institutes such as DIAS as well as their general reluctance to give science – or Irish for that matter – a useful and realistic role in education.

Despite instructions to the contrary, *Cruiskeen Lawn* continued to refer to DIAS and Schrödinger. Myles provided the institute’s address in Merrion Square and solicited ideas for inventions to be sent there. Schrödinger sometimes appeared as a foil for Myles’s Dr na gCopaleen persona;³² at other times his name was dropped to indicate difficulty and complexity.³³ Myles would also openly challenge him, often in the least likely of contexts: ‘What are film stars *étoile*? Why not film comets, film planets? (You, Schrödinger, distinguish between “comet” and “planet”; discuss briefly the basis of my claim that I am the man in the moon. (ten marks))’.³⁴ Such references to Schrödinger exhibit the *science or scientists are eccentric* attitude and illustrate how well-known a figure the Austrian physicist had become in Dublin in the 1940s and 1950s. The immortalisation of Schrödinger and Myles as co-conspirators to keep Ireland neutral in Arthur Riordan and Bell Helicopter’s musical comedy *Improbable Frequency* (2005) also confirms their connection in Irish cultural memory of the war years. Schrödinger’s name functions in *Cruiskeen Lawn* as an umbrella term for academics or a personification of intellect, similar to the way Einstein’s name functions today. These mentions never created as much scandal as the offending column about two Saint Patricks and no God – probably because other references were not explicitly about Irish sacred cows.

When taken together and where one attitude contradicts the other (and that one yet another), I believe that it is here, between the lines, between attitudes – in other words, dialogically – that O’Nolan’s general anti-epistemological project reveals itself. The cumulative meaning that emerges is closest to the *keeping an open mind* attitude: we simply cannot say whether one theory or one way of looking at the world is singularly true, because there might be something we do not know about that is equally true. *The Dalkey Archive*’s Saint Augustine espouses this attitude too: what was believed at a certain point in history should only be made accountable for itself in its own chrono-topo – in its own time–space. As things move between time–spaces, meaning is prone to shifts. The attitudes Myles tests in the column are

examples of possible points that could be made in a possible conversation on the subject of the place of science in society.³⁵

The fragmented, contradictory and complementary multiple perspectives on science provided by *Cruiskeen Lawn* stimulate dialogue and thought while giving a balanced view of the real attitudes to science circulating in mid-century Ireland. This sceptical dialogic tendency in O’Nolan’s work resists the elevation of one interpretation or way of looking at the world to the status of singular truth. The impact of relativity, wave mechanics and quantum physics made the universe a noisy, shifting, uncertain and exciting place. Writers and artists tried to crack the code of the universe as represented by scientists, mathematicians, theologians and historians. In 1928, Wyndham Lewis claimed that artistic experiment, mutually necessitated and inspired by twentieth-century physics, involved ‘not only technical and novel combinations, but also the essentially new and particular mind that must underlie and should even precede, the new and particular form, to make it viable’.³⁶ Despite his tenacious conservatism in some matters, O’Nolan’s work betrays his possession of a new mind in others, as evidenced by his predilection for multiple interpretations, particularly as the multi-faceted and Janus-faced Myles of limitless experience. Like the White Queen, who in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871) tells Alice that ‘sometimes I have believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast’,³⁷ Myles was expert at believing six times as many impossible – or possible – things within a single column and thousands more throughout the life of *Cruiskeen Lawn*.

THE TRIAL OF JAMS O'DONNELL
An Béal Bocht and the force of law

Maebh Long

Throughout the course of *An Béal Bocht* (1941) the question ‘Phwat is yer nam?’ is put to Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa three times. The first time, in which he also learns the answer, *Jams O'Donnell*, occurs as a bloody and violent event of rebirth through renaming (*ABB*, 25). The second time transpires when the Seanduine wishes to fool an inspector into giving the family money and so Bónapárt, to prove he can speak English, answers the question with the rote response (*ABB*, 109). The third time heralds the beginning of Bónapárt's twenty-nine-year jail sentence and is accompanied by a firm hold on his arm (*ABB*, 112). Thus the name ‘Jams O'Donnell’ is associated with violence, trickery and arrest and yet, by the conclusion of the text, Bónapárt joyfully identifies with the imposed moniker. This essay analyses the ontological implications of ‘Jams O'Donnell’ and the position of the name and the Irish language within Bónapárt's trial.¹

The prosecution of Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa is undoubtedly unethical: he is tried and convicted in court proceedings conducted in a language that is foreign to him. In *An Béal Bocht* the Irish language is other to the law and its speakers must bow to the decrees of a legal system wholly beyond their understanding. Justice – supposedly outside of language, theoretically wholly translatable and universal – is in this case absolutely anglophile and anglophone. Hence, in this short scene O'Nolan performs the sentiments written in ‘The Pathology of Revivalism’: Irish is a ‘prison of a language’.² For the English speaker there is the law, but for the Irish speaker there is only prison, only the restriction of a language other to justice and right.

Bónapárt's trial calls to mind the 1882 Maamtrasna murders, which saw the brutal killing of John Joyce, his wife Bridget, his mother

Margaret, his daughter Margaret and his son Michael.³ The family were shot and beaten and dogs consumed the flesh from the arm of the dead grandmother. Of the accused and sentenced to death, was one Myles Joyce, a man to whom the trial was as incomprehensible as Bónapárt's, as he spoke no English. Joyce spent his trial 'with his head leaning on his arms',⁴ and when the jury returned after six minutes of deliberation and the judge declared him guilty, understood nothing. When the interpreter eventually explained the verdict, Joyce spoke of his innocence in a language that few present understood.⁵ As the *Freeman's Journal* of 20 November 1882 wrote, 'the condemned man, touched on the shoulder by the dark warder, then turned slowly away and with a step, lingering and sorrowful and a heavy sigh, with which there was an indistinct exclamation in Irish [. . .], he descended to the cells'.⁶

A contemporary account states that while walking to his hanging Joyce

turned to every official of the jail he met [. . .] and, with all the fiery vehemence of the Celt, declared, in a language which nearly all those who surrounded him were strangers to, that 'he was innocent. He feared not to die. But he felt the indignity of being put to death as a murderer'.⁷

Even with the blindfold over his eyes Joyce continued to proclaim his innocence – in Irish – but his death was treated with no more respect than his trial:

The rope caught in the wretched man's arm and for some seconds it was seen being jerked and tugged in the writhing of his last agony. The grim hangman cast an angry glance into the pit and then, hissing an obscene oath at the struggling victim, sat on the beam and kicked him into eternity.⁸

Prior to Joyce's execution, two men, also due to be hanged, wrote dying confessions proclaiming both their guilt and Joyce's innocence. One of the witnesses publicly confessed to the Archbishop of Tuam that his testimony was false and that Joyce was innocent. Although this testimony was corroborated by a further witness, the authorities refused to reopen the case.⁹ As George Trevelyan, Irish Chief Secretary from 1882, put it, cavalierly equating all involved, 'What earthly motive could we have in hanging one peasant more than another for the murder of another peasant?'¹⁰

What difference indeed, in executing one Jams O'Donnell or another? At issue in both the trial of Myles Joyce and the trial of

Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa is the problem of language and of the proper name. For those of Trevelyan's mentality, whether Bónapárt killed the old man or not becomes irrelevant: (a) Jams O'Donnell killed, so (a) Jams O'Donnell must go to jail. Once (a) Jams O'Donnell is incarcerated, justice has been served. The enactment of a trial is sufficient to ensure that justice is done and thus the *process* of law is privileged. If Kafka's man from the country cannot pass through the open gates to the Law, it is nonetheless his gate, his doorkeeper, all in his name. For Bónapárt there is merely a gate for Jams O'Donnell, a gate for a category rather than a unique individual and neither the doorkeeper, nor the law itself, deign to speak his language. He is not before the law, he is beneath the law; beneath its notice as an individual but nonetheless under its control. His position in relation to the law can only be negative: he can transgress but he cannot be protected.

Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin write of the force or violence behind law. Derrida's 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"' argues that 'in its origin and in its end, in its foundation and its preservation, law is inseparable from violence, immediate or mediate, present or represented'.¹¹ The act of creating or founding a law is always an act of violence, as it immediately alters which actions can and cannot be performed with impunity. Law-making effects a swift change on the legal landscape, a sharp blow that alters and reshapes so as to enable the lawmakers to retain control. Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence' makes a direct attack on the brutality of laws created to preserve and retain state power: 'Lawmaking is power making and, to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence'.¹² Benjamin argues that too often the law is a 'mythic violence' that manifests itself as 'bloody power over mere life for its own sake'.¹³ It is a law-making based on the capriciousness of a reactionary and tyrannical politics desperate to retain power and is exemplified for Benjamin in the gods' punishment of Niobe for her pride in her children. The violent reaction of the gods 'establishes a law far more than it punishes for the infringement of one already existing':¹⁴ the law Niobe transgressed did not predate her act, but was formed in the act of her transgression. Inasmuch as Niobe did not break public law but tempt fate with private boastfulness, Benjamin argues that modern law and the police wield the same intrusive and inescapable power as fate. Their surveillance tactics make no distinction between the public and the private; all become points of control which further the power of the state.

The law that Bónapárt comes before is not a law working towards just ends but rather a power-making of mythical violence and the force of the law is brought to bear on him. He can no more escape the heavy clasp of the policeman's hand on his arm than he can fate; indeed, as we will see, the law and fate become inseparable. Bónapárt is that against which the law can be enforced, the point against which the law is imposed and therefore shown to operate. The purpose of Bónapárt's trial and conviction is to prove that the law functions: he is within and yet without the law, an object to be punished but never a subject to be protected. In the Greek myth Niobe is punished by being turned to stone; silenced and robbed of the power to protest. In *An Béal Bocht* the Irish-speaking Bónapárt is *a priori* silenced, always already petrified by the violent exclusion/inclusion of the English-language legal system.

Occurring under British rule, in the Myles Joyce trial the Irish were the others necessitating an enforceable law; in the Bónapárt trial Irish speakers are that other. Thus the English-speaking Irish re-enact the exclusion and separation to which all were subject under British rule, filling the vacant position of excluded other with those from the Gaeltacht. While the Irish language was constitutionally enshrined in 1937 as a symbol of independence and individuality, in practice it was treated as the language of backward peasants and Irish-speakers as anachronistic, troublesome stereotypes or category types rather than individuals.

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), Giorgio Agamben writes on the Greek division between *zoē* and *bios*, whereby *zoē* is simple, natural life, 'the simple fact of living common to all living beings', while *bios* is a particular way of life, 'the form or way of life proper to an individual or group'.¹⁵ The individual must convert *zoē* – life, existence – into the *eu zēn* – the good life or politically qualified life – that is *bios*. *Bios* exists within the political realm, while 'simple natural life is excluded from the *polis* in the strict sense and remains confined – as merely reproductive life – to the sphere of the *oikos*, "home".¹⁶ In Ancient Greek political society natural life was relegated to the domestic: a private space separate from, but still included within, the public *polis* and thus we find the inclusion, through exclusion, of *zoē* and the foundation of Western politics on a complex relation between exclusion and inclusion.

While Aristotle may speak of *zōon politikon*, the political animal, it is in order to stress that the human, whose political and philosophical ability is paramount, is also an animal; or, in Michel Foucault's terms,

that a human being is 'a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence'.¹⁷ While the living body of the subject was traditionally considered private and domestic and as such excluded from the political, within the modern era 'man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question'.¹⁸ In other words, the modern era is the period of the biopolitical, in which control is manifested through the power 'to make live and let die'.¹⁹ Biopower or biopolitics transforms the political body into a biological body and an obsessive focus on the body, birth rates, life expectancies and health becomes a point of domination. Thus *zoē* enters *bios* and one's world is framed by one's physical or biological existence. This contamination of *zoē* and *bios* is referred to by Agamben as 'bare life', as what is created 'is neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself'.²⁰

Agamben equates 'bare life' with *homo sacer* ('the sacred man'), a figure within Roman law who 'may be killed and yet not sacrificed'.²¹ If one kills the sacred man, one is not punished for murder or manslaughter and yet the death will not have been a ritual sacrifice. One may kill without contamination and without committing sacrilege. The *homo sacer* is, therefore, outside both human and divine law, or, more accurately, included within the law as an exclusion, as he is neither executed under the normal functioning of the law nor sacrificed to the gods. The sacred man lives a 'life devoid of value', a 'life unworthy of being lived'.²² His is thus a 'life exposed to death', a 'bare life'.²³ Neither *zoē* nor *bios*, but a blighted and debased amalgamation of the two, 'bare life' is 'a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man',²⁴ and those who are designated 'bare life' are 'the slave, the barbarian and the foreigner, as *figures of an animal in human form*' [my emphasis].²⁵

Agamben links 'bare life' to Carl Schmitt's 'state of exception': a period when the normal functioning of law is suspended in a time of emergency. For Agamben, Nazi concentration camps exemplify the 'state of exception', as the inmates there exemplify the 'bare lives' exposed to death. *Homo sacer*, or the 'bare life', is, therefore, a mode of political subjectification by dint of objectification: it is made an object of the cessation of the law in a space where distinctions between law and order, reason and chaos, innocence and guilt become meaningless. Different periods have given us bare life under different names: Jew, Palestinian, gypsy, homosexual, refugee, detainee; those who were

'lacking almost all the rights and expectations that we customarily attribute to human existence and yet were still biologically alive, [who] came to be situated in a limit zone between life and death, inside and outside, in which they were no longer anything but bare life'.²⁶ 'Bare life' is those who are designated anthropomorphous animals; human vermin, whose lack of rights, political place, means of expression, or even a fully formed language 'prove' the legitimacy of the supposedly unconditional rights of 'real' citizens.²⁷

An Béal Bocht portrays the inhabitants of the Gaeltacht as 'bare life' living in a state of exception, as they are viewed by English speakers as humanoid animals. But the purpose the bare life in the Gaeltacht serves is somewhat unusual. The camps run by the Nazis were states of exception as sites of ethnic cleansing, where the 'purity' of the German race could be secured by the removal of 'lesser', 'bare life'. In *An Béal Bocht*, the Gaeltacht is a state of exception inhabited by an inferior people, but an inferior people who prove the racial purity of the Irish not by being removed from it, but by being that purity itself. They are not the excluded impure that prove by comparison the purity of the general populace, but the excluded pure that prove by association the purity of the general populace. They are 'bare life' because they are antiquated, inferior relics of the past, even as that past proves the 'Irishness' of a rapidly changing country.

The state of exception demonstrated by Bónapárt's trial is also an interesting inversion of the normal functioning of the exception, as it is created not by suspension but by continuation. At precisely the point at which the law should be interrupted and when it should acknowledge linguistic difference, it absolutely and resolutely functions as normal. Jams O'Donnell becomes a cog within the machine of the law, a law that turns around him, ignoring any points of alterity. The refusal to acknowledge the Irish language performs the exclusion of Bónapárt from justice and inscribes Jams O'Donnell into the harsh force of the law. As Aristotle writes, all life has a voice, but only *bios* has language and so,

language is for manifesting the fitting and the unfitting and the just and the unjust. To have the sensation of the good and the bad and of the just and the unjust is what is proper to men as opposed to other living beings and the community of these things makes dwelling and the city.²⁸

Language manifests justice and to use language is to be fully human. Without it, one is not of the law and of the city but of the wild, barbaric

outside. The term ‘barbarous’ comes from the Greek, meaning one who does not know how to speak: the savage or the barbarian is one whose language is not considered civilised or cultured. As ‘bare life’, as one straddling the divide between the human and that which is heterogeneous to the human, one does not speak, or, rather, one speaks in a barbaric, improper tongue, making the noise of animals. To refuse to recognise the legality of a language is to refuse to recognise the humanity of the speaker.

Hence, the treatment that the people of the Gaeltacht receive, starkly exemplified by Bónapárt’s trial, effectively denies them inclusion within the category of *bios* and repositions them as ‘bare life’. The category of *bios* is predicated on a thinking, reasoning individual complete with language and a proper name. When Bónapárt is tried as Jams O’Donnell he is tried as a life, but a ‘bare life’ that is outside (proper legal) language and outside the proper name. He is subject to the normal functioning of the law and he has the right to a trial, but a trial in which he cannot participate, a court case in which he has no speech. He is, therefore, not subject but object, located inside and outside the law, which functions around him, including and excluding him.

Throughout *An Béal Bocht* the position of the Irish language is problematised. While it is a human language that fills mouths with sweet words, it is also confused with the grunting of swine. The ethnographer who comes to Corca Dorcha joyfully records the words of Bónapárt’s pig because, as Bónapárt explains, ‘*Thuig sé go mbíonn an dea-Ghaeilge deacair agus an Ghaeilge is fearr beagnach dothuigthe*’ (ABB, 36).²⁹ An inhuman language, Irish is spoken by those indistinguishable from animals. The pig was able to deceive the ethnographer because it was wearing clothes and it was wearing clothes in order to fool an inspector who had come to check that all the children in the house could speak English. Such is the treatment of Irish-speakers that Bónapárt eventually asks the Seandúine: “*An bhfuilir cinnte [. . .] gur daoine na Gaeil?*” (ABB, 90).³⁰ But their humanity – in all senses of the term – is something that the Seandúine cannot confirm: “*Tá an t-ainm sin amuigh orthu, a uaislín,*” ar seisean, “*ach ní fritheadh deimhniú riamh air. Ní capaill ná cearca sinn, ní rónta ná taibhsí, agus ar a shon sin is inchreidte gur daoine sinn [. . .]*” (ABB, 90).³¹

The question – are we a people? – becomes even more negatively weighted when we look at the implications of the name ‘Corca Dorcha’. According to Patrick Weston Joyce’s seminal work on Irish place names,

corc and *corca* mean ‘race’ or ‘progeny’,³² and while *dorcha* is usually translated as ‘dark’, according to Irish lexicographer Patrick S. Dinneen it also means ‘hidden, secret, mysterious; shy, distant [. . .]; malignant’.³³ Hence Corca Dorcha means hidden race, secret race, malignant race, but most importantly, dark race, or dark progeny. While in the place name one hears overtones of Mary Shelley’s ‘hideous progeny’,³⁴ the deliberate play on a racist slur seems unavoidable. If the Irish-speakers are a people, they are the dark race, the ‘niggers’ of Ireland, with all the terrible overtones of racial difference, inferiority and immaturity that term implied/implies. And if this dark race resemble pigs and the language they speak is confused with the grunting of pigs, how can it truly be a language at all and not simply the cries made by the animalistic ‘bare life’? How then can Irish and the Irish speaker ever be given the full rights of *bios*, legally, politically and socially?

If for Stephen Dedalus Ireland is ‘the old sow that eats her farrow’,³⁵ for O’Nolan, Irish is, to those who do not speak it, the language of pigs. And the emblematic pig of *An Béal Bocht* is Ambrós. Ambrós was the runt of the litter and because he was too weak to fight for a place at his mother’s teat, he was fed cow’s milk by hand by the Seanduine. Weak and unnatural, Ambrós became excessive; huge and possessed of a smell defying oral and written description. Swollen, unresponsive, the pig rotted from the inside, becoming a living corpse. His stench nearly killed Bónapárt’s mother and in the end, hesitant to split his throat, they allow a neighbour to block the windows and doors so that it suffocates on its own odour. Reading Ambrós as an allegorical representation of the Irish language, we understand it as a language rotting from within, harmed by and harming those who would seek to protect it, detrimentally insulated from the life that would enable it to live properly. A living-dead language, in the end it asphyxiates itself. Thus O’Nolan presents a complex – and noisome – contamination between the treatment the Irish language received by those who wished to protect it and those who saw it as an anachronistic remnant of poverty and insularity.

So that English speakers would not have to sully their mouths with the language of the (in)human other, all the male inhabitants of Corca Dorcha are given the English-Irish proper name of Jams O’Donnell by the vicious schoolmaster Aimeirgean Ó Lúnasa.³⁶ But a proper name, Derrida insists, has ‘no meaning, no conceptualisable and common meaning’ and, when pronounced, ‘can designate [*viser*] only a single,

singular individual, one unique thing'.³⁷ A name denotes a distinct individual; regardless of the number of times new-borns are given the Irish name 'Bláthnaid', for example, in each case it refers to a specific and singular 'Bláthnaid'. Each instance of 'Bláthnaid' exists in homonymic relation to every other instance; while they may sound the same, they designate wholly different signifieds. Derrida writes that proper names 'designate individuals who do not refer to any common concept';³⁸ proper names do not mark a particular category. There is thus no conceptual or categorical requirement that a certain child be given a certain name: while a tree falls into a particular biological classification and under the strictures of taxonomy is included in a specific species, genus, or family, there are no specific classificatory conditions stating that, because of particular characteristics, the child reside in the category of Bláthnaids. Such a category does not exist and there is no general concept that is 'Bláthnaid'.

While 'Jams O'Donnell' masquerades as a proper name, it very clearly functions instead as a common noun. It signifies in a way a proper name does not; it denotes the category or genus of 'male, Irish-speaking peasant'. 'Jams O'Donnell', it should be stressed, is not a new name given to each boy, but the '*gall-leagan a ainm féinig*' (ABB, 27)³⁹ – his name otherwise, his name adulterated to English, his name reduced to the general common noun. Jams O'Donnell is not a unique marker, but a common signifier denoting not simply common properties but a common category. As Bónapárt is tried as Jams O'Donnell, he is, therefore, not tried as a unique individual, but as a member of a social group. His function is representative: he represents, in the eyes of English-speakers, the unlawfulness of the Irish peasant and the subsequent functioning of justice. Because the system must act, at the very least, as the simulacrum of legality, Bónapárt is not wholly picked at random, but as a peasant suspiciously in possession of gold coins. Beyond this, further investigation is unnecessary.

While Bónapárt's trial, as it is presented to us, is an undeniable travesty, clouding the transparently unethical conduct is a deep ambiguity. The conceit of *An Béal Bocht*, it cannot be forgotten, stipulates an author and an editor: the author is Bónapárt himself, writing from jail and the interfering hand of the editor – '*Tá an scríbhinn seo go díreach mar a fuair mé í ó láimh an údair ach amháin go bhfuil an mhórchuid fágtha ar lár*' (ABB, 7)⁴⁰ – that of Myles na gCopaleen. While Bónapárt's lack of English makes the legal proceedings a painful farce, it also means

that he can honestly and convincingly fail to present any evidence that might demonstrate his guilt. Writing from jail, his version presents his innocence, but this innocence is rendered suspect by a series of repeated structures and inconsistencies in his account. Did, therefore, Bónapárt take the money from Maoldún as he avows, or did he in fact murder and rob the gentleman in Galway, as the law courts insist? One might protest that Bónapárt is too weak and cowardly to kill, but O’Nolan’s texts repeatedly feature the execrable abilities of the pathetic and the evidence against him is, at the very least, highly suggestive.

