

# ‘As long as the fancy stuff is kept down’

## The Perils of the Personal Note for Brian O’Nolan

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In *The Parish Review* 1, no. 2, Adrian Naughton continued his exploration of Brian O’Nolan’s MA thesis, particularly focusing on the author’s admiration for the succinctness of language and restraint of tone in early Irish nature poetry.<sup>1</sup> This quality O’Nolan sees as undergoing a change after the end of the Early-Irish period, circa 1100, with the introduction (though restricted) of more personal preoccupations leading to a decline in the standard of composition. As Louis de Paor says in an article cited by Naughton, *Nádúir-fhíliocht na Gaeilge* is of great importance for an understanding of the values O’Nolan sought out in literature and contains, writ large, values expressed more *sotto voce* in later works.<sup>2</sup> What I will examine here are instances of that echoing, specifically the dangerous consequences of indulging one’s self or of excessive self-examination, despite a paradoxical compulsion to strike that personal note in the first place.<sup>3</sup>

Until the idea began to be reassessed, one view of much poetry composed in Irish from the period referred to by O’Nolan in his MA thesis right up until the collapse of the Gaelic order in the early 17th century was that the formal requirements of its often courtly nature prevented any variety or innovation. Indeed, the extent to which concepts such as variety and innovation are to be considered anachronistic is an essential part of that debate.<sup>4</sup> Whereas O’Nolan saw poetry as sacrificing its refinement or subtlety of intimation as the Bardic period began, at the same time highly specific rules as to metre and rhyme were being adhered to, which had the effect of preventing perceived superfluity.

If the postgraduate Brian O’Nolan disapproved, as Flann O’Brien he chose to reconfigure the convention’s inner workings. The detached mock-heroism of Sweeny’s verses or Finn McCool’s stories in *At Swim-Two-Birds* is an echo less of earlier Irish literature than of scholarly translations of that literature. Humour is sometimes the unintentional by-product of the scholars’ tendency to be completionist in their translations. The contrast between the deceptive brevity which encapsulates a narrative denseness in the source-material and the prosaically unravelled literalness of the translation moves the two poles slightly too far apart, and this perception gap is bridged by humour. A parody of the technique proliferates in *At Swim-Two-Birds* to

the point of stylistic infection: the narrative voice recounting the Pooka's offer to share his breakfast with Trellis, to take just one example, takes on not just the Pooka's own brand of formality of speech, but something of the Hiberno-English translationese more usually associated with Sweeny or Finn: 'he had extended to the man upon the branch a courteous invitation to make company with him at eating.'<sup>5</sup> It is shortly before this when Orlick announces that 'the profundity of my own thought' will 'lift our tale to the highest plane of great literature' that Shanahan twice cautions against immoderacy, saying 'As long as the fancy stuff is kept down.'<sup>6</sup>

Many examples of O'Nolan's distinctive cross-pollinating noun-adjective pairings are found across the major novels: 'wretch-wretched I have been' (*At Swim-Two-Birds*); 'tá mo bhuíochas buíoch díot' (*An Béal Bocht*); 'good luck to your luck' (*The Third Policeman*); etc. Adrian Naughton's interpretation of O'Nolan's commentary on one poem in the thesis casts some light on this innovation. The poem in question, written after this watershed of 1100 AD and containing references to food, is for O'Nolan, Naughton says, 'overly long and unnecessarily detailed, as if there is no longer faith in a single noun or adjective,' as though 'this anxiety has led to an overcompensation in the catalogue of food.'<sup>7</sup> Conversely, a pre-1100 poem which found favour with the young author Naughton describes as having a 'self-sufficient brevity' in the 'simplicity of its adjectives.'<sup>8</sup> It could be argued that O'Nolan's tautology defying coinings, where words fold in on themselves then re-emerge, is a radical distillation of these techniques, at once transgressively expansive and reductively economical.

