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## On Thooleramawns, Thullabawns, and Gawshkogues: The Role of Hiberno-English in Myles na gCopaleen's Lexicon of Libel

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This note reconsiders Myles na gCopaleen's uses and abuses of Hiberno-English through some of the columnist's favourite insults – such as thooleramawn, thullabawn, and gawshkogues. A master of both of Ireland's 'official' languages, Myles had a unique relationship with the unofficial hybrid, which provided him with, among other things, a rich repertoire of verbal disparagement. Not only did he have an apparent monopoly of some of these terms but, like a Hiberno-English Humpty Dumpty, he may have had exclusive rights to decide what, if anything, they meant.

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Among his many achievements, Myles na gCopaleen was the first person ever to use the word ‘thooleramawn’ in print in *The Irish Times*. According to the archive search, the insult made its debut on 4 January 1950, in the ninety-first year of the newspaper’s existence. That was quite late even in the *Cruiskeen Lawn* era: not yet at the halfway stage chronologically, but well beyond it in actual column numbers. The subject of the piece in question was Sean O’Casey’s new play, *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*. The play had been written and premiered in England, where O’Casey was now exiled, and the playwright himself thought it his best work. Myles had not yet seen this ‘mysterious masterpiece’ but, based on a deliberate misunderstanding of the title, begged to disagree: ‘Who but poor earnest, deluded thooleramawns of English intellectuals would dream of putting it on!’ he demanded to know.<sup>1</sup>

Having waited ninety years for one thooleramawn, typically, *The Irish Times* had another two days later. This time the subject was the German artist, Paul Klee. (A small personal confession here, by the way: I had until very recently always read that surname as Klee, to rhyme with ‘Key,’ until a Mylesian joke finally educated me on the issue.) In this case, Myles claimed – among other things – that the artist’s supposed work on display in Dublin had in fact been painted by two local chancers of his acquaintance. Of the deluded Irish art community, he asked: ‘Was there ever under heaven such a country for thullabawns, gawshogues, thooleramawns, and dinnaleedes?’<sup>2</sup> On second thoughts, Myles added: ‘Maybe they don’t look out of their place entoirely, at that, with Klee pipes in their gobs.’ (That was the phonetically educational joke).

We’ll come back later to the other terms of abuse in his list. But in the meantime, like a child with a Christmas toy, Myles was playing with his new favourite word again on 11 January. The subject this time was the inadequacy of Irish consular services abroad. This is the column – or one of them – in which he claims to have been born in Paddington Station in 1863 and therefore to be the proud holder of a blue passport, which he is reluctant to surrender. Illustrating the shortcomings of the green ones, he launches into a story about ‘an unfortunate *thooleramawn* of a friend of mine’ who had a bit of a nightmare when ‘stranded in a certain world capital with four Christian Brothers.’<sup>3</sup> After one more outbreak in January, instances of thooleramawners then settled down to a more sustainable average of about one a month.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Myles na gCopaleen, *Cruiskeen Lawn*, *The Irish Times* [hereafter CL] (4 January 1950): 4.

<sup>2</sup> CL (6 January 1950): 4.

<sup>3</sup> CL (11 January 1950): 4.

<sup>4</sup> CL (23 January 1950): 4; CL (13 February 1950): 4; CL (6 March 1950): 4; CL (13 March 1950): 4; CL (24 March 1950): 4; CL (31 March 1950): 4; CL (23 June 1950): 4; CL (28 July 1950): 4; CL (1 September 1950): 4.

The Year of the Thooleramawn ended with the last of a dozen or so mentions in December, this time on the subject of Scotsmen. Myles approves of Scotsmen individually, on a case-by-case basis, he assures us. But in crowds, he finds them just as overbearing as the English. Witness their annual St Andrew's Day or Burns Night celebrations, he writes, 'when they meet in some hotel to have some unfortunate *thooleramawn* of a dressed-up piper marching in on fire with his bag-pipes full of haggis, a Scotch invention which amounts to nothing more or less than solidified whisky with hair growing out of it.'<sup>5</sup> Almost needless to add, Myles had a 'Thooleramawn of the Year' award for 1951, presented in early January 1952 and won, against stiff competition, by the Gate Theatre director Hilton Edwards.<sup>6</sup> Having been the first to use the word in *The Irish Times*, Myles was also the last. Its appearances died with him in 1966, except in later years for reprints of the column and tributes – in the meantime, it had also featured in his 1961 comeback novel, *The Hard Life*.<sup>7</sup>