The entire Maoldún incident bears remarkable continuity to events already encountered, in that the Maoldún Bónapárt meets is an extension of the Seandúine’s version of the tale, not the Middle Irish saga.⁴¹ No longer a beautiful, noble adventurer, Máel Dúin is rewritten as the avaricious, self-interested pirate Maoldún, who in the great flood takes to his ship neither to avenge nor to save, but to steal from those who can no longer resist.⁴² While Maoldún does speak in Middle Irish – and here we have to detect the help of the editor, Myles na gCopaleen –, the story he tells is the same story related to Bónapárt by Ferdinand. While the otherworldly features of Bónapárt’s ‘voyage’ mean that it conforms to the mystical elements of the heroic cycles, it also means that Bónapárt can present a highly interrupted narrative. The episode thus combines the stylistic devices of the Middle Irish tale with the confusion and interruptions of a dream work, ending, unsatisfactorily, with the equivalent of ‘and then I woke up’. Hence, the oneiric quality of the descriptions – ‘*aibhneacha colgacha buí ag gluaiseacht eatarthu, ag líonadh mo chluas le dordán diabhailta díshaolta*’, ‘*sráidbhaile de charraigeacha bána*’, ‘*criathar de phoill béaldorcha díthónacha ina raibh na huiscí luatha ag titim go síorthitimeach*’ (ABB, 96)⁴³ – are coupled with repeated accounts of Bónapárt’s overwhelming fatigue. While on the summit he says ‘*Ní fheadar ná gur ligeas tharam gan fhios tamall den lá faoi shuan nó ar chaolchéadfaí*’ (ABB, 97),⁴⁴ and all is concluded when he wakes up suddenly at the bottom of the mountain, with no memory of the descent, naked and clutching a bag of gold.

While Bónapárt’s clothes may have been stripped from him by the tumultuous waters, they may also have been discarded as they were covered in blood. Indeed, Bónapárt’s later reaction to blood in the house is presented through the echo of a guilty and troubled murderer: a year after the Maoldún incident, as Bónapárt deliberates on how to spend the money, his house is suddenly awash with blood. Thinking that the

apocalypse is nigh – and judgment day with it – Bónapárt anxiously asks his mother about the source of the ‘*ceathanna dearga*’ (ABB, 104).⁴⁵ It transpires that it had come from another old man, the Seanduine. Echoing the words of Lady Macbeth, Bónapárt breathes, “*Ní raibh aon choinne agam, [. . .] go raibh an oiread seo fola sa tSeanduine*” (ABB, 105).⁴⁶ And thus Bónapárt decides to spend his money. Money, it should be noted, that is later perfectly acceptable in a shoe-shop. While the shopkeeper might raise an eyebrow at a peasant’s possession of gold, his reaction would undoubtedly be greater had the peasant attempted to pay him with an archaeological artefact.

Bónapárt’s voyage to the top of Hungerstack thus hovers between a true, if supernatural, event, a pathology concocted to repress guilt and an attempted alibi. The case for Bónapárt’s guilt or innocence can be extended almost infinitely, as the defence might argue that the Maoldún incident occurred a year before, while the murder was committed ‘*go déanach*’ (ABB, 110),⁴⁷ or that the repetition of the story of the captain shows not the character’s guilt but the author’s interest in narrative redoubling. But the real significance of this chapter lies not in finding a definitive answer to the problem, but in the openness or undecidability itself. Bónapárt is the victim of an indifferent and unlawful system, but he is not an unambiguously innocent victim. O’Nolan’s parodies allow for no idealism or romanticism; the people of Corca Dorcha cannot be depicted stagnantly as fallen nobles enslaved by the English tongue. *An Béal Bocht* writes against all homogeneity and static sameness, be it biased or simplistic representations, the racial, social and linguistic purity of the *fíor-Ghael* (true Irish) valued by the Gaelic League – and enforced with all the blind determination of adherents of eugenics – or the equally reductive and negative creation of the lower caste that is Jams O’Donnell.

As Bónapárt is taken off to jail as Jams O’Donnell, he sees a man who looks familiar, a man ‘*cromtha, briste, agus chomh tanaí le tráithnín*’ (ABB, 112).⁴⁸ Speaking the English sentence beaten into his head long ago, he asks, ‘Phwat is yer nam?’ and receives the expected reply: ‘Jams O’Donnell!’ (ABB, 112). With joy Bónapárt shakes the old man’s hand and exclaims, “*Is é is ainm agus sloinne domsa féin, [. . .] Jams O’Donnell freisin, is tusa m’athair agus is follas go bhfuil tú tagtha as an gcrúiscín!*” (ABB, 113).⁴⁹ Fresh from a trial he could not understand, with news of his twenty-nine-year sentence, Bónapárt sees an old man and asks his name, not in Irish but in English, doing so with a question

that has only one answer. The old man gives it, replying with the generic common noun rather than proper name and the little boy who looked in the milk jug for his father meets him at last. That is, meets Jams O'Donnell. The ambiguity regarding Bónapárt's guilt is repeated in his reunion with his father: does he meet his father or does he meet another Jams O'Donnell? Again, the situation must remain open and undecidable. Should Bónapárt meet his birth father, then the unending cycles of inescapable destiny are reinforced: as his father served twenty-nine years, so too does he. Jams O'Donnell will always serve a twenty-nine-year sentence, regardless of the crime, because that is his inescapable destiny.⁵⁰ Thus, fate and the mythic violence of the law system coincide; his status as 'bare life' exposes Bónapárt to a legal system that punishes with the inevitability of fate.

However, should he simply meet another Irish peasant, then the repetition of fate remains unchanged, but a slightly darker point is made. This darkness does not merely lie in the fact that Bónapárt deludes himself, but in the fact that Bónapárt repeats the reduction of the Irish-speaker to the realm of 'bare life' that his trial induced. He self-identifies not by proper name but common noun and allows the repetition of that common noun to denote 'father'. All sense of specific lineage is undone and the consanguinity denoted by family names is suppressed before the overwhelming strength of the larger taxonomic category: Jams O'Donnell. Exact family ties and units become irrelevant as each individual (male) Irish-speaking peasant is reduced to a member of the set of 'male, Irish-speaking peasant' and the unique characteristics denoting the specificity of each subject and each family unit are lost. What is even more distressing than the external use of this common noun is its assimilation by the people of the Gaeltacht themselves. The inhabitants of Corca Dorcha and the Gaeltachts thus become a homogeneous, incestuous mass: any frail old man from the Gaeltacht can be Bónapárt's father, because as Jams O'Donnell he is Bónapárt's father and cousin and neighbour and friend and Bónapárt himself. By treating all members of the set of Jams O'Donnell as ostensibly the same, as bare life, speakers of the pig language, the incest prohibition no longer applies, although it is not without effect: Jams O'Donnell can marry the daughter of Jams O'Donnell, who gives birth, it should be noted, to a piglet, only to die a year and a day later amongst the pigs.

The common characteristics of all members of the set overshadow any differences and they are effectively interchangeable. Hence, from

his house Bónapárt can see the Gaeltachts from Dingle on the south-west coast to the islands off Donegal on the north-west and the map that accompanies the Irish text clarifies this position. Physical, geographic space is elided as difference is elided: Bónapárt can see all the Gaeltachts because they are all (more or less) the same. While the compass points that all point west and the central positioning of Corca Dorcha humorously present the relative cognitive mapping of those in the Gaeltacht, they also serve to stress the elision of difference by those inside and outside the Gaeltacht alike: inasmuch as all the Gaeltachts become indistinguishable, anything not-Gaeltacht becomes repetitions of ‘*thar lear*’ (abroad) and ‘*de odar saighd*’ (the other side). Hence, as Bónapárt is being led off by the garda – the English word ‘peeler’, with Irish transposition *pílear*, is used in both texts – the man says, “*Kum along, Blashketman!*” (ABB, 113). Bónapárt is not from the Blaskets, but the Gaeltacht is all the same: any name, any designation will do. The order of the world becomes an order based on static uniformity, on upheld clichés.

Should the repetition of ‘Jams O’Donnell’ seem like an excessive flight of fancy, the repetition of names in the Maamtrasna murders prevents its dismissal as mere tragicomic hyperbole. Not including the victims, the case involved eight men with the surname of Joyce and six with the surname of Casey, while the first name John figured six times, Patrick five times, Michael twice, Anthony twice and Thomas twice.⁵¹ Thus, while the name of the murdered man was John Joyce, it was also the name of an independent witness and a young man caught up in the murder. John Casey, the supposed leader, must be distinguished from his son John Casey, who assisted with the murder, as well as from a third John Casey, wrongfully sentenced to hard labour. The victim, Patrick Joyce, should not be confused with the Patrick Joyce given penal servitude, nor with the independent witness Patrick Joyce, nor with the executed murderer Patrick Joyce. Such was the confusion that an 1884 account produced a table of names, so that the men involved could be told apart (see below).

Addressing the Maamtrasna trial in a Triestine newspaper, *Il Piccolo della Sera*, in 1907, James Joyce wrote that Myles Joyce, ‘the figure of this dumbfounded old man, a remnant of a civilization not ours, deaf and dumb before his judge, is a symbol of the Irish nation at the bar of public opinion’.⁵² In *An Béal Bocht* Myles places the Gaelic League, the government, the English-speaking public and the Gaeltachts themselves before

the law, in a novel whose status as farce or parody belies a vehement indictment of representations of Irish and the Irish speaker and the dehumanising effects this treatment produces.

APPENDIX

Protagonists in the Maamtrasna Murders

(Harrington, *The Maamtrasna Massacre*, p. ix)

List of Names.

ARRESTED FOR THE MURDER.

Patrick Joyce, Shanvallycahill,	executed, guilty
Patrick Casey,	executed, guilty
Myles Joyce,	executed, innocent
Michael Casey,	penal servitude, guilty
Martin Joyce (brother to Myles),	penal servitude, innocent
Patrick Joyce, Cappanacreha (another brother),	penal servitude, innocent
Tom Joyce (son of Patrick),	penal servitude, innocent
John Casey (little), Cappanacreha,	penal servitude, innocent
Anthony Philbin,	approver
Thomas Casey,	approver

THE ACTUAL MURDERERS (NOW ALLEGED).

John Casey (big), Bun-na-cnic,	supposed leader, at large
John Casey, Junr. (his son), Bun-na-cnic,	at large
Pat Joyce, Shanvallycahill	executed
Pat Casey,	executed
Pat Leyden,	now in England
Michael Casey,	penal servitude
Thomas Casey,	approver

INDEPENDENT WITNESSES.

Anthony Joyce
John Joyce, Derry (his brother)
Patrick Joyce, Derry (John's son)

OTHERS.

John Joyce, Maamtrasna,	the murdered man
Michael Joyce (boy), do. (son),	who died of wounds
Patrick Joyce (boy), do. (son),	who recovered
John Joyce (young), Bun-na-cnic, the man whom the murderers called out to join them	

BRIAN O'NOLAN
 misogynist or 'ould Mary Anne'?

Thomas Jackson Rice

In the final scene of Brian O'Nolan's last completed novel, *The Dalkey Archive* (1964), the protagonist Mick Shaughnessy finds himself proposing marriage to his girlfriend Mary, notwithstanding his recently formed resolution to 'put an end' to their relationship: 'His association with Mary, now that he contemplated it soberly, had been really very superficial and small; perhaps banal would be the better word' (CN, 734). He has decided to enter the Cistercian religious order and spend the remainder of his life monastically, in the company of men. Before he can break this news to her, however, Mary informs him that she has accepted a marriage proposal from their mutual acquaintance, the concupiscent Hackett. O'Nolan's readers never know how seriously each has considered this proposal, for both Hackett and Mary shortly think better of this arrangement and all apparently turns out well for Mick and Mary:

- [. . .] Mick. You're just a bloody fool.
 – But the bloody fool you're going to marry?
 – I suppose so. I like Hackett here, but not that much. (CN, 786)

So O'Nolan's comedy ends traditionally enough, not only with this promise of marriage, but also with Mary's assertion in the novel's final sentence that 'I'm certain I'm going to have a baby' (CN, 787). Considering her efficient management of Mick and probable manipulation of their relationship, who can doubt her?

Well, some might doubt her success and not just because readers familiar with O'Nolan find it difficult to take this traditional comic ending seriously. Keith Hopper construes Mary's assertion as a literal statement of her condition rather than merely an expression of her hope to bear a child: 'By the end of the novel [. . .] we discover that

Hackett has been conducting a secret, sexual affair with Mary. Moreover, Mary is now pregnant' (Hopper, 86), a conviction Hopper shares with Bernard Benstock.¹ Conversely, Anne Clissmann takes the interpretive high ground and preserves Mary's virginity, speculating that she may be announcing the book's 'final miracle', a virgin birth.² While O'Nolan is certainly capable of such religious grotesquerie, I would argue that Mick's masculinity is as much the butt of O'Nolan's joke as Mary's purity.

A generally ineffectual character in an anti-climactic story, Mick is unlikely to be more successful in consummating his marriage with his presumably virgin Mary than he has been with his contemplated flight into a Trappist monastery. O'Nolan employs his favourite comic technique of innuendo in *The Dalkey Archive* to suggest that Mary has toyed with the idea of marrying Hackett because he is far more experienced than Mick in his relations with women. While both men are involved with young women who possess famously virginal names, Hackett's epithets for each, 'pious Mary' versus 'Asterisk Agnes', strongly imply that the virginity Mary has preserved with Mick, Agnes has lost to Hackett (CN, 612). Given what Hopper calls the 'cloistered Catholic ethos' of O'Nolan's Ireland, such sexual indulgence must be asterisked off the page and out of conversation; even in the 'male-orientated pub culture of the time [. . .] issues of sexuality and images of women were excluded from ordinary discourse' (Hopper, 89, 58). Probably Hackett's intimate relations with Asterisk Agnes explain Mick's ambivalent response toward his friend, whom he introduces to the readers as a 'handsome lout' (CN, 612). This equivocal phrase conflates the antithetical impulses of masculine admiration and envy, echoing the brilliant treatment of male ambivalence – and both literal and figurative male-bonding – in O'Nolan's earlier short story 'Two in One' (1954; SF, 84–89). Surely the lack of anything resembling Hackett's attractively loathsome sexuality in Mick's relations with Mary is why he has described their 'association' as 'superficial and small' (CN, 734). His odd choice of the word 'association' furthers the distance from intimacy. Thus, the tease that prompts Mick's proposal in the final scene hints once more at Hackett's potent masculinity. Mary simply says, 'his nature is different from yours and that's all' (CN, 785). True, once their union has been sanctioned and sanctified by their parish priest, it is possible that Mick could become a Celtic tiger in the bedroom. However, *The Dalkey*

Archive hints that the union of Mick and Mary may need more than the church's blessing to be fruitful.

No doubt the happy marital ending of *The Dalkey Archive* is specious, for wherever marriage appears in O'Nolan's fiction and it does so rarely, it hardly resembles a consummation devoutly to be wished for. Nor does family life have much to recommend it. The protagonist in O'Nolan's novels either omits the mention of his parents – like the first-person narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), who lives with his uncle – promptly dispatches his parents into the next world – as do the narrators in the opening paragraphs of *The Third Policeman* (1967; written 1939–40) and *The Hard Life* (1961) – or lives with his mother – like the narrator of *An Béal Bocht* (whose father is in prison), or Mick Shaughnessy in *The Dalkey Archive* (whose father is dead). The most remarkable and disturbing marriage in the fiction and the only one involving a protagonist, occurs in *An Béal Bocht* (1941) when the narrator Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa of Corca Dorcha briefly interrupts his adventures and in the space of three pages marries a young woman and has a child with her, both of whom promptly die (CN, 460–462). Bónapárt's emotionally vacuous narration of this episode intensifies the readers' horror, but the vacuity is not his alone. Presumably O'Nolan felt obligated to include this marriage story as part of his parody of the Gaelic autobiography genre in *An Béal Bocht*, putting the marriage into his book out of much the same sense of obligation to convention that Ó Cúnasa expresses in deciding to marry.

Not to put too fine a point upon it: marriage, sexual life and women in general seem to be sources of high anxiety for the protagonists in O'Nolan's novels and apparently sources of anxiety for their author as well. There is not a single remotely convincing portrayal of a female character in all these works. The few women that do appear are peripheral (including Mary in *The Dalkey Archive*), shadowy and mysterious (like Annie, haunting the embankment in *The Hard Life*), or stereotypical mothers and wives (albeit hilariously in the figure of the model housewife Mrs Furriskey in *At Swim-Two-Birds*). Although a concern for women's needs is a running joke in O'Nolan's penultimate novel, *The Hard Life*, in Mr Collopy's obsession for providing public WCs for the females of Dublin, the woman in his life, Mrs Crotty, remains under erasure, abed in the back room throughout the story. In the end, it is not a woman but Mr Collopy himself who dies from retaining water. For the most part, then, women are either caricatures or merely

absent in the fiction. This is equally true of the shorter fiction, journalism and plays: in O’Nolan’s projected and unfinished final novel *Slattery’s Sago Saga* (SF, 93–136), Crawford MacPherson, while barely developed, is an especially unpleasant stereotype of the masculine woman. As for the *Cruiskeen Lawn* series, as Jack White succinctly puts it, women ‘figure rarely in the column and when they do appear they occupy a stock role, like “the wife” in comic postcards’.³ And while Amy Nejezchleb identifies Marie-Thérèse, ‘an assertive young woman’ who appears in O’Nolan’s late television scripts for *Th’Oul Lad of Kilsalaha* (RTÉ, 1965), as a ‘character with some depth and appeal’,⁴ she does not address the issue that O’Nolan’s scripts would have been modified by others as they moved into production.

There are several possible reasons for Brian O’Nolan’s misrepresentations or non-treatment of women in his works, reasons found in part in the conditions of his contemporary society, in part in the nature of his materials and humour and in part in what appear to be his own inclinations and insecurities. Through a number of tellingly defensive gestures of negation, O’Nolan’s writing suggests that this autobiographical approach may be productive. Once again it is Mary, an aspiring writer, who provides the decisive clue, when, in the final pages of *The Dalkey Archive*, she rejects the idea of creating fiction out of one’s own experience: ‘One must write outside oneself. I’m fed up with writers who put a fictional gloss over their own squabbles and troubles. It’s a form of conceit and usually it’s very tedious’ (CN, 786). One cannot help but read these protestations ironically. Not only does this author ‘put a fictional gloss over’ some of his own ‘troubles’ in *The Dalkey Archive*; he disproves Mary’s contentions by being far from tedious in the process. Brian O’Nolan is clearly no Mary, but he surely has more than a little bit of Mick in him and both may have some ‘Mary Anne’ in them as well, as we shall see.⁵ For now, it is sufficient to note that O’Nolan shares more than the common experience of working in the Civil Service with his hero Mick Shaughnessy. O’Nolan and Shaughnessy seem to consider women intimidating – perhaps as much a ‘menace’ as De Selby’s weapon of mass destruction – while in the same breath finding the subject of woman ‘hopeless for discussion or discourse’ (CN, 655, 654).

If we are to project Mick’s fear of the female and indifference to women back upon his creator, however, we should note that Brian O’Nolan himself was a married man, having wed Evelyn McDonnell in

late 1948 when he was already in his late thirties. By all biographical accounts the marriage, though childless, was a fairly placid one. It survived even O'Nolan's descent into alcoholism that seems to have accelerated after his decision to marry and possibly as a result of this decision. His biographer Anthony Cronin makes the same connection, speculating that O'Nolan may have begun writing *The Dalkey Archive* around the time of his marriage in 1948, when James Joyce could have plausibly been in his mid-sixties. Cronin implies that in this confluence of creative and personal activity, O'Nolan touches on his own 'personal conflicts' of that moment, conflicts that remained and intensified over the years of the book's evolution. This novel, Cronin writes,

must be read in the light of Brian O'Nolan's situation and psychology at that time, when it was beginning to be obvious to him that he had a drink problem of a major kind and was wondering whether he could or should ever embark on a serious relationship with a woman, perhaps even marry. (229)

Marriage evidently solved neither of these problems and may in fact have exacerbated both, driving him further toward alcohol as an escape from a 'loveless or sexless marriage', arising from an inability of one or the other partner 'to enter into a full relationship' (Cronin, 237). Cronin adds that O'Nolan seems to have admitted as much in the spring of 1964, during his institutionalisation for one of his occasional drying-outs at Grangegorman Hospital, when he conceded to his therapist that his 'lack of a creative and sexual fulfillment' was the likely cause of his drinking (237). The evidence from both Cronin's biography and O'Nolan's fiction strongly suggests that it was Brian who was unable to enter fully into his marital relationship with Evelyn, whom Cronin describes as having been an 'intelligent, forthright girl' (168).

And yet, the reliability of this evidence is difficult to assess. Cronin is circumspect at points, if not evasive, while at the same time inducing his readers to draw their own inferences. In a fashion, Cronin's biography mirrors its subject's fondness for innuendo and intimation, demanding that its readers tease out the implications of that which is only partially said. When Cronin reveals O'Nolan's late-in-life marriage, he does so in close juxtaposition to his discussion of 'a constant topic of complaint in Brian O'Nolan's conversations with his colleagues' that salaries and pensions in the Civil Service were 'loaded in favour of the married state' (160). Thus Cronin allows his readers to

infer that O’Nolan’s marriage may have been, at least partially, motivated by its economic benefits, ‘for he now moved on to the famous “married scale”’ (169). Indeed, Cronin’s biography is most elliptical whenever he turns to the subjects of O’Nolan’s marriage and his sexuality. The most trustworthy statement in his book, that ‘conflicts in Brian’s sexual nature can only be guessed at’ (237), is at the same time packed with innuendo by implying that O’Nolan’s sexuality raises questions. And Cronin subtly seems to steer his readers toward the necessary unpacking. If O’Nolan admitted suffering from conflicts with his sexuality at Grangegorm, Cronin is silent not only about how he happens to know this – leaving his readers to assume that only Brian himself or someone intimately connected to O’Nolan could have given him this information – but also about the nature of the conflicts and about the possible relevance of this information for our understanding of the man. Earlier in the book, when he reveals Brian’s decision to marry Evelyn (167), Cronin announces this to his readers as suddenly as the man himself did to his acquaintances:

To say that his friends were surprised by their marriage would be an understatement. Most of them regarded him as simply uninterested in women; many of them had heard him make remarks which suggested an active hostility to the other sex. In a country where celibacy was not regarded as an unnatural or inexplicable state, he was regarded as a natural celibate (168).