Where varieties of formality are found in some parts of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, more explicit approval of restraint is found elsewhere: even in the privacy of what is now the archive, for example, as detailed in Brian Ó Conchubhair's study of O'Nolan's marginalia in his copy of Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach*. As Ó Conchubhair explains, O'Nolan made eight notes on the book, one of them a commentary on the description of Ó Criomhthain's mother's death and funeral arrangements. This O'Nolan glossed with: 'all the literatures of the world contain nothing so momentarily said as that last paragraph.'<sup>9</sup> Ó Conchubhair takes this, and other notations of a similar tenor, to demonstrate O'Nolan's admiration for the Blasket author's brevity and self-restraint in describing traumatic personal experience, an affinity he sees as going against the grain of previous critical reception:

Ó Criomhthain's nonchalant, almost blasé, dismissal of his marriage, and his stoic and remorseless lack of compassion in narrating the death of his wife in addition to the birth and death of several children, has vexed critics.<sup>10</sup>

Emphasising the centrality of this aspect of *An tOileánach* in the germination of *An Béal Bocht*, Ó Criomhthain refuses, Ó Conchubhair says, 'to seek shelter in humanistic warmth' but 'coolly rejects an opportunity to wallow in standard tropes of loss and clichéd pieties.'<sup>11</sup> As O'Nolan was fond of pointing out the wide lexical variety available to the writer in Irish, to choose simplicity over multiple permutations of alliterating adjectives (which can often be various terms expressing the same concept) is presumably the more admirable choice.

The episode in *An Béal Bocht* which most supports Ó Conchubhair's contention (though he does not mention it in his article) is Bónapart's account of the death of his wife and child. It is all the more affecting for being out of place amid the general hilarity, where even death from exhaustion at a *feis* or bloody brutality in the classroom are ultimately presented with humour. That humour derives largely from Bónapart's faux-naïf voice, emphasising his passivity in the face of fate. But that voice is noticeably suspended for this brief episode. Even the pigs, often deployed with such amusing anthropomorphism, here revert to uncaring nature, grunting around the open-mouthed body of the dead woman. When Bónapart returns to where he had left his ailing child to go for help, he too is now lifeless.

Ó Conchubhair refers to Ó Criomhthain's brief postscript to his description of his mother's funeral in *An tOileánach*: '*Sin críoch leis an mbeirt do chuir sioladh na teangan so im' chluasa an chéad lá Beannacht Dé le n-a n-anam*' [That's the end of the two people who put the first syllable of this language in my ears may God bless their souls].<sup>12</sup> *An Béal Bocht* closely echoes this stoicism; the last sentence of Chapter 6 reads: '*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 dea-uain*' [There you have, reader, knowledge of the lives of the Irish poor in Corca Dhorcha and an account of the fate that awaits them from the start. The big *céilí* is followed by deep sadness and the good times do not last].<sup>13</sup> While not overly formal, the pathos of the episode chimes with the sobriety of tone. There is a brief suspension, as if for reflection, as the chapter ends before readjustment for the resumption of the capers. As John Jordan drew attention to the overlooked sadness at the heart of *At Swim-Two-Birds*,<sup>14</sup> so *An Béal Bocht* has its own darkness within the comedy, but it is presented sufficiently briefly as not to be unseemly or indulgent on the part of the narrator.

As this aspect of *An Béal Bocht* is indebted to *An tOileánach*, O'Nolan's earlier work also foreshadows it. Of the early short prose pieces in Irish, Breandán Ó Conaire calls '*Aistear Pheadair Dhuibh*' '*an téacs is tábhachtaí den ré thosaigh seo, ó thaobh BB [An Béal Bocht] de*' [the most important text of this initial period, in terms of *An Béal Bocht*],<sup>15</sup> seeing it as superior to a similar piece titled '*Ceist gan Réidhteach*' [An Unresolved

Matter] which appeared in *The Irish Press* the previous year, 1932. For Ó Conaire, '*An aoir a bhí ag péacadh ar éigean i dtús "Ceist gan Réidhteach" nochtann sé aníos go hoscailte*'<sup>16</sup> [the satire barely emergent in '*Ceist gan Réidhteach*' surfaces openly] in '*Aistear Pheadair Dhuibh.*' While there is an undeniable honing of focus in the later piece, and the characters and situation are closer to *An Béal Bocht* (as well as to *At Swim-Two-Birds* in their rebellious self-awareness), the earlier effort is also significant for being an iteration of this wariness about the prospect of dwelling too much on the self.

