

Reassembling Ford

Time is Money in Brian O’Nolan’s Brave New Ireland

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Roger Burlingame’s *Henry Ford* (1957) is among the books maintained in Brian O’Nolan’s personal library at Boston College.¹ It covers the length of Ford’s life: his lack of interest in becoming a farmer like his father, his stint in watch repair, and his rise as the automotive giant who challenged the manufacturing and marketing conventions of his time. Burlingame captures Ford’s breadth and depth of ambition, showing that Fordism was as much about social engineering as it was about automotive production. In short, Fordism was inseparable from the American dream. His book seems to emulate H. G. Wells’s popular *Outline of History*, which it mentions during its critique of Ford’s own complex attitudes toward history. Burlingame highlights Ford’s distrust of elitist history and his enthusiasm for practical history, the latter evidenced in Ford’s vast museum in Dearborn, Michigan: ‘His aim was to display the entire world sequences in agriculture, transportation, communication, and manufacture from the most primitive tools to the most advanced machines.’² The museum captures a past that leads to an ineluctable future: Fordism.

O’Nolan’s novels and columns evince an enduring interest in Henry Ford. Ford is overtly referenced in *At Swim-Two-Birds* and in the unfinished, posthumously published, *Slattery’s Sago Saga*. Ford appears several times in *Cruiskeen Lawn*, his colossal influence as a global harbinger of modernisation seeping through Myles na gCopaleen’s topical critiques. O’Nolan’s *oeuvre* as a whole, in spite of the gaps between his novelistic efforts, accrues a socio-political critique on the influences and consequences of modernisation, technology, and capitalism on Ireland’s political economy and cultural history. For O’Nolan, Ford occupies the vanguard of these changes.

Myles discusses Ford’s influence in a 14 April 1947 issue of *The Irish Times*. This column is characteristically Mylesian, building satirical momentum through seemingly digressive side roads. He begins by concocting a connection between himself and Ford: they both have roots in County Cork. This topic detours into Myles’s complaint that he could not secure a job with the Ford Motor Company some years earlier, a subject which then reverses into a peripheral story about one of Myles’s

favourite characters, Keats, albeit without his friend, Chapman. In a historical anecdote, Keats, a sixteenth-century 'soothsayer,' prophesies to the Irish chieftain, Hugh O'Neill, that 'There's a Ford in [his] future.'³ Here 'Ford' refers to both the Battle of the Yellow Ford of 1598, in which the Irish defeated English forces, and to the Ford Motor Company's advertising campaign, which, according to David L. Lewis's *The Public Image of Henry Ford*, 'became the immediate post-war era's best-known automobile slogan.'⁴ This circular conflation between past, present, and future then drives home a more general discussion on the impact of Fordism on the modern world:

Considerable as was Ford's innovation in the sphere of transport, his technology had primarily a social impact. His assembly line method rationalised and completed the Industrial Revolution [...], deluging every stratum of society with cheap utensils and machines eradicating a great amount of domestic drudgery and squalor, and with it the slave class it had created. At the same time, hope was created for the mechanisation of agriculture [...]. A revolution in human living caused by abolishing the necessity for laboriously constructing individual articles is a revolution in *time*. In addition to showing how that could be done, Ford, with his Model T car, effected a companion revolution in *space*.⁵

Although Myles's initial prognosis carries a utopian fervour that speaks to how material effects of technology transform social relations in the name of progress, not all his estimations of Ford are positive. He adds that Fordism paved the way for 'fast-growing industrial jungles, ignorant money-sodden men assum[ing] demagogic roles, financial Frankensteins shoulder[ing] philosophers from pulpits, [and] newspapers [becoming] instruments for shaping the future rather than recording the present.'⁶ In the last section of the column, Myles discusses how only America could produce Ford, and he quotes large passages from Lee Strout White's essay, 'Farewell, My Lovely!' which appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1936. The quoted passages eulogise the passing of Ford's Model T, a way of life: 'The driver of the old Model T was a man enthroned.'⁷