Cronin’s word choice here is provocative, presenting celibacy as a ‘natural’ state in O’Nolan’s Ireland, rather than, perhaps, a matter of personal choice. The picture that begins to emerge in *No Laughing Matter* is of Brian O’Nolan as a closeted homosexual who sought to avoid exposure in a society censorious of anything resembling non-normative sexuality, a man who remained attached to a Roman Catholicism that reinforced misogyny and condemned homosexuals to everlasting perdition, a Civil Service employee whose security might be jeopardised by some catastrophic lapse,⁶ and thus someone who chose first a celibate existence and then marriage as socially acceptable forms of protective colouration in his lifetime.⁷

Of course, a life of celibacy is not conclusive evidence for this reading of the lacunae in Cronin’s biography. Yet the womanless world of O’Nolan’s writings, his celibacy confirmed rather than abandoned by his late-in-life decision to enter into an apparently sexless marriage of

convenience, plus patterns of outspoken misogyny (and its mirror homophobia) in his writings – that imply disguise and defensiveness – raise strong questions about his sexual identity.⁸ Yet these tensions between the surface and compensatory misogyny-homophobia, as well as the insistent subtexts of homoerotic desire, contribute to the complexity, to the humour and indeed to the pathos of his work. If we can never be certain of Brian O’Nolan’s sexual preferences, there is no question that Flann O’Brien’s writings enact homosexual anxiety within a homophobic culture. The greatest such anxiety, the fear of exposure (of ‘being outed’) underlies one of O’Nolan’s most haunting short fictions, ‘John Duffy’s Brother’ (1940; *SF*, 54–58). The strongest and most extended illustrations of these anxieties, however, are the homoerotic motifs in his long-unpublished novel *The Third Policeman*.⁹

The homoerotic is hidden in plain sight early in *The Third Policeman* when the nameless protagonist describes his relations with John Divney, his treacherous partner in the robbery and murder of Phillip Mathers. When ‘I was nearly thirty’, he narrates, ‘Divney and I began to get the name of being great friends’ among neighbours, largely because ‘[we] never parted company’ (*CN*, 228). Their intimacy escalates as the narrator moves his bed into Divney’s room and soon thereafter gets into the same bed with him. ‘I slept with him always after that. We were friendly and smiled at each other but the situation was a queer one and neither of us liked it’ (*CN*, 229). This is ‘queer’ indeed and their mutual dislike of the situation prepares the reader for the revelation, suppressed for several pages, that the protagonist has shared Divney’s bed simply to keep him under constant surveillance because he suspects Divney will abscond with the money they stole from their murder victim. But O’Nolan’s titillating intimation of a homosexual relationship and subsequent withdrawal only several pages later allows this ‘queer’ situation to linger in his readers’ minds before it is redirected and thus suppressed.¹⁰ O’Nolan may simply be provoking his male readers’ anxieties as a kind of joke here, but the latent material of the joke is clearly homosexuality. Later in the story O’Nolan again turns toward homoerotic innuendo when the protagonist has a conversation in bed with his soul, a voice that usually comes ‘from deep inside’ him and that he has named Joe (*CN*, 240). Once again O’Nolan plays the titillating game of approaching the homoerotic, while remaining safe from its physical realisation because, as a soul, Joe is bodiless. Or is he? ‘Lying there’ in bed, the narrator sighs

a long sound of happiness. Almost at once I heard another sigh and heard Joe murmuring some contented incoherency. His voice was near me, yet did not seem to come from the accustomed place within. I thought that he must be lying beside me in the bed and I kept my hands carefully at my sides in case I should accidentally touch him. (CN, 327)

Touch may be avoided, but at the imaginative level the scene approaches the forbidden. Here as elsewhere readers are prompted to consider the nameless narrator's peculiar inability to remember his name as an oblique allusion to the Wildean love that dare not speak its name.¹¹

Following this line of interpretation, it is difficult to know exactly what to make of the protagonist's wooden leg, or more precisely, to know which of several possible implications to attach to his one-leggedness. A wooden leg, after all, offers a Freudian playground of possible sexual suggestions as well as the Freudian rejoinder that sometimes a wooden leg is just a wooden leg. The narrator only reveals that he lost his limb 'one night with a bad accident' that evidently involved some person or persons breaking his leg 'in six places' (CN, 225). The reasons for such an assault are left to the readers' imaginations, but it seems plausible that the narrator could have provoked this extraordinarily violent assault as a kind of symbolic emasculation, an ironically appropriate retaliation against homosexual advances. As for the troop of fourteen 'one-legged men' led by Martin Finnucane that comes to rescue the protagonist from the police station late in the story, the readers ultimately learn that these men with wooden legs are all in hell, like the narrator (CN, 370). To a conservative Irish Roman Catholic like O'Nolan, hell is most especially the after-world destination for homosexuals. As an almost exclusively masculine realm, O'Nolan's hell is reserved for bad boys. Probably the best clue to the meaning of the wooden leg comes in the protagonist's encounter with his double, Martin Finnucane, 'the captain of all the one-legged men in the country', who, like him, is a thief and 'a black murderer' (CN, 260, 259). After Finnucane discovers that the narrator also has a wooden leg, he offers him friendship: 'If you are ever troubled, send for me and I will save you from the woman' (CN, 260). The nameless one misses, or O'Nolan cloaks, the homosexual innuendo in this offer, but nonetheless the protagonist tellingly responds: 'Women I have no interest in at all' (CN, 260).

There is one apparent feminine presence in this hell, a bicycle that seems 'ineffably female' (CN, 378). The narrator's interaction with it/her is the most erotic scene in all of O'Nolan's work and this scene might suggest the protagonist's normative heterosexuality, albeit peculiarly. Nevertheless, several dimensions of the situation limit this argument because the bicycle is a replacement for the feminine. His ride on her is a form of self-transport on the one hand – an unfortunate idiom in this context – and, on the other hand, an erasure of the female body via extreme objectification.¹² Andrea Bobotis provides yet another way to view the narrator's ride. Since the protagonist has absconded with Sergeant Pluck's bicycle and since according to Pluck's theory of molecular exchange its gender must thus be male, he is, in fact, riding a male bicycle that he experiences, as a psychic defence, as female.¹³

While these signs of anxiety and implications of suppressed homosexuality in Flann O'Brien's misrepresentation or non-treatment of women are intriguing, it is equally possible that the nature of his materials and humour offers a less potentially contentious explanation for this than the nature of Brian O'Nolan the man. In terms of his materials, O'Nolan has little interest in either plot or psychological development of character in his fiction. His novels are mostly episodic narratives and he builds these episodes chiefly out of the anecdotes, jokes, shaggy-dog stories, tall tales, parodies, puns and witty improvisations of humorous pub conversation – the same resources 'Myles na gCopaleen' uses for his *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns that Hopper describes as 'the epitome of pub-talk at its imagined best' (31). The pub was his preferred milieu for most of O'Nolan's life. The pubs that he chose to frequent in Dublin were largely and often exclusively male domains and 'bastion[s] of patriarchy' (Cronin, 142–44; Hopper, 66). Although O'Nolan came to resent critics who compared his work to Joyce's, clearly both authors relished the pub as a locale for literary inspiration. The heteroglossia of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, for instance, seems indebted to the parodic interpolations that punctuate the pub conversations in the 'Cyclops' episode of *Ulysses*, as others have frequently observed.¹⁴ Barney Kiernan's pub is an exclusively male realm, a place where O'Nolan and his characters would feel at home, but, unlike O'Nolan, Joyce famously gives his female characters voice elsewhere in *Ulysses*. When O'Nolan introduces James Joyce into his own fiction in *The Dalkey Archive*, however, he significantly disassociates him from the world of women. Joyce disavows having written *Ulysses*

altogether – ‘I was shown bits of it in typescript. Artificial and laborious stuff, I thought. I just couldn’t take much interest in it’ – and he is positively venomous in his rejection of Molly Bloom: ‘one day I was given a piece from it about some woman in bed thinking the dirtiest thoughts that ever came into the human head. Pornography and filth and literary vomit [...] I blessed myself and put the thing in the fire’ (CN, 762–763). More than this, the James Joyce who appears in *The Dalkey Archive* is apparently undisturbed by being separated from his family by the war. He makes no mention of his wife Nora or his daughter Lucia, but he tells Mick two times that he’s been assured that his ‘son is safe’ (CN, 759, 760). In a nutshell, this fictional Joyce replicates his creator’s rejection of the world of women, dismissing Molly Bloom as ‘smutty’ and simply erasing Nora and Lucia altogether (CN, 763).

Such erasures may simply be the consequences of O’Nolan’s notorious misogyny. But rather than call his attitude toward women misogyny, it might be more appropriate to describe his anxiety at and aversion from, the female as something like the fear that arises from encountering an alien life form. Perhaps, like the de Selby of *The Third Policeman*, he is just unable to ‘distinguish between men and women’ and for both of them this failure expresses itself by their referring to all individuals as male (CN, 374).¹⁵ Or perhaps women were so remote from O’Nolan’s experience that it never occurs to him to ‘see’ them. For most of his existence, O’Nolan inhabited an intensely male world. Throughout his childhood and early adolescence, he and his two older brothers formed a separate set among the twelve O’Nolan children. When his parents eventually sent him to school, he went to boys’ institutions only and he seems to have circulated almost exclusively among males at the university. After his studies, he remained in the male-dominant realms of the civil service, editorial offices and pubs. His was a thoroughly homo-social existence and this fact, rather than scepticism about his heterosexuality, could explain the predominantly male worlds of his fiction.

Given his male-centred existence, O’Nolan’s occasional encounters with those alien life forms called women must have strengthened what has been called his Manichaeian worldview. It would seem inevitable that someone raised and living in almost entirely male environments, forming exclusively male relationships, would conceive of the next world in terms of the world he inhabits, as divided into two irreconcilable realms. As we have already seen, O’Nolan’s hell is an entirely male

domain. Presumably females go to a better place or are properly sequestered in a separate hell, 'in the end of the house' (CN, 418),¹⁶ as Bónapárt Ó Cúinasa might put it. Brian O'Nolan's Ireland and his conservative Roman Catholicism mixed with an unhealthy dose of Jansenism strongly reinforced such attitudes, breeding a misguided contempt for sexuality itself as essentially a masculine drive and promoting both fear of the sexual other and contempt for the sexual self in its young men. Judging from the alarmist literature on Ireland's declining population in the first half of the twentieth century, this breeding of contempt and self-contempt was the most productive breeding going on among the population. A typical example of this literature is *The Vanishing Irish* symposium, published in 1953, where one reads a common refrain among its several contributors: 'If the past century's rate of [population] decline continues for another century, the Irish will virtually disappear as a nation and will be found only as an enervated remnant in a land occupied by foreigners'.¹⁷ Although the sixteen contributors to *The Vanishing Irish* cite a number of cultural factors contributing to Ireland's shrinking population and several of them do not hesitate to cite the attacks of conservative Roman Catholic clergy on all types of mixed-sex socialising as a profound influence, the 'three outstanding causes' for population decline appear to them to be: '(1) emigration; (2) too few marriages; and (3) too late marriages'.¹⁸ Of these three factors, the second and third had grown to be the primary factor in the first, because vastly more young females than males were leaving Ireland. These young Irish women emigrated not only for employment, but also in search of marriage and family with less inhibited males, as several contributors note.¹⁹ The theme that thus recurs throughout *The Vanishing Irish* is that the men of Ireland, not the women, are the principal cause of the decline of the race. Although their motives may be economic as well as personal, in the estimation of several of the contributors to *The Vanishing Irish* and particularly the female contributors, far too many Irishmen are 'Marriage-shy' because they are 'Woman-shy'.²⁰ Reading almost like a case-study analysis of the late-marrying Brian O'Nolan's character and 'personal conflicts', the findings of *The Vanishing Irish* symposium suggest that O'Nolan may simply have been a typical Irish heterosexual male of his time and place.

But this may prove in the end to be a hollow reading of O'Nolan's possible psycho-sexual make-up, if one of the most entertaining of the

contributors to *The Vanishing Irish* volume, Maura Laverty, is to be trusted in her contention that the repressed homosexual may in fact *be* the typical Irish male of O’Nolan’s time. Laverty provides a contemporary view of the representative Irish man that matches the portrait of Brian O’Nolan presented earlier in this essay. Despite being herself happily married to an exceptional ‘full-blooded warmhearted’ man, Laverty spares little in her treatment of Irish males as generally ‘a race of men whose abhorrence of their Christian, social and racial duty [to propagate] has led them to persuade themselves that a natural impulse is an evil thing and that women are the devil’s handiwork’.²¹ The Irishman’s love of drink, she finds, is their favoured means for ‘deaden[ing] their natural impulses [. . .]. “Put an Irishman in a room [. . .] with a woman and two bottles of stout and he’ll choose the stout every time.” And by the time he has had his two bottles of stout, all he will ask from life is two bottles more’.²² ‘Although the years have brought me a certain amount of tolerance’, she adds, ‘I have not become deaf or blind or idiot and I know that in this Catholic country we have a shocking number of “queers”, too many of them practicing homosexuals, the others unconscious[ly]’ homosexual.²³ ‘To sum up’, Laverty concludes, ‘I would say that our male population today consists of [. . .] 60 per cent a mixed collection of what in various countries are known by various names. Here in Ireland, we call them “ould Mary Annes”’.²⁴ Does Brian O’Nolan belong in Laverty’s Irish male majority? There is no way to be certain and he himself might not have been sure, but one thing is clear: the only two females that achieve some role and the distinction of identity in the books that he wrote, as he ultimately came to terms with his ‘personal conflicts’, he has named Mary and Annie.

THE MURDERS OF FLANN O'BRIEN
 death and creation in *At Swim-Two-Birds*,
The Third Policeman, *An Béal Bocht* and
 'Two in One'

Jennika Baines

'He gave a cry and slumped forward. I hit him again. I rained blow after blow on him. Then I threw the tool away. I was upset' (*SF*, 85). Thus is the murder of a disagreeable taxidermist committed in Myles na Gopaleen's short story 'Two in One'. In that story, the murderer, a fellow taxidermist, peels and wraps himself in the skin of his victim in an attempt to fool others into thinking that no crime has been committed. This being a story by Myles na Gopaleen/Flann O'Brien, however, the twist is so surreal as to be disturbingly funny: the murderer is jailed for murdering himself, since that first character seems to have suspiciously disappeared.

This story was published in 1954, over ten years after the publication of the first three novels of Brian O'Nolan's career. There are clear similarities between this work and that of the younger novelist, especially as the later work relates to *The Third Policeman* (1967; written 1939–40). There is the tendency for inward multiplication as with Mathers's eyes within eyes or MacCruiskeen's boxes within boxes in *The Third Policeman* (*CN*, 239, 283–285). The narrator of 'Two in One' sits quite literally within another character: 'that night I was able to look into a glass and see Kelly looking back at me, perfect in every detail except for the teeth and eyes, which had to be my own but which I knew other people would never notice' (*SF*, 86). From within this narrator, too, comes the voice of every other character as all dialogue is provided through the narrator's voice rather than within direct quotes. This must have been a conscious choice from an author so skilled at capturing personalities through dialogue. In this way every character comes from within this murderous character, who sits within another character, who sits within a cell and waits for death.¹

Both *The Third Policeman* and 'Two in One' prioritise the murders and present themselves as tales of confession from the very start. And, to be sure, murder is also a prominent theme in the two novels written before and after *The Third Policeman*: there is the murder of the mad King Sweeny and the attempted murder of Trellis in *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), and there is the murder of the Galway man in *An Béal Bocht* (1941), which sentences the beleaguered Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa to a lifetime in jail. The murders in these first three novels transform those works into something more than comic. This transformation is most apparent in *The Third Policeman*. It is easy to see, for instance, how the murder of the narrator in *The Third Policeman* changes the book from a bleak, rural piece of realism to a fantastical narrative. The moment in which the bomb hidden beneath the floorboards explodes is the moment in which everything the narrator believes he is seeing, hearing and experiencing becomes unreal and impossible. This murder brings with it the blank forgetting, the misinterpretation, the repetition of ideas which come to form the structure of the novel as a whole.²

However, there is a fundamental difference between the way in which O'Nolan uses murder to convey notions of justice in 'Two in One' and in the earlier novels. In 'Two in One', the murderer is already imprisoned by a swift and reasonably efficient judicial system. The police have the right man, they just have him for the wrong reasons. Jails and policemen feature in both *The Third Policeman* and *An Béal Bocht*, but in O'Nolan's earlier novels, the notions of punishment and justice come from the novel itself – from the form and the length and the language. *At Swim-Two-Birds*, *The Third Policeman* and *An Béal Bocht* all feature murders as pivotal plot points, yet O'Nolan is not interested in the crime. Instead, he is focused on using the novel form itself as punishment. Ultimately, these murders are significant, because, unlike that in 'Two in One', they signal a move between the real and the fantastical.

Before his murder in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Sweeny recites melodious staves that are reflections on the harsh beauty of nature and the suffering torment of his experience. Of the versions of Sweeny in this novel, this first version is the most 'real' in that it is closest to the Sweeny of the original myth. His environment is the same, his crime and his punishment are the same, even some of the phrases and characters appear in both the original myth and O'Brien's novel. Sweeny creates

without the need for an audience, he recites his lays as a truth as real and vital as the trees and the water and the wind which make up his home. Sweeny is expressing torment, solitude, fear and loneliness and he uses the natural world as both inspiration and audience. In this way, Sweeny draws his inspiration from the world and sends it back out in the form of poetry. This genuine artistic expression creates a story which is absolutely true despite all of its wild impossibility. For O'Brien, Sweeny embodies truth in a narrative peopled with shams, imposters, plagiarisers and thieves. Declan Kiberd writes that readers must not

overlook the sense of Sweeny's lyrics as striking a single, pure note amidst a cacophony of false sounds and broken intervals. In it a man of real experience is impelled to pure utterance from the depths of his being. By contrast, all that modern literature can offer is an account of various 'classes of persons' marooned in acts of specialist self-love.³

But everything changes with his murder. Sweeny learns from the head-saint Moling that he is meant to die at 'House-Moling' and Moling bids him to return each night to him so that he can write Sweeny's story.

Your arrival here is surely welcome, Sweeny, he said, for it is destined that you should end your life here and leave the story of your history here and be buried in the churchyard there beyant. And I now bind you that, however much of Erin that you over-wander, you will come to me each evening the way I can write your story.
(CN, 87)

This saint, the first to record Sweeny's tale for retelling, immediately limits his freedom and also leads Sweeny to his 'death'. Within a paragraph Sweeny is murdered, stabbed from behind by Moling's cowherd as he sips milk from a pile of cow manure.

There is significance in the fact that Sweeny's murder comes immediately on the heels of his arrival at the place of Saint Moling, who is to bind Sweeny to return so that Moling might write his story down. There is significance, too, in the differences between J.G. O'Keeffe's 1913 bilingual edition of *Buile Suibhne*, which O'Nolan read and knew well and O'Brien's Sweeny. In O'Keeffe's translation, the death scene is an opportunity for Sweeny not only to lament the loss of life but also and perhaps more importantly, to receive the final sacraments and speak of his love for Christ.

To Thee, O Christ, I give thanks
 for partaking of Thy Body;
 sincere repentance in this world
 for each evil I have ever done.⁴

This collision of pagan myth with Christian morality is an important element of the Sweeny tale. But not so with O'Brien's Sweeny. This is not a story of redemption, but one of punishment and humiliation. The original Sweeny tale was adapted and manipulated to suit the purposes of Catholic proselytising. This tension of intent was considered by Seamus Heaney in his own translation of the Sweeny story:

[T]he literary imagination which fastened upon [Sweeny] as an image was clearly in the grip of a tension between the newly dominant Christian ethos and the older, recalcitrant Celtic temperament. The opening sections which recount the collision between the peremptory ecclesiastic and the sacral king and the closing pages of uneasy reconciliation set in St Moling's monastery, are the most explicit treatment of this recurrent theme.⁵

Yet despite O'Nolan's respect for the character and the tale, O'Brien adapts and manipulates Sweeny for his own very different purposes. These purposes become clear when Sweeny next appears after his murder. He falls from the thorny branches into the story of the Pooka and his retinue, who hope to commit a murder of their own – the murder of the author Trellis. When he reappears in the narrative of the characters making their way through the forest toward the birth of Orlick, Sweeny has been revised into a new version of the inspiration he once was. He is recognised instantly by the people's poet Jem Casey as someone – or something – of worth. 'Keep that bloody gun down, said Casey sharply, the voice that spoke was the voice of a bloody poet. By God I know a poet when I hear one. Hands off the poets' (CN, 123).

Sweeny descends upon the group like a reverie, transforming a chapter that had been almost entirely dialogue-based into one thick with images and descriptions that come in great waves of paragraphs upon the reader. Sentences are winding and evocative, filled with vivid images and rich language unlike that which comes before Sweeny's appearance with the group.

On the brink of night they halted to light faggots with a box of matches and continued through the tangle and the grasses with flaming brands above their heads until the night-newts and the

moths and the bats and the fellicaun-eeha had fallen in behind them in a gentle constellation of winking red wings in the flair of the fires, delightful alliteration. (CN, 128–129)

Sweeny's staves, once pure crystalline art, now descend likewise, landing with a final thump in this new reality.

In the tree of Cell Lughaidh,
it was our wish to be alone,
swift flight of swallows on the brink of summer –
take your hands away! (CN, 125)

After his murder, Sweeny has gone from Moling's courteous staves to Jem Casey's popular 'pomes' and Jem is glad to see him. But Shanahan, Lamont and the rest of the talkers and attention-seekers do not quite know what to make of the solitary artistic urge that Sweeny represents. The reverie breaks at the end of the chapter when the journey and also the time for inspiration and dreaming, has ended. The characters have arrived at their destination and the time has come to write Trellis out of the story.

The characters' efforts to put Trellis down, to write a story that will finally finish him off, are, however, agonisingly prolonged and nothing like the clean slicing spear that is a stave from Moling. The difficulty of this murder/creation is underscored by the student narrator's own interruption titled '*Note on Constructional or Argumentative Difficulty*'. The interpolation discusses his experience of trying to write Orlick's birth as one 'fraught with obstacles and difficulties of a technical, constructional, or literary character' (CN, 142–143). As Sweeny lingers sullenly with this group, bored and misunderstood, he loses his artistic integrity as his words become increasingly muddied by the coarse plot devices that surround him. And then, in a further descent, his final words in the story are completely false. Sweeny is transformed from the voice of authority speaking the truths of nature to a more mundane, more modern voice of authority: that of a judge of the court. Sweeny says to Trellis, 'You had better conduct yourself, Sir. Your arrogant bearing and your insolence have already been the subject of severe comment. Any further blackguardism will be summarily dealt with. Is it your intention to cross-examine this witness?' (CN, 199).

Sweeny, the inspired solitary artist, is gone. He has been reduced to a character more in keeping with the botched narrative of the trial. And then, Sweeny is murdered again. When the maid Theresa throws

Trellis's manuscript in the fire, Sweeny and the other characters ascend like tortured souls into the sky. Yet even this will not bring an end to Sweeny's torment as a character who is repeatedly, painfully called forth. Within a few pages Sweeny reappears in a tree again, waiting for the next bumbling writer, the next agonizing murderer, to demand that he come down: 'The eyes of the mad king upon the branch are upturned, whiter eyeballs in a white face, upturned in fear and supplication' (CN, 216).

The murder of Sweeny transforms him from a character who is real and genuine to something contrived and fantastical. With each reiteration, he becomes less real and more fantastical. Despite the flagrantly fantastical nature of the novel as a whole (or rather, as a conglomeration of parts) O'Brien makes clear that this move toward the fantastical is a descent. Whether from trees or from the ashes drifting in the sky, Sweeny descends into each new iteration with bone-crunching violence.

Just as the murder of Sweeny in *At Swim-Two-Birds* marks a major shift in the novel, so too does the murder which Bónapárt is convicted of committing in *An Béal Bocht*. That this murder should have such an effect on the narrative is surprising considering how omnipresent death is within Corca Dorcha. The heavily orchestrated *feis* ravages the community as its members dance, talk and drink themselves to death. 'During the course of the feis many died whose likes will not be there again and, had the feis continued a week longer, no one would be alive now in Corkadoragha in all truth' (CN, 444).⁶ The stench of the pig in the house drives Bónapárt's mother to attempt suicide, the shock of discovering Bónapárt moments after his unexpected birth nearly kills his father, even Bónapárt's wife and child are killed in what is perhaps the most unsettling moment in the novel. At the age of one year and one day old, Bónapárt's son, Lánardó (or Leonardo), seems suddenly to be dying.

His little face was grey and a destructive cough attacked his throat. I grew terrified when I could not calm the creature. I left him down on the grass and ran in to find my wife. What do you think but that I found her stretched out, cold in death on the rushes, her mouth wide open while the pigs snorted around her. When I reached Leonardo again in the place I had left him, he was also lifeless. He had returned whence he had come. (CN, 462)⁷

Both reader and narrator are ill-equipped to handle this sudden turn of events. Only a paragraph before there was a satirical drunken

celebration of the type that the reader had come to expect from this narrative. Any suffering which had appeared in the novel previous to this episode was exaggerated for comedic effect. These sudden, grotesque images of a young woman's gaping mouth among rooting pigs and a lifeless baby on the ground seem to be excerpts from another, darker novel. Or perhaps they are the vestiges of the poverty and misery that lie beneath the surface of the Gaeltacht autobiographies. The narrator, too, seems incapable of handling the tragedy. The chapter closes suddenly without any expression of personal grief or loss. Unlike Sweeney, Bónapárt cannot voice any real feelings.