As Ó Conaire points out, the old man in '*Ceist gan Réidhteach*' is a predecessor of the Seandúine Liath of *An Béal Bocht*; the beards of both are very similarly portrayed, for example. But whereas the Seandúine Liath's beard is described relatively briefly, the beard of his predecessor in '*Ceist gan Réidhteach*' is the key to that story's events. A youth becomes obsessed with where the beard of the old man, his neighbour, is positioned while he is asleep – under the bedclothes, or out in the air. His parents fail to answer his question, as indeed does the old man's own son. When the boy asks the old man himself to solve the matter, he is ashamed that he has no answer and asks the boy to return when he has considered the question overnight. The old man becomes so agitated by his meditation on the matter in bed that night that he goes downstairs to make himself a cup of tea to help himself think, but trips on the stairs and dies.

Though the piece is diverting enough in its embryonic quirkiness, the brief description of the fateful moment stands out as being carefully composed:

*Is amhlaidh a lean sé ag siubhal an urláir gan an urlár ann; fá thosach do'n staighre agus fá dheireadh do'n urlár an áit sin. Thuit sé mar thuiteadh sac plúir. Bhris sé a mhuineál, agus scoiltigh sé a chlaigeann agus scar a anam le 'na chorp.*<sup>17</sup>

[He so happened to continue walking the floor where the floor was not; that place which is the stairs' beginning and the floor's end. He fell as would a sack of flour. He broke his neck and split his skull and his soul separated from his body.]

I observe here a slight echo of the first line of Muireadhach Ó Dálaigh's poem on the death of his wife, '*M'anam do sgar riom-sa a-raoir,*' literally 'My soul [which] separated from me last night.' Significantly, this poem is often cited as an example of how Bardic rules of composition need not always be incompatible with more personal concerns.<sup>18</sup> The violence and death in '*Ceist gan Réidhteach*' are thematic links to *An Béal Bocht*, but the enveloping eeriness anticipates even *The Third Policeman*. In terms of tone, while not exactly formal, in this case it is more a sense of disjointedness that draws attention to the cause of the old man's death: meditating too much on what should be a trivial aspect of himself.

As if to emphasise that implication, as the story draws to a close the narrator half-intervenes with an admonition. We are told that the boy whose question brought about the misfortune now has a choice: to pursue the answer through his education, or to have sense and do otherwise. If he chooses the first course, he may even wait long enough to be able to settle the matter with a beard of his own and thus '*an t-amhras nimhneach a dhíbirt uaidh go deo*' [rid himself of poisonous doubt for good].<sup>19</sup> The story ends with the words: '*Acht b'fhéidir go gcuiridh Dia ciall ann*' [but maybe God will put sense into him].<sup>20</sup>

Exhibiting an early tendency to weaken the screen between reader and author, by extension it is implied that the reader is faced with the same paradoxical choice as the young lad of '*Ceist gan Réidhteach*.' That is, to accept this parable for what it is, or to over-analyse the moral of the story and risk self-indulgence. But rather than allowing the reader to find in the written work whatever he or she may, especially as the door is left invitingly ajar to do so, it is as if its author is trying to pre-set the limits of interpretation.

O'Nolan's characters often fail or are unable to observe these limits and suffer accordingly. John Duffy's Brother, though not guilty of narcissism, retreats into a strange new self, in his perceived transformation into a train. Significantly, though the reason for his subsequent recovery is as vague as what caused the affliction, the action is not all internal as his contact with his co-workers plays a part in the recovery. The change from man to machine and back has not been a pleasant experience: 'He gazed out into the day, no longer a train, but a badly-frightened man.'<sup>21</sup> Again there is the idea of violence, though only as a possibility which seems to have been avoided: 'So far as he could recall he had killed no one.'<sup>22</sup>

The events of 'Two in One' are a grotesque escalation of this tendency. Not only is there violence, but also a murder that causes a retreat into the self – except this time into someone else's self. Like a monstrously logical amplification of the detective-story device of donning a disguise, having skinned and hollowed out his victim Kelly, Murphy resolves: 'I would don his skin and, when the need arose, BECOME Kelly!'<sup>23</sup> Though leavened with the blackest reworking of the relation of pronouns to nouns – 'My own landlady called one day, inquiring about me of "Kelly." I told her I had been on the point of calling on *her* to find out where I was'<sup>24</sup> –, in killing Kelly, Murphy actually cancels himself. In his ultimate fate, terror and humour recombine to nullify him again, as he must forfeit his life 'for the wilful murder of Murphy, of myself.'<sup>25</sup>

Once again there is formality, this time in the neutralised tone. If the account of such extreme events has an incongruous air of restraint about it redolent of a statement of evidence read out in court (the description of the murder especially), fittingly enough we are told from the outset that 'I am writing this in the condemned cell.'<sup>26</sup>

Along with violent death, the shadow of the gallows and the involvement of cycling paraphernalia (a bicycle pump), this note of legalistic impersonality is another pointer along the route towards *The Third Policeman* and the grandiose circumlocutions of Sergeant Pluck and his colleagues.