But what exactly did *thooleramawn* mean, anyway? It clearly wasn't a compliment, a point underlined by Myles's habit of qualifying it with the word 'unfortunate.' You could guess it described someone who had started out as a mere *eejit* and whose condition then worsened. Yet my copy of Terence Patrick Dolan's *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English* is entirely silent on the matter.<sup>8</sup> And although some have suggested it derives from the Irish *dúramán*, meaning 'dunce,' that doesn't quite sound like the same thing. The only other writer ever to have used the term, seemingly, was Hugh Leonard, who revived it for a time during the 1970s and 80s in his *Sunday Independent* column 'The Curmudgeon.' But among his other previous work, of course, Leonard had adapted Flann O'Brien's *The Dalkey Archive* for the stage<sup>9</sup> and was a fan, so his *thooleramawn* must have been deliberate homage.

Similarly obscure is another of the later Myles's favourite terms of abuse, 'thullabawn,' which we met earlier at the art gallery. That word made its *Irish Times* debut a few years before *thooleramawn*, in 1945, during *Cruiskeen Lawn*'s heyday. The scene then was one of the elderly tramp Myles's many appearances before the District Court when, as was his wont, he broke into intemperate Latin on the subject of the prosecuting Garda. Asked to behave himself in court, he rants at the judge: 'Conspice vestrum thullabawn curialem! Conspice militem-pacis vestrum cum mendaciunculo

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<sup>5</sup> CL (18 December 1950): 4.

<sup>6</sup> CL (4 January 1952): 4.

<sup>7</sup> Flann O'Brien, *The Complete Novels* (New York: Everyman's Library, 2007), 636.

<sup>8</sup> Terence Patrick Dolan (ed.), *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English: The Irish Use of English*, 2nd edn (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Leonard's *When the Saints Go Cycling In* premiered at the Gate Theatre, Dublin, on 27 September 1965.

suo! Thullabawn! Mendax!’<sup>10</sup> Which means something like: ‘Behold your thullabawn court! Behold your Guardian of the Peace with his lies! Thullabawn! Liar!’ That word too became a more regular feature of the columns in the 1950s and 60s,<sup>11</sup> before also disappearing with the writer. And again, it does not feature in Dolan’s dictionary. If you Google it, the search engine’s best guesses include the Irish placename database Logainm, in which Thullabawn is a townland in Mayo.<sup>12</sup> That hardly seems to justify the word being used as an expression of contempt, nor does the placename’s inoffensive derivation from the Irish original Talamh Bán, meaning ‘white land.’

Then there is the aforementioned ‘gawshogue,’<sup>13</sup> which on at least one occasion elsewhere in *Cruiskeen Lawn* becomes ‘grawskogue,’<sup>14</sup> with an added ‘r’ and a ‘k,’ but seems to settle eventually as ‘gawshkogue,’<sup>15</sup> retaining the ‘k’ while losing the ‘r.’ *Irish Times* sub-editors must have exhausted their source materials searching for a correct spelling. But at least in the form of gawshkogue, we may have a reasonable lead as to where this word comes from and what it means. Many readers will be familiar with Gaisce, the President’s Award, presented to Irish schoolchildren in return for various worthy tasks aimed at improving themselves and their communities. Well, this may be a comment on the nature of the Irish mindset, but in Hiberno-English, it turns out that even too much self-improvement can be considered a bad thing. Dolan tells us that while Gaisce means ‘a deed of valour,’ it is often used sarcastically of the deed or the doer. In parts of Kerry, at least, ‘doing the Gaisce’ means ‘showing off.’<sup>16</sup>