This refusal to express personal grief seems to sit at odds with the narrator's compulsion to record his story in the face of the imminent extinction of his kind. Instead of expressing his grief as a natural response arising from an inherent humanity, the narrator reverts to superficial summaries and aphorisms. 'Here then, reader, is some evidence for you of the life of the Gaelic paupers in Corkadoragha and an account of the fate which awaits them from their first day. After great merriment comes sorrow and good weather never remains for ever' (CN, 462).⁸ With this, the chapter closes. There is no further mention of wife, or child, or grief. The reader is left with only meaningless stock phrases.

This text works against the definitions of the literary form it takes as its model: it is not written as an authentic, personal exploration of the writer's past. It does not exist as a truth for future readers to place within a larger context once they have the luxury of time and reflection. This is a work of self-conscious fiction rather than autobiography. The book becomes then more about the reader than it is about the life of the 'author'. One must even ask if Bónapárt is in any way individual within his community. With only slight variations of surname for all of the inhabitants of Corca Dorcha – Ó Cúnasa, Ó Lúnasa, Ó Bánasa, Ó Sánasa, Ó Pónasa – as the scene with the Draconian schoolteacher evidences, to the rest of the world they are all just 'Jams O'Donnell'. Bónapárt asks the Old-Grey-Fellow,

- Are you certain that the Gaels are people? said I.
- They've that reputation anyway, little noble, said he, but no confirmation of it has ever been received. (CN, 472)⁹

It soon becomes clear that the blame for the insubstantiality of their identities lies with the reader. One can see this by looking at the

forewords that Myles na gCopaleen created for the re-released editions of *An Béal Bocht*. The first is dated ‘*The Day of Want, 1941*’ (‘*Lá an Ghátair, 1941*’) and the second dated ‘*The Day of Doom, 1964*’ (‘*Lá an Luain, 1964*’). These two forewords by the supposed editor Myles na gCopaleen begin the text and explain that this is, in fact, an expurgated edition of the work. In the foreword composed on ‘*The Day of Want*’ Myles writes, ‘This document is exactly as I received it from the author’s hand except that much of the original matter has been omitted due to pressure of space and to the fact that improper subjects were included in it’ (CN, 409).¹⁰ Such bowdlerising was common practice. An Seabhac (Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha), who edited Tomás Ó Criomhthain’s *An t-Oileánach* (*The Islandman*, 1929), wrote in his introduction to the work that he had edited out some of its more unsavoury aspects. Similarly, in her preface to *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, Lady Gregory writes, ‘I left out a good deal of what I thought you would not care about for one reason or another, but I put in nothing of my own that could be helped, only a sentence or so now and again to link the different parts together’.¹¹ It may seem as though, as editor, Myles na gCopaleen is responsible for replacing Bónapárt’s human responses with hollow rhetoric, but in fact that responsibility lies with the reader. ‘Material will be available ten-fold if there is demand from the public for the present volume’, Myles writes in the foreword to the 1941 edition (CN, 409).¹² In the 1964 foreword, however, the editor laments that the public has allowed *An Béal Bocht* to remain out of print for many years. A fuller edition of the text was possible, but reader disinterest meant that it never appeared.

O’Nolan divides responsibility for the finished text among several parties: Bónapárt, the Gaelic community, the English-speaking society, editors, readers. The text that remains after this exchange of expectations is a manufactured amalgamation of codified language uttered by characters who are fully conceived before they are even introduced. The reader wants to encounter the language that Bónapárt will utter, but the character is merely a vehicle for the language, an afterthought. The murder that Bónapárt is wrongfully accused of committing is a tidy resolution to a plot which is hardly the focus of the narrative.

Bónapárt is very much a part of his literary community. He lives in the same type of house the others live in, speaks their language, eats the same meagre food. He exists in this text so that he can record the desperation of life in Corca Dorcha. So when his punishment arrives,

it comes in the form of the community. Bónapárt's downfall begins with his desire for the small comfort and dignity afforded by boots. It is not the boots, but rather the use of the English language, that brings about his punishment. Bónapárt has informed the reader that he has spoken a few English words earlier in his life. He tells the English inspector that his name is 'Jams O'Donnell' so that his family might get money for the English-speaking children in the cottage. This use of the English language was bidden. He was asked to perform a linguistic task and, ever the eager narrator, he did so. In buying the boots, though, he exhibited a linguistic agency that went beyond the demands of the text. Bónapárt is using language for his own gains, rather than for the benefit of his readers.

– And now, said I courteously, *bootsur!*

– *Boots?*

– *Bootsur!*

I do not know whether the fellow was either amazed or did not understand my English, but he stood for a long while gazing at me.

He then moved back and fetched many pairs of boots. (CN, 483)¹³

The police are alerted about the Islander who has pieces of gold with which to buy boots and Bónapárt is arrested for the murder of a Galway man and taken into custody. Bónapárt was called into being as a narrator for the benefit of Revival-minded readers, but this display of personal benefit goes beyond the interests of his readers. As Bónapárt becomes increasingly aware of how drastically his new environment differs from his old, he begins to lose control over the narrative. He is no longer navigating his way through a text that is so familiar that it can be taken as understood without further elaboration. Instead, he loses credibility as a narrator as his readers begin to understand his surroundings more than he does. We understand all of the contexts of the situation which he finds bewildering, from the confusing appearance before the white-wigged man who decides his fate to his first sighting of a train: 'I gazed with interest at the great coaches going by pushing big black objects ahead of them which were sniffing and coughing and emitting suffocating smoke' (CN, 487).¹⁴

Text and community are aligned in *An Béal Bocht* and in the final chapter Bónapárt uses his narration as an attempt to break beyond his community/text into the world of the English-speaking community/text. When Bónapárt encounters the judge, the train, the gentlefolk in

boots, he is unable to comprehend or express this world because it is not the world to which he is allowed access. The moment the story begins to deal with the world of the reader is the moment in which it shuts down and the text's imagined reader – that lethargic creature whom the editor Myles na gCopaleen laments – loses interest. The terms upon which this reader would come to this text are clear, the familiar rehashing of Gaelic memoirs, but when Bónapárt begins to break these terms, the text draws him to a close.

In Corca Dorcha, Bónapárt must live within the limited field of the Gael. This life is prescribed by the literature that defines it. It is a fixed repetition of stereotypes and clichés that propels itself forward on a perpetual cycle of punishment and suffering. The stability and predictability of this inner world is not only ever-present, it is intimidating. It is a monotone world of poverty and death. Creativity is stifled as the story is locked in place, unable to adapt with the times or develop an artistic vision that challenges the reader's ideal. However, outside of this Gaelic community there exists a world in flux. The metatextual realm of *An Béal Bocht* contains the editorial and framing forces of both the Myles na gCopaleen of *The Day of Want* and the Myles na gCopaleen of *The Day of Doom*. It also contains the foolish gaeligores, as well as the policemen who arrest innocent men, the real murderers of the man in Galway, the fickle readers who would demand a book that requires suffering and then allow it to go unread.

The moment in which Bónapárt is condemned during a trial which he neither understands nor takes part in comments directly on the injustices Gaelic speakers suffered under British rule. In a footnote, Myles na gCopaleen's translator Patrick Power mentions specifically the hanging of the Joyces in Dublin in 1882. They, too, were submitted to a court case in a language which they did not understand and which was not translated for them and subsequently were hanged for a crime they did not commit (CN, 495). Bónapárt's situation is shown to have its roots not in abstract concepts such as existential angst or God's punishment, but rather in a concrete, historical social situation. In moving beyond his community and beyond his text, Bónapárt discovers a 'real world' that is not governed by the rules of satire and hilarity. In tying *An Béal Bocht* into broader issues of Ireland and its history, O'Nolan gives the text a significance that goes beyond mere satire.

One of the effects of reading *An Béal Bocht* against *The Third Policeman* and *At Swim-Two-Birds* is that the reader comes to take the

surrealist or fantastical turns in these two texts more seriously. In both novels, there is such a heightened absurdity that it becomes difficult to place the violence within a proper context. With *An Béal Bocht*, though, the reader sees the root of O'Nolan's difficulty with reality. *An Béal Bocht* provides social and historical context for the representation of the absurd as it appears in the two earlier works. By facing the terror brought about by the Sea-Cat, the reader comes to understand how mythological figures can fall from modern trees or take part in farcical trials in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. By experiencing the way in which the characters accept the incessant rain and famine of Corca Dorcha, the reader can gaze with more authority out into the textual non-landscape of *The Third Policeman*.

In Bónapárt's foray beyond his community and, in a sense, beyond the text itself, *An Béal Bocht* furthers the themes that O'Nolan explores in the previous works. Bónapárt is forcefully taken from the repetitive suffering of his familiar world and placed in an unfamiliar world which is no longer comically absurd, but which has instead become an existential, Sartrean absurd. This links Bónapárt with the nameless narrator of *The Third Policeman* and even the beleaguered Sweeny of *At Swim-Two-Birds*. All three of O'Nolan's texts juxtapose a world that would appear to be normal against a world that is made ridiculous by its futility. And in all three works, the text operates as a physical manifestation of the futility against which O'Nolan's characters must struggle. How one views success in this struggle depends on how one regards these characters. Sweeny suffers, but one regards him as a hero because he knows the full extent of his suffering and carries on as a creator, whereas the nameless murdering narrator of *The Third Policeman* suffers without full awareness. With Bónapárt, however, the reader is meant to join in with the good time that can be had by laughing at him. As a narrator, Bónapárt struggles with both text and society. Eventually, these two indomitable forces join to obliterate him. As he turns to begin the jail sentence that means his annihilation as narrator, one must ask whether perhaps it was not so funny after all. One must ask who, in the end, is condemned.

To conclude, the act of murder in *At Swim-Two-Birds* transitions the reader from a Sweeny who is real to a Sweeny who is fantastical. This is similar to what happens in *The Third Policeman* because the narrative opens in a realistic mode, but becomes self-consciously fantastical after the murder of the narrator. *An Béal Bocht* inverts this

paradigm in many ways. It begins in a self-consciously contrived style, a style which wilfully distorts that of the supposedly accurate Gaeltacht biographies. But in *An Béal Bocht*, the murder brings with it a degree of reality. The murder gives the reader an awareness of a particular and real historical situation. The brutality and cruelty of this reality is so at odds with the fantastical narrative which has preceded it that the only response that *An Béal Bocht* can make is to come to an end.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

Editors' introduction

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- 3 Niall Sheridan, 'Brian, Flann and Myles', in Rüdiger Imhof (ed.), *Alive Alive O!: Flann O'Brien's At Swim-Two-Birds* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1985), p. 80.
- 4 Jorge Luis Borges, 'When Fiction Lives in Fiction', in *The Total Library: Non-Fiction: 1922–1986*, Eliot Weinberger (ed.), Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine and Eliot Weinberger (trans.) (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 162.
- 5 Letter from O'Nolan to Ethel Mannin, 14 July 1939, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, File No. 133.
- 6 Graham Greene, 'Reader's Report on *At Swim-Two-Birds* for Longmans Green Ltd.', reprinted in Imhof (ed.), *Alive-Alive O!*, p. 41.
- 7 O'Nolan's agent, Patience Ross of A.M. Heath & Co., wrote to the author with the news of Longman's rejection on 11 March 1940, quoting their stated reasons directly: 'we realise the author's ability but think that he should become less fantastic and in this novel he is more so' (qtd. in Cronin, 101).
- 8 That the issue of inheritance weighed heavily on the work and its author can be seen in the subtitle of the first collected edition of the column: *Cruiskeen Lawn: Extracts from the Daily Labours of the Wise Man Myles na gCopaleen Presented here Safe from Extinction and Eternal Loss through the Kindly Leave of the Persons Conducting The Irish Times* (Dublin: Cahill & Co., 1942).
- 9 Representative of this emerging view, Carol Taaffe argues that 'as a sprawling mass of comic writing that defies easy classification, *Cruiskeen Lawn* is unique in modern Irish writing and can have few parallels elsewhere' (205).
- 10 Kenner, p. 262.
- 11 Sue Asbee, *Flann O'Brien* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1991), pp. 126–129. See also Rüdiger Imhof, 'Chinese Box: Flann O'Brien in the Metafiction of Alasdair Gray, John Fowles and Robert Coover', *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 25, no. 1, Spring 1990, pp. 64–79; and Jaye Berman Montresor, 'Gilbert Sorrentino: At Swim in the Wake of His Gene Pool', *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2, Spring 1993, pp. 4–12.

- 12 Kimberly Bohman-Kalaja, *Reading Games: An Aesthetics of Play in Flann O'Brien, Samuel Beckett and Georges Perec* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2007); Thomas F. Shea, 'Patrick McGinley's Impressions of Flann O'Brien: *The Devil's Diary* and *At Swim-Two-Birds*', *Twentieth-Century Literature*, vol. 40, no. 2, Summer 1994, pp. 272–281; Joseph Brooker, "'That Carrousel Inside and Outside My Head": Flann O'Brien and *Pale Fire*' (*RCF*, 120–133); Mark O'Connell, "'How to handle eternity": Infinity and the Theories of J.W. Dunne in the Fiction of Jorge Luis Borges and Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*', *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2009, pp. 223–237. For a complementary comparative reading of O'Nolan and Borges, see Colm Tóibín, 'Flann O'Brien's Lies', *London Review of Books*, vol. 34, no. 1, 5 January 2012, pp. 32–36.
- 13 Timothy O'Keeffe (ed.), *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan* (London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1973); Anne Clissmann, *Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to his Writings* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975); Imhof (ed.), *Alive-Alive O!*. See also Anne Clune [Clissmann] and Tess Hurson (eds), *Conjuring Complexities: Essays on Flann O'Brien* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1997).
- 14 Breandán Ó Conaire, *Myles na Gaeilge: lámhleabhar ar shaothar Gaeilge Bhrian Ó Nualláin* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar Teo, 1986).
- 15 M. Keith Booker, *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin and Menippean Satire* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995).
- 16 Keith Donohue, *The Irish Anatomist: A Study of Flann O'Brien* (Dublin: Maunsel, 2002); Joseph Brooker, *Flann O'Brien* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2005). Readings of Myles against his cultural context have also been aided by an increased amount of biographical tools at the scholar's disposal, including Anthony Cronin, *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien* (London: Grafton, 1989) and Peter Costello and Peter van de Kamp, *Flann O'Brien: An Illustrated Biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987). Two memoirs by O'Nolan's brothers have also offered more personal insight in this regard; see Ciarán Ó Nualláin, *Óige an dearthár .i. Myles na gCopaleen* (Baile Átha Cliath: Foilseacháin Náisiúnta Teoranta, 1973), translated into English as *The Early Years of Brian O'Nolan/Flann O'Brien/Myles na gCopaleen*, Niall O'Nolan (ed.), Róisín Ní Nualláin (trans.) (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1998); and Micheál Ó Nualláin, *The Brother (Myles)* (Dublin: Micheál Ó Nualláin, 2011).
- 17 Asbee, *Flann O'Brien*; Thomas F. Shea, *Flann O'Brien's Exorbitant Novels* (London: Associated University Presses, 1992).
- 18 Roberta Ferrari, *La scrittura come travestimento dell'io: La narrativa di Flann O'Brien* (Pisa: ETS, 1995); Monique Gallagher, *Flann O'Brien, Myles na Gopaleen et les autres: masques et humeurs de Brian O'Nolan, fou-littéraire irlandais* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1998); Ralf Zimmermann, *Das Verschwinden der Wirklichkeit: Über Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Kreativität in Flann O'Briens At Swim-Two-Birds und The Third Policeman* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999); Jürgen Meyer, *Allegorien des 'The Third Policeman' und Friedrich Dürrenmatts "Durcheinandertal" als ironische Kosmographien* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2001); Christian Schuldt, *Selbstbeobachtung und die Evolution des Kunstsystems: Literaturwissenschaftliche Analysen zu Laurence Sternes 'Tristram*

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- 21 Jennika Baines (ed.), *'Is it about a bicycle?': Flann O'Brien in the Twenty-First Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011).
- 22 Neil Murphy and Keith Hopper (eds), *Flann O'Brien: Centenary Essays, The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 31, no. 3, Fall 2011 (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011).
- 23 Indeed, a number of our contributions engage in fruitful dialogue with the articles in Baines's and Murphy/Hopper's collections, as when Jack Fennell updates Samuel Whybrow's article on 'Flann and Science Fiction' and Val Nolan's 'Flann, Fantasy and Science Fiction' by introducing O'Nolan's early Gaelic short stories into the conversation of his negotiations of science fiction; when Ondřej Pilný expands upon Anthony Adams's explorations of pataphysics and steampunk in *The Third Policeman* by more rigorously analysing the ideological content in the parallels between O'Nolan's project and that of Alfred Jarry; or when Neil Murphy takes up Adrian Naughton's cue to explore O'Nolan's position in the Gaelic canon by considering *An Béal Bocht* as a pioneer of Gaelic postmodernism. See Samuel Whybrow, 'Flann O'Brien's Science Fiction: An 'Illusion of Progression in *The Third Policeman*' (Baines, 127–141); Val Nolan, 'Flann, Fantasy and Science Fiction: O'Brien's Surprising Synthesis' (*RCF*, 178–190); Anthony Adams, 'Butter-Spades, Footnotes and Omnium: *The Third Policeman* as 'Pataphysical Fiction' (*RCF*, 106–119); and Adrian Naughton, '*Nádúir-Fhíliocht na Gaedhilge* and Flann O'Brien's Fiction' (Baines, 83–97).
- 24 Booker, p. 139.
- 25 *ibid.*

1. Hopper: 'John Duffy's Brother'

- 1 Eoghan Nolan, unpublished screenplay of *John Duffy's Brother*, adapted from the original short story by Flann O'Brien (dir. Mikel Murfi, prod. AnneMarie Naughton; Ireland: Park Films, 2006), 14 mins.
- 2 The provenance of 'Naval Control' remains unproven.
- 3 See Myles na Gopaleen, *O'Dea's Yer Man*, episode one, 'The Meaning of Malt' (*PT* 417–422).
- 4 For a more detailed discussion of 'A Bash in the Tunnel' and its place in O'Nolan studies, see Neil Murphy and Keith Hopper, 'Editors' Introduction: A(nother) Bash in the Tunnel' (*RCF*, 9–20).
- 5 J.C.C. Mays, 'Brian O'Nolan and Joyce on Art and Life', *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 3, Spring 1974, p. 243.
- 6 Anne Clissmann, *Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), p. 266.

- 7 In an email to the present author (31 October 2008), the screenwriter Eoghan Nolan wrote: ‘Adapting Flann O’Brien, or certainly adapting this story, presented some unique difficulties. O’Brien’s language, his wordplay and relish of grand description, his elegant vernacular phrasing, is his hallmark. So much of this story is in the telling that the screenplay is certainly faithful to the original – it was an effort for me to augment without attempting to imitate. His voice is an inextricable part of this story so it was always going to have a rich voiceover’. I am grateful to Eoghan Nolan for answering my queries and for providing me with a copy of his screenplay.
- 8 Margot Norris, ch. 11 ‘Shocking the Reader in “A Painful Case”’, in *Suspicious Readings of Joyce’s Dubliners* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), pp. 158–171.
- 9 For discussions of O’Nolan’s supposed ‘anxiety of influence’ in relation to Joyce, see Joseph Browne, ‘Flann O’Brien: Post Joyce or Propter Joyce?’, *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 19, no. 4, Winter 1984, pp. 148–157; David Cohen, ‘James Joyce and the Decline of Flann O’Brien’, *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 22, no. 2, Summer 1987, pp. 153–160; William M. Chace, ‘Joyce and Flann O’Brien’, *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 22, no. 4, Winter 1987, pp. 140–152; Ronald L. Dotterer, ‘Flann O’Brien, James Joyce and *The Dalkey Archive*’, *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 8, no. 2, Summer 2004, pp. 54–63; Lucas Harriman, ‘Flann O’Brien’s Creative Betrayal of Joyce’, *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 14, no. 4, Winter 2010, pp. 90–109.
- 10 Flann, O’Brien, ‘John Duffy’s Brother’, *Irish Digest*, June 1940, pp. 69–73.
- 11 Flann O’Brien, ‘John Duffy’s Brother’, *Story: The Magazine of the Short Story*, vol. 19, no. 90, July–August 1941, pp. 65–68. As Anne Clissmann records, ‘in 1939 William Saroyan had visited Ireland and had become acquainted with O’Nolan. Saroyan tried to persuade O’Nolan to renew the attempt to have *At Swim-Two-Birds* published in the USA. [. . .] Saroyan’s agents in New York, Matson & Duggan, were not willing to promote *At Swim*, but they did find a publisher for [. . .] “John Duffy’s Brother” (p. 21). In their ‘Biographical Notes’ for contributors, the editors of *Story* magazine, Whit Burnett and Martha Foley, wrote: ‘Flann O’Brien is a discovery of William Saroyan’s but further than that, at this moment, we know nothing except that he is not William Saroyan’ (p. 2). Between 1931 and 1967, *Story* magazine published many distinguished debuts from writers such as J.D. Salinger, Joseph Heller and Tennessee Williams. See ‘Archives of *Story* Magazine and Story Press, 1931–1999’, Princeton University Manuscripts Division, Princeton <<http://findingaids.princeton.edu/collections/C0104#description>> (20 September 2013).
- 12 Alberto Manguel (ed.), *Black Water: The Anthology of Fantastic Literature* (London: Picador, 1983), pp. 371–376.
- 13 See Murphy and Hopper, ‘A Note on the Texts’ (*SF*, xi–xii).
- 14 Flann O’Brien, ‘John Duffy’s Brother’, complete typescript (undated), box 3, folder 18, Flann O’Brien Collection, Archives and Manuscripts, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.
- 15 ‘John Duffy’s Brother, by Flann O’Brien, 1,000 words, 2.12.1938’, ‘Brian O’Nolan papers, 1914–1966’, Special Collections Research Centre, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

- 16 James Joyce, *Dubliners*, Terence Brown (ed.) (New York, NY: Penguin, 1992), p. 103.
- 17 Thomas F. Shea, 'Flann O'Brien and John Keats: "John Duffy's Brother" and Train Allusions', *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 24, no. 2, Summer 1989, p. 113fn.
- 18 *ibid.*, pp. 109–110.
- 19 *ibid.*, p. 110.
- 20 *ibid.*, p. 109.
- 21 *ibid.*, p. 111.
- 22 'Periphrasis', *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/periphrasis>> (20 September 2013).
- 23 Fans of Myles na gCopaleen's will be familiar with the figures of Keats and Chapman from a long-running series of articles in *Cruiskeen Lawn* that first began in 1940 (the same year that 'John Duffy's Brother' was published). This comic series had its origins in Myles's telling of how Chapman brought a sick pigeon to his friend Keats. After Keats cured the ailing bird – by removing a piece of champagne cork that was lodged in its throat – he immediately sat down and wrote his sonnet, 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' (*CL*, 7 December 1940, p. 8).
- 24 As Clive Wilmer notes: 'The force and beauty of this sestet are partly due to what might for a moment be thought a loss of focus. The figure of voyaging, so appropriate to a poem about the *Odyssey*, is briefly supplanted by a figure from astronomy, only to be resumed almost at once. [. . .] But the close reader will then notice that the 'peak in Darien' is not so much a resumption of the voyaging image as a further departure from it. The adventurousness of the human mind is no longer satisfied by the islands of the Aegean. It is now ready to contemplate infinite spaces – the solar system and the oceans. Cortez, moreover, is no longer voyaging. He is on the contrary immersed in contemplation'; Clive Wilmer, 'Forth he came' [review of *The Cambridge History of English Poetry*, Michael O'Neill (ed.)], *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 March 2011, p. 8.
- 25 John Keats, *The Complete Works of John Keats, Volume 1*, Harry Buxton Forman (ed.) (New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell and Company, 1817), p. 47. The final lines of Keats's sonnet, though memorable, are factually inaccurate. As Miriam Allott notes, it was Balboa who 'first' saw the Pacific, not Cortez: Keats had been reading William Robertson's *The History of America* (1777) and apparently confused two scenes described there (Balboa's discovery of the Pacific and Cortez's first view of Mexico City); John Keats, *The Poems of John Keats*, Miriam Allott (ed.) (London: Longman, 1980), p. 62, fn. 31. Ultimately, Keats remembered the image rather than the historical fact.
- 26 Shea, p. 113.
- 27 *ibid.*, p. 115.
- 28 *ibid.*
- 29 Sue Asbee, *Flann O'Brien* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1991), p. 122.
- 30 John Keats, letter to George and Tom Keats, 22 December 1817, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–1821, Volume 1*, Hyder Edward Rollins (ed.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 193.