There is no need to demonstrate yet again how O'Nolan reaches a great intensity of sophistication in his posthumous novel. As Joseph Brooker says (in the case of 'prime' Myles na gCopaleen): 'a sense of authorial facility shines from virtually every syllable, as tone is managed to perfection with the unerring poise of a casually brilliant circus act.'<sup>27</sup> But this self-assurance is often coupled with a sense of self-doubt, as though the cost of pushing language to such mesmerising extremes might be the danger of being blinded by the terror exposed in the distortion. De Selby's hubris in attempting to explain time and eternity by means of mirrors mirroring mirrors throws up an unexpected flaw in the vision of his infinitely rejuvenating features which he reveals to himself. The moral here is that tinkering with the fabric of existence – by means of an instrument of vanity, moreover – is a dangerous business which can put a person's reason under great strain and leave them 'badly-frightened,' to echo 'John Duffy's Brother.' When MacCruiskeen's chests shrink beyond the point of visibility but stay real to the touch, the narrator finds the fantastical anomaly terrifying. With the apparent reanimation of Old Mathers, the certainty of the world is further shaken, leading to two more variations on the *mise-en-abyme*, both of which are almost unbearable. Are Old Mathers's eyes merely dummies behind which may lie thousands of masks? If Joe the soul has a body, does that body have its own body and if so where does the infinite sequence terminate – in deification in one direction or extinguishment in the other?

When Hugh Kenner casts O'Nolan as a 'fourth policeman' who consented to the non-appearance of *The Third Policeman* during his lifetime after its rejection because it 'unsettled' him when he re-read it,<sup>28</sup> he is saying something similar. For Kenner, however, it is the bleakness of the author's vision of eternity that so perturbed him, with its 'pagan Irish antecedents. And the Fourth Policeman reminded him they were wrong. Wrong.'<sup>29</sup> In this, Kenner is possibly half-wrong himself: it may well have been the ascetic aspect in that paganism, rather than a Christian viewpoint, that made O'Nolan draw back from his pyrotechnical achievement, a lowering of self-esteem or questioning of his own judgement due to the rejection. Similarly, the student narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds* shows a degree of readiness to relent and go along with the dismissal of his ambitious theory of aestho-autogamy. For John Wilson Foster, this is evidence of the progressive postmodern impulse to undermine what is still in the process of being created, but it might also be seen as a retreat from an intemperance of imagination: 'The narrator's friend Brinsley on hearing the theory replies: "That is all

my bum” and one feels that O'Brien agrees.<sup>30</sup> Even the title of de Paor's article ('*An tsídheoig is an scian dochtúra*') is taken from a self-deprecating statement in *Nádúir-fhíliocht na Gaedhilge*, albeit one de Paor calls '*iarracht chleithmhagúil den bhféinamhras agus den umhlacht*' [a coy attempt at self-doubt and humility].<sup>31</sup> The postgraduate researcher O'Nolan says of the task facing him in his study of early Irish nature poetry: '*Is leamh an obair í triall a bhaint as sídheoig le scian dochtúra, agus ní mór an tairbhe nó an t-eolas a thiocthas aisti do fhear na sceana*' [Taking a scalpel to a fairy is dull work, and there isn't much profit or knowledge to be gained by the man with the knife].<sup>32</sup>

The danger can be avoided, or the damage undone, sometimes simply by spending less time indoors, or by connecting with some locus outside the self. Both the student narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds* and Trellis are over-fond of staying in their rooms, and the student's uncle tells him it will do him good not to spend so much time holed up there. Joe's advice to the narrator of *The Third Policeman*, even as the gallows loom, is a related sentiment:

A man who takes into consideration the feelings of others even when arranging the manner of his own death shows a nobility of character which compels the admiration of all classes. [...] Besides, unconcern in the face of death is in itself the most impressive gesture of defiance.<sup>33</sup>

This 'unconcern' recalls the fact that de Selby writes nothing in his voluminous works on 'bereavement, old age, love, sin, death and the other saliencies of existence' as he believes them all to be 'unnecessary.'<sup>34</sup>

The opening pages of *The Third Policeman* evidence another treatment of death and mourning, but from the uncomprehending child's standpoint. In a scenario to which O'Nolan returns (or which he simply recycles, perhaps), the bereaved child's confusion is not helped by others resorting to euphemism, taking refuge in figurative or incomplete explanations which the literal-minded child lacks the ability to decode. The taciturnity and stoicism which is elevated on other occasions in the work, in these instances becomes problematic and brings confusion, not clarity:

My mother was the first to go and I can remember a fat man with a red face and a black suit telling my father that there was no doubt where she was [...]. But he did not mention where and as I thought the whole thing was very private and that she might be back on Wednesday, I did not ask him where. Later, when my father went, I thought he had gone to fetch her.<sup>35</sup>

Compare an early exchange in *The Hard Life*:

Then one day she did not seem to be there anymore. So far as I knew she had gone away without a word, no goodbye or goodnight. A while after I asked my brother, five years my senior, where the mammy was.

- She is gone to a better land, he said.
- Will she be back?<sup>36</sup>

Which itself is similar to an episode described in Micheál Ó Nualláin's biographical reminiscence:

Then my eldest sister, Roisín, came into my bedroom and sat on my bed. She said, 'Athair (our father) went to Heaven last night,' just as if he went down to Skerries. [...] After lunch, Brian told my younger brother Niall and myself that we three could go for a drive in his car. [...] [By now the father's body has been laid out in his room.] He drove up the Dublin mountains. [...] Then after a considerable silence he blurted out, 'You know you will never see your father again.' I immediately responded with 'Can't we go into his room and see him?'<sup>37</sup>

In a biographical piece by another brother, Caoimhín, we find the intensity of emotion eclipsing expression:

Our mother died in 1956. I remember Brian asking helplessly how we -----s deserved or came to have the mother we had. There was no answer. He thought for a long time of writing something about her, but it baffled him. Some things are beyond words.<sup>38</sup>

Further, when the English translation of Ciarán Ó Nualláin's biography of his brother, *Óige an Dearthár .i. Myles na gCopaleen* was published as *The Early Years of Brian O'Nolan / Flann O'Brien / Myles na gCopaleen* in 1998, one reviewer faulted it for being so evasive when it came to personal matters that it had not lived up to its title: 'Whether due to a sense of family probity or desire not to be eclipsed by a younger sibling, the attempt to reveal the kernel of "literary genius" remains unrealised.'<sup>39</sup>

If this shared sense of decorum forms a boundary which is not to be breached, that leaves the written work as the best place where the intention of the author may be uncovered. Yet paradoxically the richness of that work often inspires in the reader the inclination to explore, combined with a contradictory textual caution against excessive exploration: as if to say, 'look at this, but don't look too closely.' The formal register which the reader so often encounters functions both as a discreet screen to ward off excessive examination, and an indirect admission that there may yet be more to be



discovered. When the various instances of this occasionally occurring notion are taken as a whole, then the overall impression is one of an uneasy equilibrium, an ongoing, almost Beckettian looping circuit of confidence and doubt, going back and forth from the writer's compunction to express himself to a half-coded fretfulness that the fruits of his ability risk being mistaken for a display of vulgarity or vanity.

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## Notes & references

<sup>1</sup> Adrian Naughton, "'More of your fancy kiss-my-hand": A Further Note on Flann O'Brien's *Nádúir-fhíliocht na Gaedhilge*,' *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 1, no.2 (2013): 15-30.