Some years ago, in my own *Irish Times* column, I had reason to compile ‘A History of Ireland in 100 Insults.’ Myles was well represented, coming in at number 46 with ‘thooleramawn,’ number 47 with ‘turnip snagger,’ and 48 with – of course – ‘a streptococcus-ridden gang of natural Gobdaws,’ as he once called the Plain People of Ireland.<sup>17</sup> But he had a seemingly bottomless reservoir of colourful disparagement, most of it vaguely descended from Irish and much of it apparently his alone. Not only does the *Irish Times* archive have a sub-category of words that only Myles used, it has a sub-sub-category of words that perhaps only Myles understood. Like a Hiberno-English

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<sup>10</sup> CL (17 October 1945): 2.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, CL (28 June 1946): 4; CL (31 January 1957): 6; CL (2 February 1957): 11; CL (25 August 1959): 6; CL (19 February 1960): 8; CL (29 March 1960): 8; CL (3 August 1961): 8; CL (18 December 1964): 10; CL (8 February 1965): 10; CL (8 May 1965): 12.

<sup>12</sup> ‘An Talamh Bán,’ logainm.ie, <https://www.logainm.ie/en/37513>.

<sup>13</sup> CL (19 April 1946): 2; CL (17 July 1946): 4; CL (6 January 1950): 4.

<sup>14</sup> CL (23 January 1950): 4.

<sup>15</sup> CL (21 October 1953): 6; CL (26 June 1956): 6; CL (29 May 1959): 8; CL (23 April 1965): 10.

<sup>16</sup> Dolan, ‘gaisce,’ in *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English*, 100.

<sup>17</sup> Frank McNally, ‘An Irishman’s Diary: A History of Ireland in 100 Insults,’ *The Irish Times* (15 March 2012): <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/an-irishman-s-diary-1.482044>.

Humpty Dumpty, he enjoyed a monopoly not just of the terms themselves but also of their meanings. When it suited him, he even treated them as clichés, an unusual distinction for words that nobody else used.

Here is another display of his capacity for highly personalised Hiberno-English abuse, again from the area of art criticism, or more particularly from his review of the guests attending the opening of a show at the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1946:

Pictures are all very well but what about, on opening day, the vision of politically-sired judicial chancers examining oil paintings? A Kerry crofter, lately come to money, trying not to look self-conscious in a neck-tie but cute enough to keep the eyes glued on a bishop's portrait? A *gawmarawl* from Cork West who doesn't 'like' some landscape, the only picture he ever saw before (in his life) being 'A Bad Spill – Grand National, 1899. Presented with the Christmas Number *Boy's Own Paper*, 1900'? A *shoolerawn* from Ballymore-Eustace who says 'One has to come again, of course – an adjudication requires tranquillity. Crowds make me rash and emotional' (And then in an undertone, to the cousin: 'Gob, these trousers is very tight, Mick.').<sup>18</sup>

On the subject of Kerry people, crofters or otherwise, I'm reminded that the then manager of that county's football team, Páidí Ó Sé, got himself into trouble some years ago, at a time of bad results and disaffection among supporters, for suggesting that Kerry GAA fans were – quote – 'the roughest type of fucking animals you could ever deal with.' It caused quite a furore at the time, including calls for his resignation. But one of his defenders was a Catholic clergyman and language scholar, Canon Ó Fiannachta, who believed that Ó Sé's only offence was that he was *thinking in Irish while speaking in English*. In the Irish-speaking areas west of Ó Sé's Ventry, said the canon, the word 'animal' is not nearly as insulting as it is in English – there is even a certain nobility implied. As a native *Gaeilgeoir* himself, Páidí had probably been thinking of the phrase 'téad bullán' or 'scata bullán' which referred to a herd of bullocks but could also apply to a group of strong, and strong-willed, men who were not for turning. Unfortunately for Ó Sé, added the canon, the retreat of Irish had left him living on the exact fault line of the Fíor Gaeltacht and the English-speaking areas. So even in the east Kerry towns of Tralee and Killarney, his way of thinking was likely to be misunderstood. Canon Ó Fiannachta made no mention of the F-word, which had scandalised some. But then again, it's the A-word that seems to have stuck. To this day, in online GAA forums and other theatres of banter, 'the animals' remains shorthand for Kerry football people. Clearly, Páidí Ó Sé could have done with some of Myles's rich vocabulary of vivid yet

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<sup>18</sup> CL (19 April 1946): 2.

vague deprecation. That must have included a few terms implying bovine qualities but not in a way that their exact meaning could be pinned down.