- 31 Nathan A. Scott Jr., *Negative Capability: Studies in the New Literature and the Religious Situation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), p. xiv.
- 32 Asbee, p. 120.
- 33 *ibid.*, p. 122.
- 34 Mikel Murfi, email to the present author (15 October 2008).
- 35 Alberto Manguel, headnote to 'John Duffy's Brother', *Black Water*, p. 371.
- 36 Shannon Tivnan, 'Counterfeit Goods in Flann O'Brien's "John Duffy's Brother"', *The Explicator*, vol. 68, no. 4, 2010, pp. 270–271.
- 37 Significantly, the image of the telescope reappears in 'John Duffy's Brother'.
- 38 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Text, Criticism and Notes*, Chester G. Anderson (ed.) (New York, NY: Viking, 1968), p. 13.
- 39 James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Declan Kiberd (introd.) (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 893–894.
- 40 See my ch. 2 "Is it about a bicycle?": Censorship, Sex and the Metonymic Code' (Hopper, 47–90).
- 41 J.K. Huysmans, *À Rebours [Against Nature]*, Robert Baldrick (trans.) (London: Penguin, 1959), p. 44.
- 42 Andrea Bobotis, 'Queering Knowledge in Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*', *Irish University Review*, vol. 32, no. 2, Autumn/Winter 2002, p. 248.
- 43 Interestingly, one Irish blogger has speculated that the very title, 'A Bash in the Tunnel', is 'an overlooked piece of acerbic *dinnseanchas* (etymological lore) [. . .] meant to be a derogatory reference to Joyce as a homosexual and the rest of the story is a sleight of hand to distract the reader'. See John Ó Néill, ' . . . if University education were universally available and availed of, the country would collapse in one generation', *Sluggor O'Toole* (31 March 2011) <<http://sluggerotoole.com/2011/03/31/if-university-education-were-universally-available-and-availed-of-the-country-would-collapse-in-one-generation/>> (20 September 2013).
- 44 Qtd. in Michael Adams, *Censorship: The Irish Experience* (Dublin: Scepter Books, 1968), p. 250.
- 45 See Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 3–4.
- 46 Karl Kraus, *Half-Truths and One-and-a-Half Truths: Selected Aphorisms*, Harry Zohn (ed. and trans.) (Manchester: Carcanet, 1986), p. 62.
- 47 See Bernard Share, *Slanguage: A Dictionary of Slang and Colloquial English in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2003), p. 312; and Seán Beecher, *A Dictionary of Cork Slang* (Cork: Collins Press, 1991), p. 93.
- 48 Norris, p. 167.
- 49 *ibid.*, pp. 158–159.
- 50 *ibid.*, p. 166.
- 51 *ibid.*, p. 167.

2. Fennell: Brian O'Nolan's science fiction

- 1 Qtd. in Samuel Whybrow, 'Flann O'Brien's Science Fiction: An "Illusion of Progression" in *The Third Policeman*' (Baines, 129).
- 2 It should be stated, however, that this is not what Manichaeans actually believed. In Manichaean philosophy, Good and Evil exist in separate, equally-powerful realms,

- while our universe, which was created as a consequence of the war between Darkness and Light, is a mixture of both. The matter of our universe was taken from the bodies of dark beings killed during their assault on the World of Light, while the small traces of spirit in our world can be attributed to the Light these creatures swallowed before they were killed. The world is ‘fallen’ not because Light was defeated, but because it is a material realm – the physical substance of it is ‘Dark’. F. Crawford Burkitt, ‘The Religion of the Manichees’, *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1922, pp. 263–276.
- 3 Padraic Ó Conaire, ‘Páipéar a Frithadh i mBosca’, *Connacht Tribune*, 29 May 1926, p. 3.
 - 4 Barra Ó Caochlaigh, ‘An Tost’, in *An Tost agus Sgéalta Eile* (Baile Átha Cliath: Alex Thom; Oifig an tSoláthair, 1927), pp. 31–45.
 - 5 Another potential science-fiction short story by O’Nolan was published in the Winter 1932 issue of the seminal American ‘pulp science fiction’ magazine, *Amazing Stories*. Written by the (seemingly) pseudonymous ‘John Shamus O’Donnell’, ‘Naval Control’ is narrated by a widower who befriends a mad Irish scientist. The scientist, Egan, creates a robotic double of the narrator’s deceased saintly wife, but things do not go according to plan; John Shamus O’Donnell, ‘Naval Control’, *Amazing Stories Quarterly* [Chicago], vol. 5, no. 1, Winter 1932, 141–143 (reprinted in *SF*, 150–156). Though it may never be possible to conclusively prove whether or not O’Nolan wrote the short story, there are enough traces of ‘Jams O’Donnell’ in ‘John Shamus O’Donnell’ to provide food for thought and hopefully to stimulate discussion on the breadth of the ‘Flann Canon’.
 - 6 ‘Caithfidh tú cúig sgilling a dhíol ar an hata seo,’ ar seisean, ag tarraingt aníos hata úr as íochtar an mála. Dhíol mé an t-airgead gan briathar asam, agus thug sé admháil dom; dhearc mé air, agus chuir an dáta cinéal iongantais orm – 12-2-2032. ‘Shaoil mé,’ arsa mise, ‘gur b’ é an t-aonmhadh lá déag a bhí ann’.
 - 7 ‘Branch-a Mapaíochta & Survey-reachta’ is a cod-Gaelicization of ‘Maps and Surveys Branch’. It is an example of ‘Béarlachas’, a hybrid form derided among native speakers of Gaelic.
 - 8 Marc Angenot, ‘The Absent Paradigm: An Introduction to the Semiotics of Science Fiction’, *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1979, p. 17.
 - 9 Darko Suvin, ‘Science Fiction and the Novum’, in Darko Suvin (ed.), *Defined By a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction and Political Epistemology* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 68.
 - 10 *ibid.*, p. 76.
 - 11 Whybrow astutely describes *The Third Policeman* as a blend of science fiction, the absurd and the literary, but only to the extent that O’Nolan is perhaps ironically appropriating structural elements from ‘a disreputable and personally abhorred genre’, while eschewing any attempts at prediction or extrapolation (pp. 131–133).
 - 12 Jeffrey Mathewes, ‘The Manichaeon Body in *The Third Policeman*: or Why Joe’s Skin Is Scaly’, *The Scriptorium: Flann O’Brien*, 2005, p. 10 <www.themodernword.com/scriptorium/obrien_mathewes.pdf> (3 February 2014).
 - 13 *ibid.*, p. 9.
 - 14 Everett F. Bleiler, *Science-Fiction: The Gernsback Years: A Complete Coverage of the*

- Genre Magazines Amazing, Astounding, Wonder and Others from 1926 through 1936* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1998), pp. 10–11; 62; 82–83; 177; 275; 318; 502–503.
- 15 *ibid.*, pp. 31–32; 36–37; 233; 520.
- 16 Jennika Baines, “‘Un-Understandable Mystery’: Catholic Faith and Revelation in *The Third Policeman*” (*RCF*, 79).
- 17 *ibid.*, p. 80.
- 18 Charles Kemnitz, ‘Beyond the Zone of Middle Dimensions: A Relativistic Reading of *The Third Policeman*’, *Irish University Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, Spring 1985, pp. 56–72.
- 19 See Mark O’Connell, “‘How to handle eternity’: Infinity and the Theories of J.W. Dunne in the Fiction of Jorge Luis Borges and Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman*”, *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2009, pp. 223–237.
- 20 J.W. Dunne, *An Experiment With Time*, 2nd edn (London: A&C Black, 1929), pp. 29–55.
- 21 *ibid.*, p. 43.
- 22 *ibid.*, p. 54.
- 23 J.W. Dunne, *The Serial Universe* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), pp. 38–49.
- 24 *ibid.*, pp. 29–37.
- 25 This kind of ‘religious rationalism’ does not, however, disqualify a text as science fiction. If the author sees the divine as an objective element of his or her empirical environment, it cannot be excluded as an object of cognition. Hence, C.S. Lewis’s ‘Space Trilogy’ novels – *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943) and *That Hideous Strength* (1945) – are considered to be science fiction even though they make frequent use of religious logic and mystical symbolism.
- 26 Carlos Villar Flor, ‘Flann O’Brien: A Postmodernist Who Happens to Be a Thomist’ (*RCF*, 62).
- 27 St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York, NY: Benziger Brothers, 1947), Question 10, Articles 1–6.
- 28 Flann O’Brien, ‘The Saint and I’, *The Guardian*, 19 January 1966, p. 9.
- 29 The manifestations of this divine retribution included kidney failure; a broken leg; sycosis (‘barber’s rash’); the theft of the manuscript and ‘several files of correspondence’ by a young visitor; pleurisy; the destruction in a fire of the first consignment of typed proofs; an abscess in the middle ear, later diagnosed as neuralgia; cancer; and ‘generalised anaemia’ (*ibid.*).
- 30 *ibid.*
- 31 Mathewes, p. 23. This sense of a looming theological threat is further evidenced by the dedication of *The Dalkey Archive* to O’Nolan’s Guardian Angel, ‘impressing upon him/ that I’m only fooling/ and warning him/ to see to it that/ there is no misunderstanding/ when I go home’ (*CN*, 610).
- 32 The character’s name is given a lowercase ‘de’ in *The Third Policeman* and an uppercase ‘De’ in *The Dalkey Archive*.
- 33 Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 46.
- 34 *ibid.*, p. 55.

- 35 *ibid.*, p. 63.
 36 *ibid.*, p. 71.
 37 *ibid.*, p. 83.
 38 *ibid.*, p. 89.
 39 *ibid.*, p. 179.
 40 Angenot, p. 16.
 41 Val Nolan, 'Flann, Fantasy and Science Fiction: O'Brien's Surprising Synthesis' (*RCF*, 181).
 42 *ibid.*, pp. 178, 183.
 43 It appears that it was this desire that drove O'Nolan's fascination with the religion of Mani, reputed to be a rational, logical belief system without any of the mystery that defined Roman Catholicism: in Baines's words, 'Manichaeism presented a system in which faith fits into reason'; Baines, 'Un-Understandable Mystery', p. 79.
 44 *ibid.*, p. 80.
 45 Mathewes, p. 17.
 46 The followers of Pelagius believed that the sin of Adam and Eve was not transmitted to their offspring; in rejecting the existence of Original Sin, the Pelagians were directly opposed to the teachings of Augustine.

3. Quirici: The frame device in the short fiction

- 1 See, for instance, Philip John Moore Sturgess, ch. 9 'Narrative Depotism and Metafictional Mastery: The Case of Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*', in *Narrativity: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 235–259.
 2 M. Keith Booker, *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin and Menippean Satire* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 122. The scholars Booker references are A.A. Mendilow, *Time and the Novel* (New York, NY: Humanities Press, 1972), p. 227; Jerome Klinkowitz, 'At Swim-Two-Birds by Flann O'Brien', *The New Republic*, vol. 173, nos. 7 & 8, August 1975, p. 31; Sue Asbee, *Flann O'Brien* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1991), pp. 124–126; and José Lanter, 'Fiction Within Fiction: The Role of the Author in Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman*', *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1983, p. 268. Booker's conflation of metafiction with postmodernism is borrowed from Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1996).
 3 'Tá na nithe atá luaite agam sa scríbhinn seo á gcur agam ann de bhí go bhfuil an saol eile ag druidim liom go sciobtha' (*ABB* 9).
 4 Anne Clissmann, *Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), pp. 76–77. Clissmann references Niall Sheridan's claim that he reduced the manuscript of *At Swim-Two Birds* by one third. According to Cronin, 'the excision [was] of about a fifth' (85).
 5 *CL*, 11 May 1942, p. 2.
 6 For Clissmann, *At Swim-Two-Birds* is a 'book-web', a network of complex linkages and ruptures between four narratives: 'We have then, three books in all: the narrator's book about Trellis, Trellis's book about sin and Orlick Trellis's book about his father. If we add O'Brien's book about the narrator and his mind we have four narratives, one within the other' (pp. 84–85). Kimberly Bohman-Kalaja uses

Clissmann's topology of *At Swim-Two-Birds* as the foundation for a spatially articulated portrayal of O'Brien as a play theorist. Bohman-Kalaja reads the novel's narrative levels through Roger Caillois's four categories of play, arguing that through this process, 'nuanced formal devices emerge in bas-relief to reveal a previously invisible structural foundation'; Kimberly Bohman-Kalaja, 'The truth is an odd number: *At Swim-Two-Birds*' (Baines, 51).

- 7 For more on the Chinese-box analogy, see Rüdiger Imhof, 'Chinese Box: Flann O'Brien in the Metafiction of Alasdair Gray, John Fowles and Robert Coover', *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 25, no. 1, Spring 1990, pp. 64–79; Asbee, p. 19; Hopper, 113, 117, 128, 145 and 185. In contrast, Thomas F. Shea insists that 'the image of a Chinese box structure falsely tames the wildness of the text'; *Flann O'Brien's Exorbitant Novels* (London: Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 58.
- 8 Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (eds), *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), p. 128.
- 9 *ibid.*, p. 130.
- 10 While 'The Martyr's Crown' was published under 'Brian Nolan', *Envoy* footnoted this byline with the clarification '*Myles na gCopaleen', attesting to the popularity of *Cruiskeen Lawn* while outing its anonymous columnist.
- 11 The title, 'For Ireland Home and Beauty', corresponds to the story's original parody not only of pub storytellers, but also more specifically of aging Irish patriots. A play on the phrase 'For England Home and Beauty', from the song 'The Death of Nelson', the title may allude to James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). In the 'Circe' episode of Joyce's novel, Leopold Bloom proposes a toast: 'Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Ireland, home and beauty'; James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Declan Kiberd (introd.) (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 574; Donald Gifford, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), p. 265. 'The Death of Nelson' references every man doing his duty: Mr Cullen's tale reminds us: every woman has a duty as well.
- 12 Although 'For Ireland Home and Beauty' is included as an appendix in *SF*, 138–145, this essay engages with the version that resides at Boston College: Brian O'Nolan/Flann O'Brien, 'For Ireland Home and Beauty' (1940), Series 2: Original manuscripts/typescripts, box 4, folder 1, Flann O'Brien Collection, Archives and Manuscripts, John J. Burns Library, Boston College. The Boston College typescript is cleaner and appears to be a later fair copy than the Carbondale draft reproduced by Murphy and Hopper. It is, in effect, a version of the story the author may have considered more or less 'finished' as opposed to a working draft. For the reader's convenience, references here will include both the Boston College typescript and the *SF* version. 'For Ireland Home and Beauty', p. 1; *SF*, 138.
- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 'For Ireland Home and Beauty', p. 9; *SF*, 145.
- 15 'For Ireland Home and Beauty', p. 7; *SF*, 144.
- 16 O'Nolan himself was no stranger to the view of writing as an economically motivated endeavour. He wrote in a letter to William Saroyan on 7 September 1940, '*Gone With the Wind* keeps me awake at night sometimes – I mean, the quantity of

- potatoes earned by the talented lady novelist'; Robert Hogan and Gordon Henderson (eds), 'A Sheaf of Letters', *Journal of Irish Literature*, vol. 3, no.1, January 1974, p. 73.
- 17 Cronin records four conflicting accounts that O'Nolan generated about the 'lost' manuscript after its rejection (102).
 - 18 Cronin writes, 'he had already begun to dislike the book [*The Third Policeman*], probably as a result of rejection. He wanted to take out the character Joe, the Voice of Conscience; and he came to believe that the whole thing would be better recast and presented as a third-person narrative' (101–102).
 - 19 Shea describes the implications of the alteration of the manuscript of *The Dalkey Archive* (1964) from the first person to the third: 'His deliberately inconsistent self-consciousness moves the reader through contrapositive modes of encountering a text and his pervasive parody of his own and other narrators' methods affords us the proper perspective from which to view this pseudo-*bildungsroman*' (p. 153).
 - 20 For more on O'Nolan's negotiations of the climate of censorship, see Taaffe, 52–58 and Hopper, 48–52. Taaffe delineates the collusion, in O'Nolan's perspective, between literary 'filth' and literary pretensions (52–53). Hopper argues that O'Nolan's writings are marked by his efforts to circumvent censorship 'through imaginative processes of invention, euphemism and circumlocution, or by resorting to encoded metonymic discourses which allegorically substitute signifying symbols for what is forbidden' (51).
 - 21 As Donal Ó Drisceoil confirms, the line for which *The Land of Spices* was banned reads, 'She saw her father and Etienne, in the embrace of love'; "'The Best Banned in the Land": Censorship and Irish Writing Since 1950', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 35, 2005, p. 149.
 - 22 See, for example, 'The Mart of Ideas', *The Bell*, vol. 4, no. 3, June 1942, pp. 153–157; and 'The Plain People of Ireland', *The Bell*, vol. 7, no. 1, Oct. 1943, pp. 1–7.
 - 23 The inscribed book now resides in the James Joyce Collection in the Poetry Collection, University at Buffalo.

4. Fagan: 'John Duffy's Brother', 'Two in One', and Narcissus

- 1 Ruben Borg, *The Measureless Time of Joyce, Deleuze and Derrida* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 61.
- 2 This claim clearly prioritises *The Third Policeman* (1967; written 1939–40) as the epitome of O'Nolan's project; however, it will be this essay's work to make the case that this narcissistic scene underpins O'Nolan's broader poetics in its conception of both the self and of the literary event. If the unnamed de Selby scholar's afterlife of doublings, misrecognitions and unfolding selves under the torturous guardianship of the Parish policemen is echoed in de Selby's many experiments with the *droste effect* – in which the philosopher both reimagines and resituates himself and the world through a system of mirrors – then these concerns and strategies are also echoed in the mirroring genre of Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa's memoir *An Béal Bocht* (1941). As M. Keith Booker notes, in writing the self Ó Cúnasa not only 'becomes a double of his father', but also comes to reference himself through the imposed name of Jams O'Donnell, in a way that is 'truly double-voiced', until this decentred

self is placed under the wardship of the police; M. Keith Booker, *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin and Menippean Satire* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), pp. 144, 76. Likewise, if *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) is an obvious point of reference for Linda Hutcheon's study of 'Narcissistic Narrative', then Myles's *Cruiskeen Lawn* column is no less paradigmatic of the writer's thematic and formal concern with the tropes of narcissism; Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), pp. 18, 26, 45. A particularly resonant instance from the column is the occasion upon which Myles reports a recent pub-crawl he had enjoyed with five versions of himself until the goodwill among his 'intoxicated selves' began to dissolve. The columnist promises to resolve his heated drunken disputes with himself by having the offending Myles 'pay the cost at the imperious behest of the dread and inexorable majesty of the law' (*CL*, 1 April 1946, p. 4). As numerous critics have noted, this concern in O'Nolan's writing is mirrored in his strategies of pseudonymity, by which 'O'Nolan's identification with multiple selves that fractured into pseudonyms was a signature of his writing'; Amy Nejezchleb, 'O'Brien's Your Man: Myles, Modernity and Irish National Television' (Baines, 99).

- 3 Borg, *Measureless Time*, p. 60.
- 4 Javier Saavedra Macías and Rafael Velez Núñez, 'The Other Self: Psychopathology and Literature', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, vol. 32, no. 4, December 2011, p. 258.
- 5 Claire Nouvet, 'An Impossible Response: The Disaster of Narcissus', *Yale French Studies*, no. 79, 1991, p. 104. While the model of the Narcissus myth has 'traditionally been canonised as one of the primary texts on subjectivity and even on "egoism"', Nouvet reminds us that primarily Ovid's text 'presents itself as narrative about responsibility': Narcissus himself is 'punished because he failed to respond to the other' (*ibid.*). In Ovid's myth, Narcissus is doubled in each of the figures he encounters – Echo, himself – and, in failing at once to recognise himself in an other and to respond to the call of the other, is punished by being condemned to an eternity of self-misrecognition. This, in broad terms, is also the story of *The Third Policeman*.
- 6 Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, Ann Smock (trans.) (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 125.
- 7 J.C.C. Mays, 'Brian O'Nolan: Literalist of the Imagination', in Timothy O'Keeffe (ed.), *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan* (London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1973), p. 91.
- 8 As Richard Rankin Russell notes, 'from *The Confession of Saint Patrick* (c. AD 450), through Stephen Dedalus's confession in James Joyce's *Bildungsroman, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), to Bernard MacLaverty's novel *The Anatomy School* (2001), confession looms large in Irish literature'; Richard Rankin Russell (ed.), *Martin McDonagh: A Casebook* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), p. 34.
- 9 For Michel Foucault, the confession is 'a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of initiations and the masterful secret'; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*, Robert Hurley (trans.) (New York, NY: Vintage, 1990), p. 58. However, it should be noted that O'Nolan would have

- encountered this idea of the confession as an exercise of power that internalises the policing of the self in ways that must be transcended in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).
- 10 'Der Mensch ist nie allein – das Selbstbewußtsein macht, daß immer 2 Ichs in einer Stube sind'; Jean Paul, *Ideen-Gewimmel, Texte und Aufzeichnungen aus dem unveröffentlichten Nachlaß*, Kurt Wölfel and Thomas Wirtz (eds) (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 1977), p. 76.
 - 11 Although, as the narrator tells us in a characteristically metafictional flourish, 'For obvious reasons, the name of this firm is fictitious' (*SF*, 56).
 - 12 While dismissing the story on the grounds that 'it is not particularly amusing', Clissmann notes that 'John Duffy's Brother' is 'a step on the way to *The Third Policeman*' in so far as 'a man thinking he is a train is not far removed from a man becoming a bicycle'; Anne Clissmann, *Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), p. 266.
 - 13 Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 5. In this study, Newton investigates 'narrative structure and form as ethical relation' by expanding upon the intersubjective dimensions of this distinction between literary process and product (p. 7). As a site of an intersubjective encounter and the consequences of 'the reciprocal claims binding teller, listener, witness and reader', the literary event is for Newton, 'a realm of ethical confrontation' (pp. 4, 11). In this essay, I share Newton's contention that texts which foreground the latter dimension of 'Saying', as O'Nolan's clearly do, are primarily interested in staging, if not resolving, the ethical problem of how to represent and witness an intersubjective encounter with an other.
 - 14 Thomas F. Shea, 'Flann O'Brien and John Keats: "John Duffy's Brother" and Train Allusions', *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 24, no. 2, Summer 1989, p. 112.
 - 15 *ibid.*, p. 113.
 - 16 Borg, *Measureless Time*, p. 60.
 - 17 The importance of this setup for O'Nolan's thinking of the literary event becomes clearer if we consider how it prefigures *The Third Policeman*, in which the vision of a hell specifically and individually designed and manufactured for the persecution of the De Selby scholar presents a grand image of the universe of the text, 'arranged by wise hands' (*CN*, 251), as a narcissistic mirror for a murderous *misreader*.
 - 18 Blanchot, *Disaster*, p. 125.
 - 19 Sigmund Freud, 'A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, James Strachey (ed. and trans.) (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), pp. 139–141.
 - 20 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, Peggy Kamuf (trans.) (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 97. Blanchot traces a similar argument in 'The Great Hoax', in *The Blanchot Reader*, Maurice Holland (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 157–160.
 - 21 'Third class and first class, I suppose, sir?'
 'No,' said Mr Duffy. 'In deference to the views of Herr Marx, all class distinctions in the passenger rolling-stock have been abolished.' [. . .]
 'That's communism,' said Mr Hodge.
 'He means,' said Mr Cranberry, 'that it is now first-class only' (*SF*, 57).