Anthony Cronin informs us in *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien* that O'Nolan purchased a Ford Anglia in around 1947, leaving behind his old Morris. O'Nolan was one among many post-war automotive consumers. As Cronin writes, 'With the end of the war, petrol had become available again in Ireland and private cars were allowed back on the roads.'⁸ According to his account of O'Nolan's driving skills, this might not have been the safest development for Ireland. On the economic upside, however, Ford production rebounded in Ireland after World War II. In *Are You Still Below? The Ford Marina Plant, Cork 1917-1984*, Miriam Nyhan details that 'The second half of the century began in Cork with an optimistic start at Henry

Ford & Son Limited. At 2.15pm on 18 July 1950, the longest serving employee, Bill O'Connell, drove the 75,000th vehicle built in Cork since 1932 off the assembly line' and the '[unconvincing] production figures of 2,379 in 1946 paled beside those of 11,007 and 11,881 in 1949 and 1950 respectively.'⁹ After the global effects of the Great Depression, the economic war between Ireland and Britain, and the belt-tightening state policies of World War II, Ireland was back on the road to modernisation. The Cork plant was an essential component of Ireland's economy, with a domestic and international market, producing cars, vans, and lorries along with its bread and butter, the Fordson tractor.¹⁰ Time and space were indeed going through a revolution.

By the time *At Swim-Two-Birds* was published in 1939, Ford already had spread his utopian zeal to Ireland, having built the assembly plant in Cork in 1932, the foundry dating back to 1917. As in America, Ford was a harbinger of modernisation in Ireland, and there was no turning back. Fordism accelerated consumption-production relations, commodity standardisation, mechanisation, labour distribution, and urbanisation. Fordism changed the speed of life, affecting social behaviour through consumerist enculturation and material relations. While much of Ireland still matched its postcard depictions – a patchwork of green fields, farms, and villages – modernity, with a specifically American sheen, continued its advance on Ireland's agrarian and cultural traditions. O'Nolan's novels, early and late, represent ambivalent responses to Ireland's split between tradition and modernity. The Gaels in *An Béal Bocht* are initially terrified of motor-cars: 'When the first motor came in view, many paupers were terrified by it; they ran from it with sharp screams and hid among the rocks but issued forth again boldly when they saw there was no harm whatever in those new-fangled machines.'¹¹ The interim between fear and assimilation is brief, reflecting Myles's accelerated revolution in time and space. In *At Swim-Two-Birds*, the student narrator's friend Brinsley remarks in an anachronistic gesture, 'Slaveys [...] were the Ford cars of humanity; they were created to a standard pattern of a hundred thousand' and it is Trellis who manufactures human beings and who is later punished for exploitative practices.¹² O'Nolan, Myles, and O'Brien's shared vision of Fordism reveals the merging between humanity and technology in the Machine Age. Maebh Long's *Assembling Flann O'Brien* explicates the compositional methods and polyphonic effects of pastiche in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, noting the novel's resistance to hierarchical reading.¹³ These methods and effects of assembly, I would add, reflect O'Nolan's purposeful confusion between human and technological production, garnering a socio-political critique of a modernising Ireland. In fact, O'Nolan's preoccupations mirror widespread anxieties of the time. On 27 March 1937, one anonymous *Irish Times* contributor apocalyptically wrote in an essay titled 'Man and the Machine':

It is said that the increasing use of machinery in industry will deprive the world of its craftsmen, and that the monotony of the machine-minder's job will produce a race of robots [...]. It is characteristic of the new industrialism that on one occasion Mr Henry Ford is reported to have said that for his industrial purposes the untrained man was preferable to the trained man, because he had less to unlearn.¹⁴

Here, as in O'Nolan's writing, engineering and social engineering are inextricably linked in the imagination of the day. Ford was notorious for his vision of factory production as a well-oiled machine, segmenting labour into easily learnable and repeatable tasks – as if the collective of human labour could be perpetually improved like an engine itself. To this purpose, Ford also disregarded the line between private and public life within his factory cities, introducing policies to promote “moral” behaviour, such as abstention from alcohol consumption. Trellis practices similar managerial methods in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. In contradiction to the student narrator's vision of the modern novel, which should avoid ‘despotic’ and ‘undemocratic’ writing, and which should support ‘a private life, self-determination and a decent standard of living,’ Trellis's novel seeks to control the humans he manufactures, eliminating boozing and instilling ‘moral’ behaviour. Both Trellis and Ford's mechanical treatment of human beings lead to revolt.¹⁵

Burlingame's book forms a link between O'Nolan's novels from *At Swim-Two-Birds* to *Slaterry's Sago Saga*, in the latter of which Crawford MacPherson plots to transform Ireland's social and material relations, erasing Irish tradition and history in the process. Ironically, her father-in-law ‘had been shamelessly swindled by Henry Ford,’ and yet her first name, ‘Craw-Ford,’ seems to perpetuate his legacy.¹⁶ Although O'Nolan's attitudes toward, and representations of, technology, mass production, and commodity fetishism were shaped by countless sources, Ford's influence was exceptional. That influence, however, was also refracted through another source, a missing link in O'Nolan's library at Boston College.