The retreat of Irish was already well under way when Brian O’Nolan was born in West Tyrone, not far from the Donegal Gaeltacht. He went on to live in several different parts of Ireland, but, given his early immersion in Irish, he was always living on the fault line between the Fíor Gaeltacht and the English-speaking areas. It ran through *him*, even when he was resident in Blackrock and Stillorgan. He was always quick to defend the language when it was attacked. But mostly he just mined the cultural misunderstandings for comedy, first in Irish, then English, and increasingly as the years went by, in the hybrid language, in which he was equally fluent. Hiberno-English was, after all, the birthright of a character named ‘Myles na gCopaleen’ and a column called *Cruiskeen Lawn*, spelt with those interlopers in the Irish alphabet, a ‘k’ and a ‘w.’ It may have added to the attractions of that born-out-of-wedlock linguistic love child that it annoyed some of the Irish revival purists. In any case, after the anarchic inventiveness of the column’s early years gave way to a more conventionally satirical overview of Irish life, the colourful put-downs in Hiberno-English became ever-more useful. Perhaps, too, the pre-loaded comedic quality of words such as ‘thooleramawn’ and ‘thullabawn’ was a comfort blanket in the column’s later years, when Myles’s own comic energy waned.

Much as he revelled in the vocabulary, Myles was famously unenamoured of past attempts to elevate Hiberno-English into a language of national expression, whether as Lady Gregory’s so-called Kiltartanese or in the plays of J. M. Synge. In his own, one-man version of the *Playboy* riots, from 1942, he famously railed:

A lifetime of cogitation has convinced me that in this Anglo-Irish literature of ours (which for the most part is neither Anglo, Irish, nor literature) (as the man said) nothing in the whole galaxy of fake is comparable with Synge. That comic ghoul with his wakes and mugs of porter should be destroyed finally and forever by having a drama festival at which all of his plays should be revived [...]. The younger generation should be shown what their fathers and grand-daddies went through for Ireland, and a time when it was neither profitable nor popular.<sup>19</sup>

Myles was particularly exercised by the rise in ethnic exhibitionism that Synge’s plays had allegedly encouraged, which was a bit rich for a columnist himself named after a nineteenth-century stage Irishman. He continues:

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<sup>19</sup> CL (28 August 1942): 3.

This trouble probably began with Lever and Lover. But I always think that in Synge we have the virus isolated and recognisable. Here is the stuff that anybody who knows the Ireland referred to simply will not have. It is not that Synge made people less worthy or nastier, or even better than they are, but he brought forward with the utmost solemnity amusing clowns talking a sub-language of their own and bade us to take them very seriously. There was no harm done there, because we have long had the name of having heads on us. But when the counterfeit bauble began to be admired outside Ireland by reason of its oddity and 'charm,' it soon became part of the literary credo here that Synge was a poet and a wild celtic god, a bit of a genius, indeed, like the brother. We, who knew the whole inside-outs of it, preferred to accept the ignorant valuations of outsiders on things Irish. And now the curse has come upon us, because I have personally met in the streets of Ireland persons who are clearly out of Synge's plays. They talk and dress like that, and damn the drink they'll swally but the mug of porter in the long nights after Samhain.<sup>20</sup>

Typically, as if to guard against taking his opinions on this too seriously, Myles allows himself to be interrupted at that point by The Plain People of Ireland, asking him an only slightly relevant question about how Synge Street got its name.