- 22 Macías and Núñez, p. 260.
- 23 Dimitris Vardoulakis, 'The Return of Negation: The Doppelgänger in Freud's "The Uncanny"', *SubStance*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2006, p. 100.
- 24 As Judith Butler notes, 'if we assume that the self exists and then it splits, we assume that the ontological status of the self is self-sufficient before it undergoes its splitting [. . .]. But this is not to understand the ontological primacy of relationality itself and its consequences for thinking the self in its necessary and ethically consequential disunity'; Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), p. 150.
- 25 Shea, 'Train Allusions', p. 113.
- 26 Borg, *Measureless Time*, p. 60.
- 27 Nouvet, p. 104.
- 28 James Joyce, *Dubliners*, Terence Brown (ed.) (New York, NY: Penguin, 1992), p. 104. For a more detailed enumeration of the echoes of Keats's poem and Joyce's story in 'John Duffy's Brother', see Shea, 'Train Allusions', pp. 109–115.
- 29 The issue of reading Duffy's rejection of Emily Sinico in terms of a tragic narcissist character flaw is hotly contested in Joyce scholarship, with more recent queer analyses of the text highlighting that this traditional narcissistic reading heteronormatively assumes a shared and equal, but ultimately unfulfilled desire between Duffy and Sinico and arguing that this assumption reinforces standard binary oppositions which limit freedom, understanding and alterity. For an excellent overview of this debate, see Christopher M. DeVault, 'Love and Socialism in Joyce's "A Painful Case": A Buberian Reading', *College Literature*, vol. 37, no. 2, Spring 2010, pp. 78–102. In common with DeVault's suggestion that this debate can be profitably re-negotiated by reading Joyce's short story alongside Martin Buber's writing, I am also interested in a broadly Buberian consideration of 'John Duffy's Brother' that 'enables a critique [. . .] that is grounded in ethics rather than sexual desire' (p. 80).
- 30 For a story so concerned with *misreading*, the choice of Keats's invocation of Cortez is particularly germane. As Tennyson famously pointed out to Francis Palgrave: 'history requires here Balboa'; Francis Turner Palgrave (ed.), *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language* (New York, NY: Walter J Black, 1932), p. 298. It has been long assumed, as Harry Buxton Forman notes, that if Keats erred in his reference 'it is to be assumed that his memory betrayed him'; John Keats, *The Complete Works of John Keats, Volume 1*, Harry Buxton Forman (ed.) (New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell and Company, 1817), p. 47fn. The betrayal of memory (the seat of the self) is of course relevant to O'Nolan's theme – however, it might be considered that Keats intended the slip to highlight the role of intermediaries in his analogy: he is, after all, concerned with *Chapman's Homer*.
- 31 Shea, 'Train Allusions', p. 117.
- 32 Keats, p. 47. In a typically narcissistic gesture, Myles would write himself (via 'the da') into this final verse in a later *Cruiskeen Lawn* column:
 Or like stout Cortot, when with 'Eagle' Hayes,
 He stared at the pa's *oifig* – and Alice Mahon,

Luke Dottide, Suther, with O. Wilde, *Sir Myles* –
 Silent, upon a peak in Merrion.

(*CL*, 16 December 1942, p. 3) [my emphasis]

- 33 Shea, ‘Train Allusions’, p. 114. In the story we are told that Duffy’s father ‘would often spend the afternoons of his sea-leave alone in his dining-room thumbing a book of Homer with delight’ (*SF*, 55).
- 34 Jacqueline L. Cowan, ‘Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* and the Alterity of the New World’, *Literature & Theology*, vol. 25, no. 4, December 2011, p. 416.
- 35 Foucault, *Sexuality*, p. 59.
- 36 Foucault contends that ‘writing about oneself [. . .] offers what one has done or thought to a possible gaze; the fact of obliging oneself to write plays the role of a companion by giving rise to the fear of disapproval and to shame’; Michel Foucault, ‘Self Writing’, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Volume I*, Paul Rabinow (ed.), Robert Hurley et al. (trans.) (New York, NY: New Press, 1997), p. 207.
- 37 Hutcheon, pp. 27, 139.
- 38 On these grounds I cannot share Shea’s view of the story as ‘celebrating the risks of imaginative exploration’ in which ‘John Duffy’s brother discovers the exhilarating euphoria of “adventure” as he re-creates himself and delightfully transforms what might have been just another ordinary day into an inspiring excursion through the realms of indeterminacy’; Shea, ‘Train Allusions’, pp. 115, 118.
- 39 Newton, p. 285. Newton continues: ‘It is, finally, the sign of interruption which identifies the reader’s share in the act of telling the self to others, the dialectic of revelation and concealment, of leaving home and looking away, of knowing and acknowledging that is narrative ethics’ (*ibid.*).
- 40 Mays, p. 91.
- 41 Blanchot, *Disaster*, p. 128.
- 42 Thomas F. Shea, *Flann O’Brien’s Exorbitant Novels* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1992), p. 12.
- 43 Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 79.
- 44 Newton, p. 7.
- 45 Murphy later announces his inference that when he joined the same club as Kelly, his superior had suspected that he had done so in order to spy on him and ‘the attentions he paid the lady members’ (*SF*, 87). While ostensibly describing Kelly as a paranoid, implicitly portraying Murphy’s victimhood and justifying his killing of his superior, the scene rather betrays Murphy’s narcissistic certainty of his victim’s obsession with his soon-to-be-murderer.
- 46 D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), p. 206.
- 47 Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics – Queer Reading* (New York, NY: Routledge 2005), p. 47.
- 48 Borg has hinted at the parallelism between taxidermy and writing operating in O’Nolan’s story, in a paper delivered at the 2nd International Flann O’Brien Conference: ‘The frustrations of an under-appreciated artist thus provide the

motive for Murphy's violent act. The murder doubles as the subject of a good story and as the pretext for the most challenging, most rewarding job a taxidermist can hope to take on. In short, it is an opportunity for the narrator to ply his trade and to take pride in his art'; Ruben Borg, conference paper, 'Reading Flann with Paul: Modernism and the Topos of Conversion', *Problems with Authority: The 2nd International Flann O'Brien Conference* (Rome, June 2013).

- 49 As numerous critics have noted, this goal is always negated in the very process of its telling. The partitioning of the self into subject and object in the distinction between the registers of 'Saying' and 'Said' in the confession's mode of narration has become a staple of writing on the genre. In what Jerome Bruner and Susan Weisser term 'a unique epistemological and psychological circumstance', the act of self-reporting 'separates the self who is *telling* from the past self or "selves" who are being *told about*'; Jerome Bruner and Susan Weisser, 'The Invention of the Self: Autobiography and its Forms', in David R. Olsen and Nancy Torrance (eds), *Literacy and Orality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 132. In Susannah Radstone's terms, confession's mode of narration is one 'in which the position of the confessional subject is divided between a narrated "I" located in the narrative's past and a narrating "I" located in the narrative's present'; Susannah Radstone, *The Sexual Politics of Time: Confession, Nostalgia, Memory* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 22. A recent exemplification of this self-negating dynamic of the confession or autobiography can be seen in the humorous, though slightly unsettling title of Carl Reiner's autobiography *I Remember Me* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2013).
- 50 Foucault, *Sexuality*, pp. 58–59.
- 51 Mark Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 33.
- 52 Blanchot, 'The Great Hoax', p. 159.
- 53 Borg, *Measureless Time*, p. 145. Borg is here calling on Blanchot's warning against reading Friedrich Schlegel's dictum that 'every poet is Narcissus' as confirmation of 'a certain romanticism according to which creation – poetry – is absolute subjectivity and the poet a living subject in the poem that reflects him'. Rather, Blanchot insists, the creator, the poet, is Narcissus in so far as 'in the poem where the poet writes himself, he does not recognise himself. Thus the poet 'is excluded from the facile, humanistic hope that by writing, or "creating", he would transform his dark experience into greater consciousness' – rather the poet must 'renounce all conceivable relations of a self [...] to the poem which henceforth belongs to the other' (Blanchot, *Disaster*, p. 135).
- 54 The story's implicit echoes of Poe are rendered explicit in O'Nolan's teleplay *The Dead Spit of Kelly* (1962), a later reworking of 'Two in One' for Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ): 'That's always the trouble with a killing [...] The body. The tell-tale body' (PT 397).
- 55 As Peter Brooks notes, the narrative mode of the confession inevitably implies a reader – even a silent, absent reader's response is an integral part of the discourse of the confession, as the reader's role as authoritative witness 'is in a deep sense what

- the speech is about'; Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 163.
- 56 Paul De Man, 'Excuses (Confessions)', in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 279. Newton simplifies this idea to the formulation 'confession's purpose is to rectify (if possible) unethical action through ethical language' (p. 250).
- 57 Edgar Allan Poe, 'William Wilson', in *The Complete Stories: Edgar Allan Poe*, John Seelye (ed.) (New York, NY: Everyman's Library, 1992), p. 400.
- 58 *ibid.*, p. 417.
- 59 *ibid.*, p. 418.
- 60 Vardoulakis, p. 100.
- 61 *ibid.*
- 62 Francis Bacon, 'The Great Instauration', in *Collected Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 7, no. 1 (London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1996), p. 30.
- 63 Michel Foucault, 'Theatrum Philosophicum', in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Volume II*, James D. Faubion (ed.), Robert Hurley et al. (trans.) (New York, NY: New Press, 1998), p. 347.
- 64 James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Declan Kiberd (introd.) (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 242.
- 65 Borg, *Measureless Time*, p. 58.

5. Robin: 'The Martyr's Crown' and *Thirst*

- 1 Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), p. 223. Anne Clissmann identifies a total of thirty-six different genres and styles throughout the novel; *Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), p. 86.
- 2 Ihab Hassan, 'Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective', in Calinescu Matei and Fokkema Douwe (eds), *Exploring Postmodernism* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1990), p. 21.
- 3 Ihab Hassan, 'From Postmodernism to Postmodernity: The Local/Global Context' <http://www.ihabhassan.com/postmodernism_to_postmodernity.htm> (29 September 2011).
- 4 Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 105–106.
- 5 *ibid.*
- 6 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Fredric Jameson (foreword), Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (trans.) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. xxiv.
- 7 Frank O'Connor, 'Introduction', in Frank O'Connor (ed.), *Modern Irish Short Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. xiv.
- 8 Claud Cockburn, 'Introduction' (*SP*, 7).
- 9 There are extant two different draft versions of the original story, housed in the 'Flann O'Brien papers' collection at the John J. Burns Library, Boston College and the 'Brian O'Nolan Manuscript Collection' at the Morris Library, Southern Illinois

University at Carbondale, Illinois. The version of the story collected in *SF* is that of the Carbondale collection (see the editors' 'A Note on the Texts', *SF*, xv).

- 10 In the context of this discussion of literary history and chronology, it is interesting to note that the main differences between the two versions of the story illustrate O'Nolan's general tendency to rewrite and in the process to bowdlerise, texts which could not get published in the first place. Therefore, one could say that 'The Martyr's Crown' compares to 'For Ireland Home and Beauty' just as *The Dalkey Archive* compares to *The Third Policeman* in terms of inventiveness and transgression toned down by the process of later rewriting. So much, this time, for the notion of progress.
- 11 For a more detailed analysis of how O'Nolan often writes about sex in ways that are encoded and implicit, see Hopper, 68–69.
- 12 Hassan, 'Pluralism', pp. 18–22.
- 13 For further analysis of fragmentation and other Hassanian concepts as applied to O'Nolan's work, see my article 'Representation as a Hollow Form, or the Paradoxical Magic of Idiocy and Skepticism in Flann O'Brien's Works' (*RCF*, 33–48).
- 14 Hassan, 'Pluralism', p. 19.
- 15 Cockburn, p. 8.
- 16 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World: Carnival and Grotesque*, Helene Iswolsky (trans.) (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 34.
- 17 Hassan, 'Pluralism', p. 22.
- 18 Hutcheon, p. 106.
- 19 *ibid.*, p. 105.
- 20 Fragment 41: 'L'imagination dispose de tout, elle fait la beauté, la justice et le bonheur qui est le tout du monde'; Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Michel Le Guern (ed.) (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p. 79.
- 21 The version under analysis here is the shorter version of the play, which can be found collected in *SP*, 81–94 and *PT*, 117–135, however a longer version of the stage play also exists, as collected in *PT*, 137–156. Later in the 1950s, O'Nolan considered using *Thirst* as part of a larger work (see Cronin, 205), yet the text never developed into anything more than the sketch we have today.
- 22 I have dealt elsewhere with the specific issue of the satirical treatment of history in *Faustus Kelly* and would refer any reader interested in this topic to: Thierry Robin, 'Théâtre et deconstruction du nationalisme irlandais dans *Faustus Kelly* de Flann O'Brien: "all talk and no play"', in Jeffrey Hopes and Hélène Lecossois (eds), *Théâtre et Nation* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011), pp. 103–118.
- 23 See *Worker's Republic*, the newspaper James Connolly founded in 1898 and in particular the articles 'The Fighting Race' (13 August, 1898) and 'Cannon Fodder for British Imperialism' (12 February 1916). In the newspaper, Irish heroism is often presented in a highly ironical context: 'Yes, we are a fighting race. In Africa, India or America, wherever blood is to be spilt, there you will find Irishmen, eager and anxious for a fight, under any flag, in anybody's quarrel, in any cause – except their own' ('The Fighting Race'). In 'The Martyr's Crown', O'Nolan presents a keen interest in this stereotype of the Irish as 'the

fighting race’, yet he immediately deconstructs it through humour, laying its threads bare by having it performed by a wholly unreliable character. For further analysis of the colonial dimension of Irish literature, see Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 157–164 and *passim*.

- 24 Joseph Brooker, *Flann O’Brien* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2005), p. 26.
- 25 Flore Coulouma, ‘Tall Tales and Short Stories: *Cruiskeen Lawn* and the Dialogic Imagination’ (*RCF*, 168).
- 26 *CL*, 10 March, 1947, p. 4.
- 27 *CL*, 2 March, 1966, p. 10.
- 28 ‘Nature of chuckles: Quiet, private, averted’ (*CN*, 20).

6. Mittermaier: In search of Mr Love

- 1 Brendan P. O’Hehir, ‘Flann O’Brien and the Big World’, in Wolfgang Zach and Heinz Kosok (eds), *Literary Interrelations: Ireland, England and the World, Volume 3: National Images and Stereotypes* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1987), pp. 207–216.
- 2 Brian O’Nolan, ‘The Pathology of Revivalism’, unpublished manuscript, Flann O’Brien Papers, MS.1997.027, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.
- 3 Unpublished manuscript, qtd. in Taaffe (124).
- 4 *ibid.*
- 5 *CL*, 14 February 1951, p. 4.
- 6 John Wyse Jackson, ‘Introduction’ (*MBM*, 10).
- 7 Joseph Brooker, *Flann O’Brien* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2005), p. 24. Contributions by Oscar Love to the controversies titled ‘The Three Sisters’ and ‘Literary Criticism’ appeared in *The Irish Times* on 15 and 20 June 1940 and on 23, 25, 27, 30 July and 2 August 1940.
- 8 Flann O’Brien, letter, *The Irish Times*, 3 June 1940, p. 2.
- 9 Flann O’Brien, letter, *The Irish Times*, 4 June 1940, p. 4.
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 Lir O’Connor, letter, *The Irish Times*, 8 June 1940, p. 8.
- 12 Oscar Love, letter, *The Irish Times*, 15 June 1940, p. 13.
- 13 Oscar Love, letter, *The Irish Times*, 20 June 1940, p. 4.
- 14 Patrick Kavanagh, ‘Maurice Walshe’s New Novel’, *The Irish Times*, 20 July 1940, p. 5.
- 15 Thomas B. O’Grady, ‘Poetics and Polemics: The Politics of Patrick Kavanagh’s “Spraying the Potatoes”’, *Colby Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 4, Winter 1995, p. 245.
- 16 Anne Clissmann, *Flann O’Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), p. 187.
- 17 Keith Donohue, *The Irish Anatomist: A Study of Flann O’Brien* (Dublin: Maunsel, 2002), p. 18.
- 18 Rüdiger Imhof, ‘Introduction’, in Rüdiger Imhof (ed.), *Alive-Alive O!: Flann O’Brien’s At Swim-Two-Birds* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1985), p. 8.
- 19 O’Grady, p. 246.
- 20 Brooker, p. 24.
- 21 Wyse Jackson, ‘Introduction’ (*MBM*, 10).

- 22 *ibid.*
- 23 Myles na Gopaleen, 'De Me', *New Ireland*, March 1964, p. 42.
- 24 John Newsinger, 'Blackshirts, Blueshirts and the Spanish Civil War', *Historical Journal*, vol. 44, no. 3, Autumn 2001, p. 840.
- 25 For comprehensive discussions of the public reaction to the Spanish Civil War in Ireland, see Fearghal McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–39* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999); Robert Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–39* (Manchester: Mandolin, 1999).
- 26 Charles Ewart Milne, *Drums Without End: Short Stories Mainly About the Spanish Civil War* (Portree, Isle of Skye: Aquila, 1985); 'Song of the Night Market', in Joseph Donnelly (ed.), *Charlie Donnelly: The Life and Poems* (Dublin: Dedalus, 1987), p. 83; 'Thinking of Artolas', 'Salutation for Some Poets', 'Sierran Vigil', 'The Hour Glass', 'Sierran Aftermath', 'Lines for a European Drama', 'Ecce Homo', 'Song for a Great Multitude', in Charles Ewart Milne, *Letter from Ireland* (Dublin: The Gayfield Press, 1940).
- 27 Charles Donnelly, 'Heroic Heart', 'The Tolerance of Crows', 'Poem', in Valentine Cunningham (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse* (London: Penguin, 1996).
- 28 For a detailed analysis of Irish pro-Republican as well as pro-Nationalist literary responses to the Spanish Civil War, see ch. 3 in Ute Anna Mittermaier, *Images of Spain in Irish Literature, 1922–1975*, unpublished PhD thesis (Trinity College Dublin, 2010).
- 29 Katharine Hoskins, *Today the Struggle: Literature and Politics in England During the Spanish Civil War* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 7–14; Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 93.
- 30 Obviously, those who supported the Spanish Republicans exclusively in the form of letters to *The Irish Times* were far less exposed to violent attacks from fiercely anti-Communist mobs than the speakers at pro-Republican rallies. The fact that the supporters of both sides in the Spanish Civil War were allowed to have their say in the paper actually set *The Irish Times* apart from the other big national newspapers, the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Press*, which relied almost exclusively on pro-Francoist voices for their coverage of the war in Spain. However, the much wider circulation of the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Press* as well as the reputation of *The Irish Times* as a largely 'Protestant' paper meant that public opinion in Catholic Ireland remained largely unaffected by the epistolary efforts for a more balanced view of Spanish Republicans by Oscar Love or the much better informed Trinity College professor T.B. Rudmose-Brown. See Fearghal McGarry, 'Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 33, no. 129, May 2002, pp. 68–90.
- 31 Oscar Love, letter, *The Irish Times*, 7 January 1939, p. 4.
- 32 J.H. Hutchinson, letter, *The Irish Times*, 9 January 1939, p. 7.
- 33 Oscar Love, letter, *The Irish Times*, 10 January 1939, p. 8.
- 34 Oscar Love, letter, *The Irish Times*, 12 January 1939, p. 5. In further letters to *The Irish Times* published on 20 and 23 February 1939, Love took issue with another

correspondent's insinuation that the conspicuously 'un-Irish' sound of their names automatically disqualifies the pro-Republican contributors to the letter controversy over Spain from looking at conditions in Spain from the only right – that is, Irish Catholic – perspective.

- 35 'Baptism of Oscar Alexander Love'. *Irish Genealogy*. Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. n. d. <<http://churchrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/details/25b8ab0013578>> (27 Sept. 2011). A search for the name 'Oscar Love' in *The Irish Times* digital archive yields dozens of hits over a period spanning the first six decades of the twentieth century. The census records from 1901 have him down as 'Ascar [sic] Alexander Love', a 17-year-old 'scholar' living with his widowed mother and nine siblings aged between five and twenty-three in 62 S.C.R. (South Circular Road) ('1901 census entry for Ascar Alexander Love', *Census of Ireland 1901/11*, The National Archives of Ireland). The name 'Oscar Love' appears in *The Irish Times* as a participant in numerous events and competitions organised by the Church of Ireland Young Men's Christian Association from as early as 1 December 1906; see Erasmus, 'Synonym Prize Competition', *The Weekly Irish Times*, 1 December 1906, p. 6. The 1911 census records show that 'Oscar Crawford-Love' was a member of the Church of Ireland and a 'Commercial Clerk' sharing a house in 86 S.C.R. with his widowed mother, four sisters and one brother. His age is wrongly given as 24 ('1911 census entry for Oscar Crawford-Love', *Census of Ireland 1901/11*, The National Archives of Ireland). From May 1914 Oscar Love is mentioned in various newspaper reports as an inspector for the Irish Insurance Commissioners and from 1928 as Inspector of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce; see 'Insurance Prosecutions', *Irish Independent*, 12 May 1914, p. 6; 'Unstamped Insurance Cards', *The Irish Times*, 12 July 1916, p. 2; 'Pawnbroker Fined for Insurance Offence', *The Irish Times*, 30 March 1928, p. 9.
- 36 Oscar Love, letter, *The Irish Times*, 17 September 1918, p. 4.
- 37 Oscar Love died of 'carcinoma of stomach' on 11 April 1967. He left behind a wife, Stella Love (Death Index Book for 1967 held at the General Register Office Research Room, Dublin).
- 38 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 14 April 1967, p. 6.
- 39 Oscar Love, letter, *The Irish Times*, 20 June 1940, p. 4 and 2 Aug. 1940, p. 6. Oscar Love's first contribution to the 'Three Sisters' letter series in *The Irish Times* of 15 June 1940 prompted 'Luna O'Connor' to invite Love to have tea with her and her brother 'Lir' at their home 'in the 'Noggin' (19 June 1940, p. 4). Love declined Luna's 'gracious invitation to tea'. However, he joined in the banter by adding that he had 'pleasant memories' of Luna. He had 'first met her in Ebury Street one moonlight night many years ago', when he observed her leaving 'her Noggin' for a late rendezvous with 'jaunty George Moore' (20 June 1940, p. 4). In the context of the 'Literary Criticism' debate, Love made fun of the puritanical ethos displayed by some of the other contributors by relating how his habitual morning swim in the nude at the Forty-Foot had goaded 'some literary scouts' into calling 'a condemnatory meeting', which, however, had to be 'abandoned as sweet Judy Clifford and happy Hilda Upshott secured admission disguised as scouts' (2 August 1940, p. 6).