In *At Swim-Two-Birds*, the narrator's library includes works by ‘Mr A. Huxley,’ whose dystopian *Brave New World* satirises Fordism.¹⁷ Interestingly, Ireland is among the territories assimilated in Aldous Huxley's dystopia, wherein history is purged in the name of progress.¹⁸ Mond, one of the World Controllers, declares to students touring the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre: ‘History is bunk.’ The phrase is a popular paraphrase of a remark that Ford made to the press in 1916, a remark Burlingame critiques in his biography.¹⁹ Mond's statement appears within the novel's most technically experimental chapter, which oscillates between separate narrative scenes to emulate a eugenic assembly line. This technique represents the

ways in which modernisation has fragmented time. The structural similarities between this chapter and *At Swim-Two-Birds* are suggestive.

Although Burlingame's book could have influenced only O'Nolan's later novels, having been published in the 1950s, the ideational network that coalesces between Huxley and Burlingame exposes O'Nolan's preoccupation with a brave new Ireland split between tradition and modernity. O'Nolan's writing discloses an ideological friction and cognitive dissonance between utopian and dystopian attitudes toward modernity; and, in either scenario, society's historical genealogy, its sense of history, is in crisis. In a *Cruiskeen Lawn* column of 10 May 1944 that relates to the social engineering vision of Huxley, Myles, our soothsayer, portends troubles for post-war Ireland:

I solemnly warn Pat to look out for himself. Hospitals are being planned for him, clinics, health centres, stream-lined dispensaries. I can see the new Ireland all right, in mime-hind's eye. The decaying population tucked carefully in white sterilised beds, numb from drugs [...]. It is my considered view that Paud keeping step with world hysteria in the belief that he is being 'modern' is a woeful spectacle.²⁰

The column goes on to discuss 'built-in furniture' and 'prefabricated shells,' speaking to the nightmare of social homogenisation that Huxley imagined. For O'Nolan, this brave new and improved Ireland threatens to corrode culture and history, and only through a retrospective mind's eye ('hind's eye') can the effects of modernity and the genealogy of capitalism be traced.

Significant critical work has established the influence of Huxley's *Point Counter Point* on O'Nolan's *At Swim-Two-Birds*, in spite of the former's immediate ban in the Irish Free State.²¹ *Brave New World* was likewise immediately banned upon publication, but its imprint on O'Nolan's writing is clear. The genetic traces no doubt vary. Beyond Huxley's influence, O'Nolan was aware of Ford's global and national impact. *The Irish Times* paid close attention to the ups and downs of Ford's role in Cork, in Ireland, and in the world. Among its numerous articles on Ford, it featured a multipage history on the Cork plant on 19 April 1938: 'Twenty-One Years at Cork: History of Ford Cars in Eire.'²² On any given week, ads for Ford cars, lorries, and tractors appeared in the Dublin-based paper. Aside from the Ford Motor Company's value as a creator of industry and as an eventual producer of planes and ships during wartime – in spite of Ford's stated pacifism – the entrepreneur's fiery personality and controversial beliefs offered drama for the international press. O'Nolan's representations of Ford and Fordism, however, are also filtered through *Brave New World*. Taken together, Ford and Huxley's version of Ford proliferate in O'Nolan's writing, and Fordism's

modernising significance specifically merges with the spectre of American modernity in O'Nolan's critique.