<sup>2</sup> Louis de Paor, '*An tsídheoig is an scian dochtúra: Flann O'Brien agus seanlitríocht na Gaeilge*,' in *Cín Chille Cúile. Texts, Saints and Places: Essays in Honour of Pádraig Ó Riain*, ed. Máire Herbert and Kevin Murray (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2004), 65: '*go bhfuil cuid de na luachanna a mholtar os ard sa dá leagan den tráchtas le brath os íseal ina dhiaidh sin ar fud a shaothair*.' All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup> *Cruiskeen Lawn* possibly merits a separate study in this respect: the contrasting registers of Myles and The Brother, the corrective tendency of the compiler of the Catechism of Cliché, the impatience with inaccurate use of language, the constant examination of what lies behind particular usages, as well as the dismissive instruction 'nawbocklesh' (ná bac leis, never mind, 'don't bother with it'), etc.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Louis de Paor, '*Do chor chúarta ar gcríde: Léamh ar dhán le hEochaidh Ó hEoghusa*,' in *Saoi na hÉigse: Aistí in ómós do Sheán Ó Tuama*, ed. Pádraigín Riggs, Breandán Ó Conchúir, and Seán Ó Coileáin (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar, 2000), and Alan Titley, "'An nóta pearsanta" agus litríocht na meán-aoiseanna,' in *ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> Flann O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 185.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>7</sup> Naughton, 23.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Brian Ó Conchubhair, '*An Béal Bocht and An tOileánach: Writing on the Margin – Gaelic Glosses or Postmodern Marginalia?*' *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 31, no. 3 (2011): 198.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>12</sup> As quoted in *ibid.*, 198.

<sup>13</sup> Myles na gCopaleen, *An Béal Bocht* (Corcaigh: An Preas Náisiúnta, 1986), 76.

<sup>14</sup> John Jordan, 'One of the Saddest Books Ever to Come Out of Ireland,' reprinted from *Hibernia* (5 August 1960) in Hugh McFadden, ed. *Crystal Clear: The Selected Prose of John Jordan* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> Breandán Ó Conaire, *Myles na Gaeilge: Lámhleabhar ar shaothar Gaeilge Bhrian Ó Nualláin* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Brian Ua Nualláin, 'Ceist gan Réidhteach,' in *Éire, Bliainiris Gael* (Baile Átha Cliath 1939), 94. Reprinted from *The Irish Press* (Christmas edition 1932): 20.

<sup>18</sup> See for example J.E. Caerwyn Williams and Patrick K. Ford, *The Irish Literary Tradition* (Massachusetts: University of Wales Press, 1992, 2007), 180: 'Even in translation, Muireadhach Ó Dálaigh's poem "On the death of his wife" shows some of the nobility of expression which resulted from the channelling of strong emotion into intricate metre made up of consonance, alliteration and rhyme.'

<sup>19</sup> Ua Nualláin, 'Ceist gan Réidhteach,' 94.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Flann O'Brien, 'John Duffy's Brother,' in *The Short Fiction of Flann O'Brien*, ed. Neil Murphy and Keith Hopper (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2013), 58.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>23</sup> Myles na gCopaleen, 'Two in One,' in *The Short Fiction of Flann O'Brien*, 86.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Brooker, 'Myles' Tones,' in 'Is it about a bicycle?': *Flann O'Brien in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Jennika Baines (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), 31.

<sup>28</sup> Hugh Kenner, 'The Fourth Policeman,' in *Conjuring Complexities: Essays on Flann O'Brien*, ed. Anne Clune [Clissmann] and Tess Hurson (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, 1997), 71.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> John Wilson Foster, 'The Irish Renaissance, 1890–1940: Prose in English,' in *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature Volume II: 1890–2000*, ed. Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 172.

<sup>31</sup> De Paor, 'An tsídheoig is an scian dochtúra,' 64.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman* (London: Picador, 1976), 139.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Flann O'Brien, *The Hard Life* (London: Picador, 1976), 11.

<sup>37</sup> Micheál Ó Nualláin, *The Brother (Myles)* (Dublin: M. Ó Nualláin, 2011), 17.

<sup>38</sup> Kevin O Nolan, 'The First Furlongs,' in *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*, ed. Timothy O'Keeffe (London: Martin Brian and O'Keeffe, 1973), 31. Compare Samuel Beckett's comment shortly after the death of his father: 'I can't write about him [...] I can only walk the fields and climb the ditches after him.' Qtd in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett Volume I: 1929–1940*, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xc.

<sup>39</sup> Brendan Duffin, review of Ciaran O'Nuallain [sic], *The Early Years of Brian O'Nolan/Flann O'Brien/Myles na Gopaleen*, in *Fortnight* 378 (1999), 31.