- 40 Oscar Love, letter, *The Irish Times*, 18 October 1940, p. 3.
- 41 *ibid.*
- 42 Oscar Love, letter, *The Irish Times*, 22 February 1950, p. 5.
- 43 Clissmann, p. 187.
- 44 Oscar Love, letter, *The Irish Times*, 8 March 1911, p. 6; 15 August 1940, p. 6.
- 45 'Church of Ireland YMCA', *The Irish Times*, 9 October 1909, p. 9.
- 46 Oscar Love, letter, *The Irish Times*, 27 August 1940, p. 6 and 11 December 1953, p. 7.
- 47 Harold C. Brown, letter, *The Irish Times*, 29 July 1940, p. 2. Reading Love's commentary on the Irish Boy Scouts and the German *Hitlerjugend* in his letters of 23, 25, 27 and 30 July 1940 in tandem, the benignly disposed critic might get the impression that the author was actually trying to make the point that the Boy Scout movement was no less militaristic than the Hitler Youth and, whereas the Irish Boy Scouts solely devoted themselves to their war games, the German boys at least made themselves useful as voluntary farm-workers. If this was the case, however, he obviously did not get his message across, for at least four readers, Harold C. Brown (24 and 29 July 1940), 'F.L.J.' (24 and 26 July 1940), Frank E. Prenton Jones (27 July 1940) and N.S. Harvey (29 July 1940) 'fail[ed] to detect the obviously intended irony of Love's statement[s]' on the Boy Scouts (O'Grady, p. 245).
- 48 Donohue, p. 19.
- 49 'Deaths', *The Irish Times*, 13 April 1967, p. 5; from 1925 onward Love signed most of his letters to *The Irish Times* 'Oscar Love, Blackrock, Co. Dublin'.
- 50 'Funeral of Mr R.M. Smyllie', *The Irish Times*, 15 September 1954, p. 4.
- 51 Clissmann, p. 20.
- 52 Flann O'Brien, letter, *The Irish Times*, 2 August 1940, p. 6.
- 53 *CL*, 15 December 1950, p. 6.
- 54 Flann O'Brien, letter, *The Irish Times*, 16 January 1939, p. 5.
- 55 Oscar Love, letter, *The Irish Times*, 18 October 1945, p. 3; 2 and 7 November 1945, p. 3.
- 56 Oscar Love, letter, *The Irish Times*, 12 January 1939, p. 5; 31 July 1945, p. 5; 30 January 1965, p. 14.
- 57 In 1943 O'Nolan told the reporter Stanford Lee Cooper from *Time* magazine that in 1933 he had gone to Germany to 'study the language' ('Eire's Columnist', *Time*, vol. 42, no. 8, 23 August 1943, pp. 30–31). During his stay he was 'beaten up and bounced out of a beer hall for uncomplimentary references to Adolf Hitler' and married the daughter of a Cologne basketweaver, who died after a month (*ibid.*). As Cronin has explained in detail, O'Nolan's recorded literary and social activities in 1933 and 1934 'virtually rule out the possibility of a prolonged stay' in Germany in the 1930s or in later years (68). Peter Costello and Peter Van de Kamp's argumentation in *Flann O'Brien: An Illustrated Biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987) that the account of O'Nolan's sojourn in Germany in *Time* magazine was true to the facts is anything but cogent and has been refuted by Cronin (69–70).
- 58 Costello and Van de Kamp, p. 47.
- 59 O Hehir, *passim*.

- 60 Ute Anna Mittermaier, 'Charles Donnelly, "Dark Star" of Irish Poetry and Reluctant Hero of the Irish Left', in David Clark and Rubén Jarazo (eds), *To Banish Ghost and Goblin: New Essays on Irish Culture* (La Coruña: Netbiblo, 2010), p. 191.
- 61 Wyse Jackson, 'Introduction' (*MBM*, 8).

7. McCourt: A Portrait of the artist as a Joyce scholar

- 1 Niall Sheridan, 'Brian, Flann and Myles', in Timothy O'Keeffe (ed.), *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan* (London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1973), p. 39.
- 2 Joseph C. Voelker, 'Doblends Jined: The Fiction of Flann O'Brien', *Journal of Irish Literature*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1983, p. 94.
- 3 Thomas B. O'Grady, 'High Anxiety: Flann O'Brien's Portrait of the Artist', *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 2, 1989, p. 205.
- 4 M. Keith Booker, *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin and Menippean Satire* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 30.
- 5 John Wain, 'To Write for My Own Race', *Encounter*, July 1967, p. 85.
- 6 Joseph Browne, 'Flann O'Brien: Post Joyce or Propter Joyce?', *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 19, no. 4, Winter 1984, p. 157.
- 7 'The Nobel Prize', editorial, *The Irish Times*, 16 October 1940, p. 4.
- 8 *CL*, 25 July 1962, p. 8.
- 9 *CL*, 26 July 1962, p. 8.
- 10 *CL*, 6 June 1957, p. 8.
- 11 Flann O'Brien, 'Enigma', *The Irish Times*, 16 June 1962, p. 10.
- 12 'Death of Mr Niall Montgomery', *The Irish Times*, 13 March 1987, p. 8.
- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 Niall Montgomery, 'Dublin's Dublin', *The Irish Times*, 16 June 1962, p. 10.
- 15 'Two Irishmen: James Joyce and John McCormack', unsigned review, *The Irish Times*, 22 March 1941, p. 5.
- 16 Montgomery, 'Dublin's Dublin', p. 10.
- 17 Niall Montgomery, letter published in *The Irish Times*, 12 July 1941, p. 6.
- 18 John Garvin, *James Joyce's Disunited Kingdom and the Irish Dimension* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1976).
- 19 Anthony Cronin, 'Life-Long Devotion', *The Irish Times*, 12 March 1977, p. 8.
- 20 *ibid.*
- 21 D.F. (Donal Foley), 'Dr John Garvin: An Appreciation', *The Irish Times*, 5 April 1986, p. 19.
- 22 Niall Montgomery is quoted making this comment in an article signed 'Irish Times Reporter' titled 'Judgements on Joyce and Proust', *The Irish Times*, 23 June 1962, p. 4.
- 23 Quidnunc (Seamus Kelly), 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 16 June 1962, p. 10.
- 24 Quidnunc, 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 23 June 1954, p. 5.
- 25 *The Irish Times*, 26 June 1954, p. 9.
- 26 Quidnunc (Seamus Kelly), 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 16 June 1962, p. 10.

- 27 See Peter Costello, 'James Joyce and the Remaking of Modern Ireland', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 93, no. 370, 2004, pp. 121–132.
- 28 O'Brien, 'Enigma', p. 10.
- 29 Charles Garvice (1850–1920) was a prolific and hugely popular author of romance novels who, despite being perhaps the most successful author of his day in England, was subjected to regular ridicule by literary critics for his melodramatic and formulaic style.
- 30 *CL*, 7 July 1958, p. 6.
- 31 Sheridan, 'Brian, Flann and Myles', pp. 72–81.
- 32 *ibid.*, pp. 41–44.
- 33 Anne Clissmann, *Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), pp. 76–77.
- 34 O'Brien, 'Enigma', p. 10.
- 35 Peter Costello and Peter Van de Kamp, *Flann O'Brien: An Illustrated Biography* (London: Bloomsbury 1987), p. 24.
- 36 *CL*, 18 June 1947, p. 4.
- 37 *CL*, 17 December 1948, p. 4.
- 38 *CL*, 9 September 1949, p. 4.
- 39 *CL*, 6 June 1957, p. 8.
- 40 *CL*, 3 January 1959, p. 9.
- 41 *CL*, 20 December 1961, p. 8.
- 42 *CL*, 7 July 1953, p. 4.
- 43 *CL*, 7 July 1958, p. 6.
- 44 *CL*, 18 August 1948, p. 4.
- 45 *CL*, 7 July 1958, p. 6.
- 46 *CL*, 16 June 1954, p. 4.
- 47 O'Brien, 'Enigma', p. 10.
- 48 Ronald L. Dotterer, 'Flann O'Brien, James Joyce and *The Dalkey Archive*', *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 8, no. 2, Summer 2004, p. 63.
- 49 Robert Hogan and Gordon Henderson (eds), 'A Sheaf of Letters', *Journal of Irish Literature*, vol. 3, no. 1, January 1974, p. 82.
- 50 Flann O'Brien, 'Bringing Joyce Home', letter, *The Irish Times*, 20 June 1962, p. 7.
- 51 O'Brien, 'Enigma', p. 10.
- 52 Letter from O'Nolan to A.M. Heath & Co., 31 January 1938, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, File No. 243.

8. Walker: *The Third Policeman* and the writing of terror

- 1 'The Death of Detective O'Sullivan', *The Weekly Irish Times*, 22 June 1929, p. 17.
- 2 'Blown to Pieces in County Clare', *Irish Independent*, 13 June 1929.
- 3 'Brutal Murder says Coroner', *Irish Independent*, 14 June 1929 <<http://www.garda.ie/honour/default.aspx>> (20 February 2014).
- 4 Keith Hopper, *Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-Modernist* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), pp. 56–57.
- 5 See David Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Terror in Ireland: 1916–1923* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2012).

- 6 Anne Dolan, “‘The Shadow of a Great Fear’: Terror and Revolutionary Ireland’, in Fitzpatrick (ed.), pp. 27–28.
- 7 Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (London: Macmillan, 2003), pp. 54, 60–61. O’Nolan’s awareness of this activity is clear in a letter written to Ethel Mannin on 14 July 1939: ‘I know you are prejudiced against me on account of the IRA bombings’; Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, File No. 133.
- 8 Brian Griffin, *Cycling in Victorian Ireland* (Dublin: Nonsuch, 2006), pp. 147–148.
- 9 Alice Milligan, *Hero Lays* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1908), pp. 76–77.
- 10 George Moore, *Hail and Farewell: Ave, Salve, Vale*, Richard Cave (ed.) (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1976), pp. 303–304.
- 11 Frank O’Connor, *The Big Fellow* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1986), p. 71.
- 12 Dan Breen, *My Fight for Irish Freedom*, Joseph McGarrity (introd.) (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1924), p. 21.
- 13 Roddy Doyle, *A Star Called Henry* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 194.
- 14 Ernie O’Malley, *On Another Man’s Wound: A Personal History of Ireland’s War of Independence* (Niwot, CO: Roberts Rinehart, 1999), p. 104.
- 15 *ibid.*, pp. 146–147.
- 16 See Brian Hughes, ‘Persecuting the Peelers’, in Fitzpatrick (ed.), pp. 206–218.
- 17 O’Malley, p. 154.
- 18 Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Peadar O’Donnell* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), p. 41; Peadar O’Donnell, *Storm: A Story of the Irish War* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1926), p. 99.
- 19 F.P. Crozier, *Ireland for Ever* (Bath: Cedric Chivers, 1971), p. 116.
- 20 Eunan O’Halpin, *Defending Ireland: The Irish State and Its Enemies since 1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 34.
- 21 Hopper, pp. 226–229.
- 22 Hopper, p. 40.
- 23 Frank O’Connor, *Guests of the Nation* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1979), pp. 23, 26, 28. Further stories in the collection that *The Third Policeman* seems to echo include the title story, ‘Jumbo’s Wife’, ‘September Dawn’ and ‘Soirée Chez Une Belle Jeune Fille’.
- 24 Seán O’Faoláin, *Midsummer Night Madness and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 1982), pp. 142–143.
- 25 Flann O’Brien, letter, *The Irish Times*, 15 October 1938, p. 7.
- 26 Seán O’Faoláin, letter, *The Irish Times*, 12 October 1938, p. 5; Frank O’Connor, letter, *The Irish Times*, 12 October 1938, p. 5.
- 27 ‘Modern Novels Criticised’, *The Irish Times*, 5 November 1938, p. 10.
- 28 Flann O’Brien, letter, *The Irish Times*, 8 November 1938, p. 5.
- 29 O’Faoláin and O’Connor had been airing their critical views for some time in the periodical *Ireland To-Day* (1936–1938), whose contributors also included O’Nolan’s close friends Niall Sheridan and Donagh MacDonagh.
- 30 Seán O’Faoláin, ‘Irish Gasconade’, *John O’London’s Weekly*, 24 March 1939, p. 970.
- 31 Heather Ingman, *A History of the Irish Short Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 132.

- 32 O’Faoláin, *Midsummer Night Madness*, p. 12.
 33 *ibid.*, p. 55.
 34 Seán O’Faoláin, *Stories of Sean O’Faolain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 9.
 35 O’Malley, pp. 44–45.
 36 *ibid.*, p. 294.
 37 O’Faoláin, *Midsummer Night Madness*, p. 116.
 38 J.C.C. Mays, ‘Brian O’Nolan: Literalist of the Imagination’, in Timothy O’Keeffe (ed.), *Myles: Portraits of Brian O’Nolan* (London: Martin Brian & O’Keeffe, 1973), p. 92.
 39 Hopper, p. 128.

9. Murphy: *An Béal Bocht*: intertextuality and aesthetic play

- 1 *CL*, *The Irish Times*, 3 January 1957, p. 6.
 2 Thierry Robin alludes to this same paradox in a general observation about O’Brien’s work: ‘This is the O’Brien paradox, namely that vast fields of human knowledge and activity are simultaneously satirised, deconstructed – for satire implies deconstruction – and criticised, shown as futile, incomprehensible while concurrently rendered fascinating, puzzling and thought-provoking’; ‘Representation as a Hollow Form, or the Paradoxical Magic of Idiocy and Skepticism in Flann O’Brien’s Works’ (*RCF*, 35).
 3 Ciarán Ó Nualláin, *The Early Years of Brian O’Nolan/Flann O’Brien/Myles na gCopaleen*, Niall O’Nolan (ed.), Róisín Ní Nualláin (trans.) (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1998), p. 107.
 4 Brian Ó Conchubhair, ‘The Novel in Irish since 1950: From National Narrative to Counter-Narrative’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 35, 2005, p. 215.
 5 See Anne Clissmann, *Flann O’Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), pp. 235–236.
 6 Gerald Griffin, *The Collegians* (London: Atlantic Books, 2011).
 7 Dion Boucicault, *The Colleen Bawn; or, The Brides of Garryowen. A Domestic Drama in Three Acts*, printed but not published, n.d. <<http://www.archive.org/details/colleenbawnorbri00boucrich>> (14 January 2012), p. 9.
 8 ‘Ní fios cad chuige, ach sin mar bhí. An té a shíleann nach bhfuil an fhírinne á rá agam, léadh sé na dea-leabhair’ (*ABB*, 56).
 9 Jane Farnon, ‘Motifs of Gaelic Lore and Literature in *An Béal Bocht*’, in Anne Clune [Clissmann] and Tess Hurson (eds), *Conjuring Complexities: Essays on Flann O’Brien* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1997), p. 99.
 10 Muiris Ó Súilleabháin’s *Fiche Bliain ag Fás* (*Twenty Years A-Growing*, 1933) is also parodied in a generic sense and the title of Tomás Ó Máille’s novel *An Béal Beo* (Dublin: An Gum, 1936) is comically mimicked, too.
 11 Farnon, p. 103.
 12 *Qtd.* in Clissmann, p. 230.
 13 Farnon, pp. 105–106.
 14 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 59.
 15 David Wheatley, ‘The Aistriúchán Cloak: Paul Muldoon and the Irish Language’, *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2001, p. 126.

- 16 Richard T. Murphy, “‘A root of the new sprout’?: Flann O’Brien, Minor Literature and the Modern Gaelic Canon’ (Baines, 75).
- 17 Murphy, p. 75.
- 18 Farnon, p. 94.
- 19 Myles na gCopaleen also approved of another great satirist of Irish morality, Brian Merriman (*CL*, 16 May 1942).
- 20 See also Clissmann, p. 248; Farnon, p. 108.
- 21 Joseph Brooker, *Flann O’Brien* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2005), p. 63.
- 22 *ibid.*, p. 65.
- 23 Denis Donoghue, *Irish Essays* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 40.
- 24 Flore Coulouma, ‘Transgressive and Subversive: Flann O’Brien’s Tales of the In-Between’, in Ciaran Ross (ed.), *Sub-Versions: Trans-National Readings of Modern Irish Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 65–66.
- 25 Brian Ó Conchubhair, ‘*An Béal Bocht* and *An tOileánach*: Writing on the Margin: Gaelic Glosses or Postmodern Marginalia?’ (*RCF*, 191).
- 26 ‘Ní cuimhneach liom go fírinneach an lá a rugadh mé ná aon chuid den chéad leathbhliain a chaitheas abhus ar an saol seo, ach gan amhras bhíos i mo bheatha go cinnte san aimsir sin, cé nach bhfuil aon chuimhne agam uirthi, óir ní bheinn anois ann ach go rabhas an uair sin ann, agus is de réir a chéile a thig ciall don duine ach a oiread le gach créatúr eile’ (*ABB*, 9).
- 27 Tomás Ó Criomhthain, *The Islandman*, trans. Robin Flower (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 1.
- 28 ‘Bhíos an-óg nuair a rugadh mé, gan aon aois (ní amháin lá féin) slán agam; go ceann leathbhliana [. . .] níor aithníos na daoine thar a chéile’ (*ABB*, 11).
- 29 ‘Cuid acu ag lapadánacht ar an mbóthar gan aon tsiúl acu. A lán acu as Daingean Uí Chúise, cuid as Gaoth Dobhair; cuid eile acu aniar ar an tsnámh as Árainn. Sinn go léir go groí rábach ar an chéad lá scoile dúinn’ (*ABB*, 24).
- 30 Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), p. 498.
- 31 ‘San áit a raibh sé, bhí sé soar ó dhrochaimsir, ó ghorta agus ó tharcaisne an tsaoil. Bheadh na róna aige mar chuideachta agus mar ábhar proinne’ (*ABB*, 87).
- 32 Brooker, p. 66.
- 33 Ó Conchubhair, pp. 201–202.
- 34 ‘Ní fheadar ná gur ligeas tharam gan fhios tamall den lá faoi shuan nó ar chaolchéadfaí, agus más amhlaidh a tharla, is é is iontach liom anois gur tháinig aon mhúscailt feasta orm. [. . .] Bhí mo chuid fola go léir cailte agam san am seo, agus bhíos ar tí umhlú don chinníúint, luí síos go sásta sa chlábar agus aghaidh a thabhairt ar an tsíoraíocht, nuair a bhraitheas solas beag ag lonrú go faon i bhfad uaim, é lag leathchailte ar fud an cheo agus na mbratacha báistí. [. . .] B’iúd, dar liom, an t-aon seans a bhí eadrainn agus béal na síoraíochta’ (*ABB*, 97).
- 35 Clissmann claims that *An Béal Bocht* ‘represents a logical continuation of many of the battles he had begun in *Comhthrom Féinne* and carried forward into *Cruiskeen Lawn*. Stylistically it is an intermediary between the worlds of those very dissimilar books, *At Swim* and *The Third Policeman*’ (p. 250). Keith Donohue reminds us of

Cruiskeen Lawn's 'Tales from Corkadorky' or simply 'Corca Dorcha', short dramatic anecdotes with numerous characters in a fictitious Irish village that appeared in 1941. The last one appeared in November 1941, before *An Béal Bocht* was published; see his *The Irish Anatomist: A Study of Flann O'Brien* (Dublin: Maunsel, 2002), p. 71. Keith Hopper also alludes to Myles's *Cruiskeen Lawn* debates about the Irish language (30).

- 36 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 17.

10. Pilný: Brian O'Nolan and pataphysics

* An early version of this essay was delivered at the conference at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore in June 2011. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the NTU and to Dr Neil Murphy in particular for the generous invitation. Research for this essay was supported from the 'Programme for the Development of Research Areas at Charles University, P09, Literature and Art in Intercultural Relations', sub-programme 'Transformations of the Cultural History of the Anglophone Countries: Identities, Periods, Canons'.

- 1 Alfred Jarry, *Exploits & Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician*, Simon Watson Taylor (ed. and trans.) (Boston, MA: Exact Change, 1996), pp. 21–22.

2 *ibid.*, p. 22.

3 *ibid.*, p. 23.

- 4 See the website of the Collège for its more recent activities: <www.college-de-pataphysique.org> (20 February 2014). A useful summary concerning pataphysics and the Oulipo, including the principal works of criticism, is to be found in Anthony Adams, 'Butter-Spades, Footnotes and Omnium: *The Third Policeman* as 'Pataphysical Fiction' (*RCF*, 107, 109, 110).

- 5 For details of the production and its political and artistic context, see Ondřej Pilný, 'Jan Grossman, Prague Structuralism and the Grotesque', in Martin Procházka and Ondřej Pilný (eds), *Prague English Studies and the Transformation of Philologies* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2012), pp. 184–197.

- 6 To the great chagrin of the management of Czech television, it needs to be said; the organisers eventually disqualified Cimrman on the contentious grounds that fictitious characters were not eligible.

- 7 The journal is currently published online at <www.clinamen.cz>. 'Samizdat' means in this context that the periodical was produced and disseminated illicitly outside the publication network approved and supervised by the state authorities. For Jarry's use of the term *clinamen*, see Jarry, *Faustroll*, pp. 88–94, 133fn. More recently, the concept of *clinamen* has been linked with Heisenberg's uncertainty principle; see Roger Shattuck, 'Introduction to Jarry', *Faustroll*, p. xviii. On *clinamen*, Jarry and the Oulipo, see Adams, p. 110. Finally, Harold Bloom offers an influential adoption of the concept when he refers to *clinamen* as 'poetic misprision', being the first of Bloom's six 'revisionary ratios'; *The Anxiety of Influence*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 19–45.

- 8 Adams, pp. 114–116.

- 9 For a basic bibliography of Jarry's works and their circulation, see Alastair Brotchie, *Alfred Jarry: A Pataphysical Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011). The publication history of *Faustroll*, which is the main point of reference in the present essay, is to be found in Roger Shattuck's introduction to the English translation of the novel (pp. ix–x) and is as follows: the first two editions appeared posthumously in 1911 and 1923, respectively and after two more French editions, the novel was published in English in 1965. The output of the Collège de 'Pataphysique would have been similarly difficult to reach from Ireland.
- 10 Adams, p. 118.
- 11 For an elaboration concerning the position of *The Third Policeman* in the tradition of Menippean satire, see M. Keith Booker, ch. 4 'The Impossibility of Knowledge: Science, Philosophy and *The Third Policeman*', in *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin and Menippean Satire* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995).
- 12 For my own early attempt, see Ondřej Pilný, 'Cycling Round The Bend: Interpretation and Punishment in Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*', *Litteraria Pragensia*, vol. 7, no. 13, 1997, pp. 44–49.
- 13 The list of de Selby's principal successors would usefully be complemented by the name of Jára Cimrman, mentioned earlier, whose inventions and hypotheses are a decent match, despite their lack of bleak implications altogether. This, however, would be a matter for a separate study, one that would be focused largely on comedy and mild political satire directed at the course of Czech history and politics.
- 14 Jarry, *Faustroll*, pp. 102–103.
- 15 *ibid.*, pp. 7–8.
- 16 Roger Shattuck, Introduction to Jarry, *Faustroll*, p. xiv.
- 17 This being, moreover, the only instance in the entire novel where a spatial alteration of such kind occurs. For more details, see Pilný, 'Cycling Round The Bend', p. 47.
- 18 Hopper, 230–240, Booker, pp. 55–57.
- 19 José Lanters, *Unauthorized Versions: Irish Menippean Satire, 1919–1952* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), p. 212.
- 20 Walter Moore, *Schrödinger: Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 377–379. For a more detailed account, see Ondřej Pilný, 'My Kingdom for a Pun: Myles na gCopaleen, Erwin Schrödinger and *The Third Policeman* in *Improbable Frequency*', *Irish Theatre International*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2008, pp. 47–48. Schrödinger's most recent biographer, John Gribbin, confirms Moore's observations, stating that 'Schrödinger already knew Myles, through his circle of intellectual contacts' before the latter's attack against the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies; regrettably, Gribbin cites no evidence concerning their acquaintance; John Gribbin, *Erwin Schrödinger and the Quantum Revolution* (London: Bantam Press, 2012), pp. 208–209.
- 21 The quotation is from the encomium for Schrödinger on the occasion of his being awarded an honorary doctorate by Trinity College Dublin in 1940; qtd. in Moore, p. 366.
- 22 Dermot Diamond and Fergus Cronin, *The Science of Flann O'Brien*, as performed on 16 October 2011 at the Flann O'Brien Centenary Weekend Conference, Trinity College Dublin.