In his distrust of the flowerier excesses of Hiberno-English, Myles was unusually consistent, and he followed through on this in his own literary fictions. The weirdness of the English syntax in *The Third Policeman* arises in part, as Anthony Cronin notes, from its resemblance to a translation of Irish,<sup>21</sup> but without the poetry Synge or Lady Gregory would have insisted on, and with a darker sort of comedy than you would get in the likes of Somerville and Ross. Similarly, the first-person narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds* seems to vacillate in style between the rhythms of translated Irish and an English so precise and formal that it sounds like – again in Cronin's words – a 'dead language.'<sup>22</sup> As for *An Béal Bocht*, that Irish-language satire arose from Myles's complicated and intense relationship with the book it lampoons: Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An t-Oileánach*. The original had an 'explosive' effect on him, he claimed, disturbing him so much he had to put it away for a time, 'a thing not to be seen or thought about and certainly not to be discussed with strangers.'<sup>23</sup> But (speaking of 'Flowery' language) he considered Robin Flower's English translation a travesty: 'A greater parcel of bosh and bunk than Flower's "Islandman" has rarely been imposed on the unsuspecting public.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> CL (28 August 1942): 3.

<sup>21</sup> Anthony Cronin, *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien* (New York: Fromm International, 1998), 106.

<sup>22</sup> Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 106.

<sup>23</sup> CL (3 January 1957): 6.

<sup>24</sup> CL (3 January 1957): 6.

Of course, it was Myles's fond belief, and sometimes his unfond and cranky one, that many words and concepts in Irish were simply impossible to translate into English and vice versa. In fact, he thought dictionaries in general were often exercises in futility, although he also claimed to own at least 40 of them.<sup>25</sup> He considered the mutual estrangement between Irish and English to be well illustrated by the dictionary of a clergyman – no, not Father Dinneen, for once. This time it was Father MacCionnaith's 1956 English-Irish lexicon, an oddity from which Myles chose several samples before re-translating the priest's Irish definitions back into English. To explain the word 'dying,' apparently, Father McCionnaith had used a phrase meaning 'the dry breath is falling out of me'; 'influenza' he had defined as 'the big cold' (that one is straightforward enough); and for 'flog a dead horse,' he had substituted 'throw stones at a dead dog.'<sup>26</sup> Myles writes:

I am not trying to be aganatastical [there's another word that must have had the newspaper's subs scratching heads] or derogatory about this dictionary, but the author is again and again compelled to give, not a word for a word, but a word for a context; there is an endemic want of *rapport* between the two languages, particularly where subtlety of meaning is involved. There is no accurate English equivalent of words like thooleramawn, grig, poteen, colleen, ownshuck, shebeen and other ethnic peculiarities of ours, for the same reason.<sup>27</sup>

I must say, that, whatever about *poitín* being untranslatable, it comes as news to me – as it will to the many Irish-American women who have it as a name – that the concept of a colleen has no equivalent in English. But that's what Myles said.

That same column also mentions another heroic but doomed lexicographer, Seán Caomhánach of Dún Chaoin, who spent decades compiling an epic dictionary of Irish from the Dingle peninsula alone, and who had told Myles once that, after seven years, he was 'only half-way in the letter B.'<sup>28</sup> Myles wrote elsewhere in the column that whereas the average English person used 400 words, the average Irish-speaking peasant used more like 4,000, and he joked that with some of the more fluent, it was a matter of pride never to use the same word twice.<sup>29</sup> Caomhánach's Dingle dictionary suggests he may not have been exaggerating as much as he thought. The finished work eventually ran to 4,000 pages, but plans to publish it in a multi-volume edition were abandoned in

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<sup>25</sup> CL (9 March 1956): 8.

<sup>26</sup> Qtd in CL (10 March 1956): 10.

<sup>27</sup> CL (10 March 1956): 10.

<sup>28</sup> CL (10 March 1956): 10.

<sup>29</sup> CL (11 January 1941): 8.



favour of consigning it to the National Library as a research tool. Maybe that's where Myles got some of his personal vocabulary supplies.

Incidentally, Caomhánach was better known as Seán a' Chóta, or Sean the Coat. And on the great philosophical question 'is it about a bicycle?', it often was in his case. He was the first on the Dingle peninsula to own one, and he travelled large parts of Ireland on it. He is also reputedly the person who coined the Irish word *rothar* for bicycle, after a short period in which the invention had been known in Irish by the more Homeric term *An Capall Maide* (the wooden horse). Alas for dictionary makers, I'm told that *rothar* is still regarded with suspicion in what's left of the Fíor Gaeltacht, and that the natives there prefer such constructions as *mo bhadhsacal*.