- 23 Hopper features astute observations on the Greek Atomists and their relevance to O'Brien's novel (203–204).
- 24 Maciej Ruczaj has recently outlined an intriguing set of parallels with Dante's *Divine Comedy*; see his 'Infernal Poetics/Infernal Ethics: Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* Between Medieval and (Post)Modern Netherworlds' (*RCF*, 91–105).
- 25 O'Brien's attitude is forcefully developed in *The Dalkey Archive* (1964): while de Selby never makes an actual appearance in *The Third Policeman* and comes across mostly as an amusing lunatic, O'Brien places him centre-stage in his later novel and turns him into a dangerous nihilist who is intent on destroying the world and needs to be stopped (*CN*, 621–623).

11. Gillespie: *Cruiskeen Lawn* and science

- 1 Two of the fictional Schrödinger's verses in the song 'An Ingenious Device' in Arthur Riordan and Bell Helicopter's musical comedy *Improbable Frequency* (London: Nick Hern, 2005), pp. 66–67.
- 2 Thomas F. O'Rahilly, *The Two Patricks: A Lecture on the History of Christianity in Fifth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1942). In this work O'Rahilly argues that two distinct Christian missionaries, Palladius and Patrick, were conflated into the contemporary persona of St Patrick. Schrödinger had recently spoken on the impossibility of proving a first cause, which Myles here rather superficially interprets as being equivalent to saying that there is no God.
- 3 *CL*, 10 April 1942, p. 3.
- 4 *ibid.*
- 5 Mark O'Brien, *The Irish Times: A History* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), p. 130.
- 6 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Caryl Emerson (ed. and trans.) (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 115.
- 7 M. Keith Booker, *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin and Menippean Satire* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 63.
- 8 Ken Hirschkop, 'Is Dialogism for Real?', *Social Text*, vol. 30, 1992, pp. 111–112.
- 9 When De Selby urges St Augustine to admit to his debauched youth, the saint claims that 'there is no evidence against me beyond what I wrote myself. Too vague. Be on your guard against that class of fooling. Nothing in black and white.
– My vocation is enquiry and action, not literature.
– You're sadly inexperienced. You cannot conceive the age I lived in, its customs, or judge of that African sun' (*CN*, 636).
- 10 Qtd. in *CL*, 3 August 1942, p. 3.
- 11 *ibid.*
- 12 The facetious tone of this argument disguises its graver implication: serious improvements are needed in primary and secondary education in Ireland if such knowledge is to become common.
- 13 Reverend M. Brenan, 'Agriculture and Our School System', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 59, 1942, p. 207.
- 14 'Irish Culture', *The Irish Times*, 12 March 1940, p. 4.
- 15 See *Dáil Debates*, vol. 79, 10 April 1940, 'Institute for Advanced Studies Bill, 1939 – Second Stage' (Dublin: Oireachtas, 1940); vol. 79, 17 April 1940, Committee on

- Finance, ‘Institute for Advanced Studies Bill, 1939 – Committee’ (Dublin: Oireachtas, 1940).
- 16 *Dáil Debates*, vol. 79, 10 April 1940, ‘Institute for Advanced Studies Bill, 1939 – Second Stage’ (Dublin: Oireachtas, 1940), col. 1082.
- 17 Tom Garvin, *Preventing the Future: Why Was Ireland so Poor for so Long?* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004), p. 167.
- 18 Mulcahy held the post in both Inter-Party governments (1948–51, 1954–57).
- 19 Ireland, Department of Education, *Council of Education: Terms of Reference and General Regulations* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1950), p. 12.
- 20 Brenan, pp. 202–203.
- 21 *CL*, 17 January 1946, p. 2.
- 22 As Minister for Industry and Commerce in the mid-1920s, McGilligan wrote that ‘if a nation is to depend on agriculture it must produce mainly a population of farmers: men of patience, endurance, thrift and modest intellectual aspirations. If it produces other types it must export them at an early age if it is not to risk the continual inner ferment of disappointed and distorted minds denied by circumstances their adequate exercise’ (qtd. in Garvin, p. 169). The original source is the Patrick McGilligan Papers, housed in the Archives Department of University College Dublin (P35b/10).
- 23 Nicholas Allen, ‘States of Mind: Science, Culture and the Irish Intellectual Revival, 1900–30’, *Irish University Review*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2003, p. 153.
- 24 A contemporary correlative can be found in the media’s premature declaration of a paradigm shift after scientists at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Switzerland published research in September 2011 that seemed to confirm particles moving faster than light (Higgs boson). CERN researchers themselves insisted that the results were extremely odd and must be scrutinised and reproduced by independent scientists. Nonetheless, the popular press and the public declared Einstein irrelevant with an enthusiasm more appropriate to World Cup soccer finals. Subsequent experiments and findings of equipment malfunctions at CERN soon undermined the claim, until new experiments and further analysis did confirm the discovery of the Higgs boson particle in 2013.
- 25 Garvin, p. 177.
- 26 Alfred J. O’Rahilly, ‘The Scientific Standpoint’ [rev. of *Science and the Human Mind: A Critical and Historical Account of the Development of Natural Knowledge* by Professor and Mrs W.C.D. Whetham], *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 2, no. 6, 1913, p. 60.
- 27 *ibid.*, p. 61.
- 28 *CL*, 10 March 1947, p. 4.
- 29 Brenan, p. 203.
- 30 *CL*, 3 August 1942, p. 3.
- 31 *ibid.*
- 32 ‘Hard on the news of Mr Truman’s hydrogen bomb [. . .] comes information about the development of Cruscalon, a new cosmic vapour [. . .]. Dr Schrödinger, of the institute of Cosmic Studies, [. . .] expressed scepticism about the success of Cruscalon. “I have not had an opportunity of visiting the laboratories at Santry”, said

- Dr Schrödinger, “but, from what I have heard, they do not have the equipment or the technicians to tackle any scientific project seriously” (CL, 25 January 1950, p. 5).
- 33 ‘He shuns his human fellows and types out formulæ plastered with Greek letters that are, in my solemn opinion, outside the understanding even of Dr Erwin Schrödinger himself’ (CL, 6 March 1950, p. 4).
- 34 CL, 2 February 1946, p. 4.
- 35 Richard Rorty argues that variety in discourse should be a goal of all quests for knowledge in the hermeneutical view: ‘Hermeneutics sees the relations between various discourses as those of strands in a possible conversation, a conversation which presupposes no disciplinary matrix which unites the speakers, but where the hope of agreement is never lost so long as the conversation lasts’; Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 318.
- 36 Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 126.
- 37 Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (New York, NY: Wings Books, 1993), p. 251.

12. Long: *An Béal Bocht* and the force of law

- 1 An extended version of this essay can be found in Maebh Long, *Assembling Flann O’Brien* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 107–141.
- 2 Brian O’Nolan, ‘The Pathology of Revivalism’, Flann O’Brien Papers, MS.1997.027, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.
- 3 While badly injured, the youngest son, Patrick (Patsy), survived.
- 4 Report of the Maamtrasna Murders in *The Freeman’s Journal*, 20 November 1882, as presented in Timothy Charles Harrington, *The Maamtrasna Massacre: Impeachment of the Trials (With Appendix containing Report of Trials and Correspondence between Most Rev. Dr McEvilly and the Lord Lieutenant)* (Dublin: Nation Office, 1884), app., p. 29.
- 5 The trial had been moved from local courts to Dublin.
- 6 Harrington, app., p. 35.
- 7 *ibid.*, pp. v–vi.
- 8 *ibid.*, p. vi.
- 9 *ibid.*, pp. vi–viii.
- 10 *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, Third Series (London: Cornelius Buck, 1884), p. 234; qtd. in Jeanne A. Flood, ‘Joyce and the Maamtrasna Murders’, *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 4, 1991, p. 883.
- 11 Jacques Derrida, ‘Force of Law: The “Mystical Foundation of Authority”’, in Gil Anidjar (ed.), *Acts of Religion*, Mary Quaintance (trans.) (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 283.
- 12 Walter Benjamin, ‘Critique of Violence’, in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, Peter Demetz (ed.), Edmund Jephcott (trans.) (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1986), p. 295.
- 13 Benjamin, p. 297. Opposed to such ‘mythic violence’ is ‘divine violence’, a force Benjamin characterises as ‘pure power over all life for the sake of the living’, which sacrifices in order to save the living (*ibid.*). ‘Divine violence’ is

- justice: that which has played no part in the rote application of laws of power, but which works to serve just ends in each singular situation.
- 14 *ibid.*, p. 294.
- 15 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Daniel Heller-Roazen (trans.) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 1.
- 16 *ibid.*, p. 2.
- 17 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*, Robert Hurley (trans.) (New York, NY: Vintage, 1990), p. 143.
- 18 *ibid.*, p. 143.
- 19 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Daniel Heller-Roazen (trans.) (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1999), p. 83.
- 20 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, Kevin Attell (trans.) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 38.
- 21 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 8.
- 22 *ibid.*, p. 138.
- 23 *ibid.*, p. 88.
- 24 *ibid.*, p. 105.
- 25 Agamben, *The Open*, p. 37.
- 26 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 159.
- 27 The term ‘bare life’ is a translation of Benjamin’s *das bloße Leben*, usually translated as ‘mere life’. ‘Mere life’, as noted above, is the object of mythic violence: from Benjamin to Agamben we thus find a drift from the ‘mere life’ which suffers the mythic violence of the law, to the ‘bare life’ placed in a state of exception outside the law.
- 28 Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, Section 1253a, lines 13–18; as translated and qtd. in Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 12.
- 29 ‘he understood that good Gaelic is difficult but that the best Gaelic of all is well-nigh unintelligible’ (CN, 433).
- 30 ‘Are you certain that the Gaels are people?’ (CN, 472).
- 31 ‘They’ve that reputation anyway, little noble, said he, but no confirmation of it has ever been received. We’re not horses nor hens; seals nor ghosts; and in spite of all that, it’s unbelievable that we’re humans’ (CN, 472). This is an example of a very problematic translation – *inchreidte* means believable or plausible, so the English should read: ‘it’s plausible that we’re humans’, a very important difference.
- 32 Patrick Weston Joyce, *The Origin and History of Irish Names of Places* (Dublin: McGlashan and Gill, 1869), p. 113.
- 33 Patrick S. Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla: An Irish-English Dictionary; Being a Thesaurus of the Words, Phrases and Idioms of the Modern Irish Language, with Explanations in English* (Dublin: M.H. Gill & Son, 1904), p. 257. However, given the animosity O’Nolan felt for Dinneen’s dictionary one turns to it with reluctance. See, for example, Myles’s claim that ‘Father Dinneen is making our very language ridiculous today’ (CL, 12 November 1942, p. 3).
- 34 Mary W. Shelley, ‘Introduction’, in *Frankenstein* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1831), p. xii.

- 35 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Text, Criticism and Notes*, Chester G. Anderson (ed.) (New York, NY: Viking, 1968), p. 203.
- 36 Who, interestingly, is not himself called Jams O'Donnell.
- 37 Jacques Derrida, 'Who or What Is Compared? The Concept of Comparative Literature and the Theoretical Problems of Translation', Eric Prenowitz (trans.), *Discourse*, vol. 30, nos. 1 & 2, Winter & Spring 2008, p. 36.
- 38 Derrida, 'Comparative Literature', p. 36.
- 39 'the foreign form of his name' (CN, 426).
- 40 'This document is exactly as I received it from the author's hand except that much of the original matter has been omitted' (CN, 409).
- 41 See Whitley Stokes, 'The Voyage of Mael Duin', *Revue Celtique*, vol. 9, 1888, pp. 447–495 and vol. 10, 1889, pp. 50–95. The text as compiled by Stokes comes from an amalgamation of four sources: *Lebor na hUidre* (c. 1100), *The Yellow Book of Lecan* (14th century) and two manuscripts, respectively titled 'Harleian 5280' (15th century) and 'Egerton 1782' (15th–16th centuries).
- 42 In even sharper contrast is Tennyson's loose ballad reworking, 'The Voyage of Maeldune', which opens by emphasising the nobility of Máel Dúin and his men:
- I was the chief of the race – he had stricken my father dead –
But I gather'd my fellows together, I swore I would strike off his head.
Each of them look'd like a king and was noble in birth as in worth,
And each of them boasted he sprang from the oldest race upon earth.
Each was as brave in the light as the bravest hero of song,
And each of them liefer had died than have done one another a wrong.
- Alfred Tennyson, *The Major Works: Including The Princess, In Memoriam and Maud*, Adam Roberts (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 449. No doubt O'Nolan would have found this reworking in parts amusing and distressing.
- 43 'yellow fretful rivers flowing between them and filling my ears with an unearthly mysterious humming', 'villages of leaning white rocks', 'a mesh of bottomless dark-mouthed holes where rapid waters were falling incessantly' (CN, 476).
- 44 'I don't know whether I allowed a large part of the day to slip by in sleep or in semi-consciousness' (CN, 476).
- 45 'red showers' (CN, 482).
- 46 'I never thought [. . .] that the Old Fellow had that much blood' (CN, 482). 'Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?'; William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V.i.40–41, in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, rev. ed., Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan (eds) (London: Thomson Learning, 2001), p. 795.
- 47 'lately' (CN, 486).
- 48 'bent and broken and as thin as a stem of grass' (CN, 487).
- 49 'The name and surname that's on me [. . .] is also Jams O'Donnell. You're my father and it's clear you've come out of the jug' (CN, 488).
- 50 Of course, we should note that while fulfilling his destiny, Bónapárt writes from the jug (*crúiscín*). The jug full of Jams O'Donnells (*crúiscín lán*) or, anglicised, 'Cruiskeen Lawn'. Having relegated himself to the position of mere editor, Myles seemingly could not resist some inclusion.

- 51 In an interesting twist in a tragic case, among the main, male players the only first name not to be repeated was 'Myles'.
- 52 James Joyce, 'Ireland Before the Bar', in *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (eds) (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 198.

13. Rice: Misogynist or 'ould Mary Anne'?

- 1 Bernard Benstock, 'The Three Faces of Brian Nolan', in Rüdiger Imhof (ed.), *Alive-Alive, O!: Flann O'Brien's At Swim-Two-Birds* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1985), p. 67.
- 2 Anne Clissmann, *Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), p. 322.
- 3 Jack White, 'Myles, Flann and Brian', in Timothy O'Keeffe (ed.), *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan* (London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1973), p. 69.
- 4 Amy Nejezchleb, 'O'Brien's Your Man: Myles, Modernity and Irish National Television' (Baines, 102).
- 5 'Mary Anne' was a popular euphemism for a homosexual in 1950s Ireland. Maura Laverty, 'Women-shy Irishmen', in John O'Brien (ed.), *The Vanishing Irish* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1953), p. 59. Hopper comments that in 'the original draft manuscript of *The Dalkey Archive*, [O'Nolan] had intended to suggest that Mick was actually homosexual', adding that he considered making Mary a 'male homosexual' as well (88–89).
- 6 Although it was generally believed that a position in the Civil Service insured 'almost absolute security' (Cronin, 76), apparently you could be dismissed and your pension 'wiped out by a single serious lapse' (O'Nolan, qtd. in Cronin, 160). Neither Cronin nor O'Nolan explain what would constitute such a 'lapse'.
- 7 One biographical detail that stands out in Cronin's biography is the austere detachment of Brian's father Michael O'Nolan from his son and indeed from all his children. The impact of a distant father on the son is almost a cliché in psycho-social aetiologies of homosexuality. Whether or not such was the effect of O'Nolan's father upon his son, there is no question that dead or absent fathers are a constant in all the novels.
- 8 O'Nolan may have calculated that his notorious misogyny and 'overt homophobic posturing' would defend him from 'accusations of homoeroticism', yet the fact remains, as Hopper concedes, that the 'relentless fascination with homosexuality – which runs throughout [O'Nolan's] novels in coded form – might well betray a more personal anxiety' (73, 74–75). Hopper offers the best discussion of the homoerotic elements in O'Nolan's fiction (72–84).
- 9 It is tempting to suggest that publishers might have rejected this fascinating, dark, funny and disturbing book precisely *because* of these motifs.
- 10 The use of 'queer' for a homosexual was already well-established in O'Nolan's Ireland; Andrea Bobotis, 'Queering Knowledge in Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*', *Irish University Review*, vol. 32, no. 2, Autumn/Winter 2002, p. 255; see also Hopper, 73–76.

- 11 Among numerous amusing and fascinating examples of O’Nolan’s ‘coded’ homoerotic allusions in *The Third Policeman*, Hopper notes that the name Kurt Freund – ‘also the name of a [contemporary] Czech sexologist famous for his studies of male homosexuality’ (137) – appears in the narrator’s list of his possible names (CN, 254–255).
- 12 An earlier, similar erasure of the female is Dermot Trellis’s theory of ‘aestho-auto-gamy’ in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, a parody of the Joycean androgynous artist – viz. Stephen Dedalus’s Shakespeare discussion in the ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ episode of *Ulysses* (1922) – that eliminates the female from the act of procreation, ‘producing a living mammal from an operation involving neither fertilisation nor conception’ (CN, 37).
- 13 Bobotis, p. 248. Appropriately enough, after *The Third Policeman* was rejected by publishers, O’Nolan put his manuscript in a closet where it remained until after his death.
- 14 Clissmann, p. 112; M. Keith Booker, *Flann O’Brien, Bakhtin and Menippean Satire* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), pp. 30–34; J.C.C. Mays, ‘Brian O’Nolan: Literalist of the Imagination’, in O’Keeffe (ed.), p. 83, *inter alia*.
- 15 This particular de Selby note coincides in the text with the bicycle scene in which the narrator similarly yet reciprocally imposes the opposite gender on a subject. Hopper has noted the innuendos of ‘homosociality’ and ‘sexual unease’ in this and other de Selby footnotes in *The Third Policeman* (77); thus we could argue that de Selby, like Martin Finnucane, subtly reflects the protagonist’s apparent homosexuality. Hopper further observes that the de Selby footnotes ‘contain an inbuilt self-defence mechanism for the author. By showing the reader how literary and philosophical ideas can be easily misinterpreted, [O’Nolan] implicitly warns us against deconstructing the value systems of his own work in biographical terms. [O’Nolan] seems anxious that his particular depiction of social and sexual conduct may be misconstrued and used against him’ (77–78).
- 16 ‘i dtóin an tí’ (ABB, 16).
- 17 John O’Brien (ed.), p. 3.
- 18 *ibid.*, p. 17.
- 19 *ibid.*, pp. 22, 32; Patrick B. Noonan, ‘Why Few Irish Marry’ in John O’Brien (ed.), pp. 47–48; Paul Vincent Carroll, ‘The Mystical Irish’, in John O’Brien (ed.), p. 65; Edmund J. Murray, ‘The Key to the Problem’, in John O’Brien (ed.), pp. 75, 78, *inter alia*.
- 20 Mary Frances Keating, ‘Marriage-shy Irishmen’, in John O’Brien (ed.), p. 170; Lavery, p. 50.
- 21 Lavery, p. 54.
- 22 *ibid.*, p. 58.
- 23 *ibid.*
- 24 *ibid.*, p. 59.

14. Baines: The murders of Flann O’Brien

- 1 One might consider, too, that like the narrator of *The Third Policeman*, this narrator is unnamed (‘Let us say my name is Murphy’) and inhabits a timeless, unidentified place that is very like Ireland.

- 2 For more on the theological and ontological effects of the murder in *The Third Policeman*, consult Shelly Brivic, ‘*The Third Policeman* as Lacanian Deity: O’Brien’s Critique of Language and Subjectivity’, *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 16, no. 2, Samhradh/Summer 2012, pp. 112–132.
- 3 Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 507.
- 4 J.G. O’Keeffe (ed. and trans.), *Buile Suibhne: The Adventures of Suibhne Geilt* (London: The Irish Texts Society, 1913), p. 155.
- 5 Seamus Heaney, *Sweeney’s Flight, Based on the Revised Text of ‘Sweeney Astray’* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 87.
- 6 ‘Le linn na féile, cailleadh a lán daoine “ná beidh a leithéidí arís ann,” agus dá leanfaí den fheis go cionn seachtaine eile is fíor nach mbeadh aoinne anois beo i gCorca Dhorcha’ (ABB, 52).
- 7 ‘Bhí a aghaidh beag liath agus casachtach mhillteanach ag gabháil dó. Tháinig scanradh orm de bhrí nár fhéadas an créatúr a cheansú. D’fhágas é mar a raibh sé ar an bhféar agus ritheas isteach ar lorg mo mhná. Cad deirir ach go bhfuairéas í sinthe fuar marbh ar an luachair, a béal ar lánoscailt, agus na muca ag srannfaigh ina timpeall. An t-am ar shroicheas Lánardó arís mar ar fhágas é bhí seisean gan aon bheatha ann chomh maith. Bhí sé imithe arís go dtí an fód ó dtáinig’ (ABB, 76).
- 8 ‘Sin chugat, a léitheoir, faisnéis ar shaol na mbochtán Gaelach i gCorca Dhorcha agus cuntas ar an gcinniúint atá rompu ón chéad lá. Tar éis an chéilí mhóir tig an dúbhrón agus ní go seasmhach a mhaireann an deauain’ (ABB, 76).
- 9 “An bhfuilir cinnte,” arsa mise, “gur daoine na Gaeil?”
“Tá an t-ainm sin amuigh orthu, a uaislín,” ar seisean, “ach ní fritheadh deimhniú riamh air” (ABB, 90).
- 10 ‘Tá an scríbhinn seo go díreach mar a fuair mé í ó lámh an údair ach amháin go bhfuil an mhórchuid fágtha ar lár de dheasca a raibh inti de thráchtas ar nithe nach bhfuil oiriúnach’ (ABB, 7).
- 11 Lady Augusta Gregory, *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993), p. 5.
- 12 ‘Beidh a dheich n-oiread eile le fáil go réidh, mar sin féin, más amhlaidh go mbíonn aon ghlaoh ag an bpobal ar an leabhrán seo’ (ABB, 7).
- 13 “Anois,” arsa mise, go cneasta, “bootsor!”
“Boots?”
“Bootsor.”
Ní fheadar an iontas a bhí ar an duine uasal nó nár thuig sé mo Bhéarla, ach sheas sé ar feadh i bhfad ag breathnú orm. Ansin, bhog sé siar agus fuair sé a lán péirí bróg’ (ABB, 106).
- 14 ‘mise ag breathnú uaim go spéisiúil ar chóistí móra ag dul thar bráid, ag brú rompu rudaí móra dubha iarainn a bhí ag smaoisíl agus ag casachtaigh agus ag ligean deataigh astu’ (ABB, 111).

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