One of the things Myles professed to love about Ireland's First Official Language was what he called its 'steely latinistic' precision.<sup>30</sup> Soon after his own farewell to Irish, in 1943, he was compelled to defend it against an *Irish Times* editorial arguing that the half-million pounds a year wasted on reviving it would be better spent on slum clearance. Perversely, as usual, Myles did this while conceding that nobody living could now speak or write old Irish properly and that the only person qualified to try – modesty forbade him naming names – had been too tired to bother recently. But by way of illustrating the superior exactitude of Irish, he attempted a literal translation of a 350-year-old letter from Hugh O'Neill to a Gaelic captain whose loyalty had become suspect, as follows:

Our blessing to ye, Ó Mac Coghlin: we received your letter and what we understand from her is that what you are at the doing of is but sweetness of word and spinning out of time. For our part of the subject, whatever person is with us and will not wear himself out in the interest of justice, that person we understand to be a person against us. For that reason, in each place in which ye do your own good, pray do also our ill to the fullest extent ye can and we will do your ill to the absolute utmost of our ability, with God's will. We being at Knockdoney Hill, 6 februarii, 1600.<sup>31</sup>

That seems to Myles to be 'an exceptional achievement in the sphere of written nastiness,' and yet, he says it also 'exudes the charm attaching to all instances of complete precision in the use of words.'<sup>32</sup>

He could have done with some of that himself a few years later during one of his own more infamous exercises in written nastiness when, at the height of the Mother and Child controversy, he this time defended *The Irish Times's* editorial line from an attack by the socially conservative president of University College Cork, Alfred

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<sup>30</sup> CL (11 October 1943): 3.

<sup>31</sup> CL (11 October 1943): 3.

<sup>32</sup> CL (11 October 1943): 3.

O’Rahilly.<sup>33</sup> The feud, which ran to seven columns in 1951 and made the newspaper’s lawyers very nervous, included the full battery of Myles’s Hiberno-English bombast. It began with the sentence: ‘Today I mount my rostrum (*stet*) to deal with Alfred O’Rahilly, the Cork *thooleramawn*.’<sup>34</sup> A day later, O’Rahilly was dubbed ‘the Cork *gawskogue*’ (no ‘h’ there, yet another variant spelling).<sup>35</sup> And a little later again, after quoting something suitably recriminating O’Rahilly had written, Myles pauses to ask readers: ‘Honest, lads – isn’t he the most extraordinary and incorrigible *thullabawn*?’<sup>36</sup> This is the ultimate Mylesian insult: invoking a public gallery assumed to be sympathetic (‘Honest, lads’) while deploying a vague but apparently damning epithet that draws its authority from ancient Irish roots known only to him and against which O’Rahilly can hardly appeal, since he probably doesn’t know what it means either. On a side note, I think O’Rahilly may hold the record for being the only person called a thooleramawn, a thullabawn, and a gawshkogue by Myles.

As Terence Dolan points out in the introduction to his dictionary, the modern dominance of English in Ireland was a long time coming. In the meantime, the native language put up an epic and spirited fight. From the earliest years of Anglo-Norman rule, Irish words often infiltrated the newcomers’ speech and by the fourteenth century, the settlers themselves had taken to Irish, despite attempts to forbid it by law. The old language continued to thrive into the fifteenth century. It was only with the plantations of the sixteenth and especially the seventeenth centuries that English began to gain ground in parts of the country where Irish was previously dominant. To the economic importance of learning English, then, was added the growing prestige of the language’s association with the big houses and towns. The Penal Laws, the Act of Union, and the Famine completed the rout of Irish. And yet, Dolan points out, English did not become dominant without having to succumb to many of Ireland’s native linguistic traditions along the way. As he sums up, the result is a form of English ‘contaminated through and through with Irish.’<sup>37</sup>

Myles na gCopaleen clearly enjoyed the contamination more than most writers, and greatly added to it. But his inability to transcend Ireland during his lifetime and achieve a wider readership abroad may have been one reflection of a wider paradox that has long baffled language scholars: the official scarcity of Irish in English. Ireland was England’s oldest colony and a country famous for talkers and writers. But according to

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<sup>33</sup> For more on Myles’s feud with Alfred O’Rahilly during the Mother and Child controversy, see Alana Gillespie, ‘The Soft Misogyny of Good Intentions: The Mother and Child Scheme, *Cruiskeen Lawn*, and *The Hard Life*,’ in *Flann O’Brien: Gallows Humour*, eds. Ruben Borg and Paul Fagan (Cork: Cork University Press, 2020), 77–94.

<sup>34</sup> CL (16 May 1951): 4.

<sup>35</sup> CL (17 May 1951): 4.

<sup>36</sup> CL (17 May 1951): 4.

<sup>37</sup> Dolan, ‘Introduction to the First Edition,’ in *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English*, xxix.

the traditional dictionaries, its contribution was negligible. H. L. Mencken, in his classic book *The American Language*, expresses surprise at the paucity of Irish inclusions, in the process further understating them: 'Perhaps *shillelah*, *colleen*, *spalpeen*, *smithereens*, and *poteen* exhaust the unmistakably Gaelic list,' he writes.<sup>38</sup> Dolan cites 'galore,' 'whiskey,' 'slogan,' and a few other examples, but agrees that the shortage is 'well-known but puzzling.'<sup>39</sup> Some have alleged cultural bias, conscious or unconscious. A now slightly notorious book of a few years ago, *How the Irish Invented Slang*, goes to the other extreme in revenge, finding possible Hibernian roots for a staggering range of American words traditionally deemed of 'origin unknown.'<sup>40</sup>

Happily, the official lexicographers' resistance appears to have weakened in recent years, perhaps thanks to new and more virulent strains of Irish literature. The 2022 quarterly update of the Online Oxford English Dictionary, released in time for St Patrick's Day, was an Irish-English special, gathering dozens of new terms into the collection. These range from English words with particular Irish meanings – such as the verb 'to shift' (in the romantic sense) – to Irish words with English spellings – including *bockety* and *banatee* – and many words of unadulterated Irish that are nevertheless used frequently in spoken and written English, including *a chara*, *blas*, *ciúnas*, *ciotóg*, *cúpla focal*, *fada*, *grá*, *plámás*, and *ráiméis*.<sup>41</sup> The standard Irish version included, that last word has clocked up an extraordinary twenty-three different spellings on its appearances in printed English, according to the OED, including the one Myles preferred. It was as the fully phonetic R-A-W-M-A-Y-S-H that he used it when, for example, calling poor old Dinneen's dictionary 'that Golden Treasury of Rawmaysh.'<sup>42</sup>

Sad to say, there was no room in the OED's update for *thooleramawn*, *thullabawn*, or *gawhskogue*. The list did, however, pay at least one tribute to our hero. The OED already had the phrase 'poor mouth,' a usage that seems to have made its first printed appearances in the US during the second half of the nineteenth century. Perhaps it was imported by Irish emigrants. If so, no doubt the English version had lost some of the original nuances *en route*. It certainly lost the alliteration. Now at last, thanks in large part to Myles, the Oxford English Dictionary also includes the phrase '*Béal Bocht*.'<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> H. L. Mencken, *The American Language: A Preliminary Inquiry Into the Development of English in the United States* (New York: Knopf, 1919), 105.

<sup>39</sup> Dolan, 'Introduction to the First Edition,' in *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English*, xxii.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Cassidy, *How the Irish Invented Slang: The Secret Language of the Crossroads* (Oakland: Counterpunch / A.K. Press, 2007).

<sup>41</sup> Danica Salazar, 'Release Notes: Irish English,' *Oxford English Dictionary* (March 2022): <https://www.oed.com/discover/release-notes-irish-english-march-2022?tl=true>.

<sup>42</sup> CL (30 January 1953): 4.

<sup>43</sup> 'Béal Bocht,' *Oxford English Dictionary*, [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/beal-bocht\\_n](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/beal-bocht_n).

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### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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