Although the genesis of capitalism in O'Nolan's brave new world is set in Ireland, the spectre of America intersects with his writing in numerous ways. Similar to Huxley's novel, O'Nolan's depictions of American influence work through an overlap of worlds. Historically, the Irish looked to America as an escape from famine or as a land of opportunity, but the enduring ties between Irish Americans and the Irish who remained in Ireland established a transatlantic network. The influence works both ways. Huxley's new world in England, the World State, represents the culmination of American Fordism; but historically the New World was the Americas, an image indirectly evoked by Miranda in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Huxley ironises the idea of savagery, where the savages are not those living in the Savage Reservation in America (a concentration camp for the viviparous), but are the intellectually vacuous and morally bankrupt people of the World State, a people produced on eugenic assembly lines and commodified as consumers of commodities. In *Brave New World*, the umbilical cord of historical continuity, which allows the viviparous to trace their cultural practices, is eradicated by the eugenic assembly plant, transplanting genealogy with Fordism. In O'Nolan's writing, this commodification of people, tradition, and knowledge is reflected through an American globalisation best instantiated by Ford as the poster child of the Machine Age.

In his contribution to *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*, Niall Sheridan discusses some of O'Nolan's literary machinations from the 1930s, one involving an experiment with monkeys: 'Brian proclaimed that the principles of the Industrial Revolution must be applied to literature [...]. If one thousand monkeys were chained to one thousand typewriters for a month, they would undoubtedly produce a steady stream of bestsellers.' This fantastic project was abandoned for a genuine collaborative project, *Children of Destiny*, which 'would deal with fortunes of an Irish family over a period of almost a century, starting in 1840' and culminating in immigration to America.²³ Sheridan highlights that O'Nolan saw these projects as ways to meet the demands of mass consumption and the homogenisation of modern readerships. Modernisation would apply the principles of Fordism to the writing and reading of literature. O'Nolan seems to have been thinking of the culture industry portrayed in *Brave New World*, wherein Helmholtz Watson, who works for the College of Emotional Engineering, writes 'slogans' and 'hypnopaedic rhymes' for mass consumption.²⁴

O'Nolan's notions of the mass assembled text anticipate the techniques of pastiche in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, which Cronin relates to Fredric Jameson's theories on postmodernism.²⁵ Specifically, Cronin recalls those elements of postmodern pastiche wherein hierarchical distinctions between elitist and popular culture no longer apply.

I would add that O'Nolan's use of pastiche is also a response to the dehistoricising effects that come with modernisation, a Fordist revolution of time and space imported from America. As Jameson writes in 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society':

the disappearance of a sense of history, the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have had in one way or another to preserve.²⁶

At Swim-Two-Birds is both an example of so-called postmodern technique and a critique of capitalist conditions. The novel successfully renegotiates the reductive division between the modern and postmodern, illuminating the position that postmodernism is an expansion and acceleration of modernity rather than an abrupt break in aesthetic and historical processes. The pastiche of science, mathematics, and technology in its third conclusion includes a prophecy: 'One man will rove the streets seeking motor-cars with numbers that are divisible by seven.'²⁷ The absurd image captures the desperation with which modern man seeks to rationalise his place in the Machine Age.

O'Nolan's early vision of America turned out to be prophetic. *Children of Destiny* was to include another modern American image: 'The first Irish-American Catholic President of the United States.'²⁸ Cronin later recounts O'Nolan's strong feelings about Kennedy: 'He came to [O'Leary's public house] to watch the week-long coverage of John F. Kennedy's visit to Ireland in the early part of 1963. Though a professional cynic, he admired Kennedy enormously.'²⁹ Kennedy later appears in *Slattery's Sago Saga*, as does an act of political assassination. Kennedy, like Ford, represents that image of America where anything is possible: wealth, power, and prosperity.³⁰ Ford and Kennedy are famous for their returns to Ireland, mixing Irish roots with American innovation, an exchange O'Nolan satirises in *Slattery's Sago Saga*. Macpherson's plan to replace Ireland's potato crops with sago, which would entail reengineering Ireland's political economy and erasing its cultural traditions, is motivated by a desire to prevent the Irish from infesting America – as if an inverted parody of Saint Patrick's mythic banishment of snakes from Ireland.³¹ Macpherson seems to echo Dr Crewett of *The Dalkey Archive*, who asserts that Irish immigrants in America are a source of 'crime and vice' rather than progress.³² The opposite turns out to be true, because O'Nolan's portrayals of American wealth and prosperity go hand-in-hand with destructive forces. A chronicle of American wealth, Edwin P. Hoyt's *The Vanderbilts and Their Fortunes* also can be found in the Boston College collection. All of O'Nolan's novels, early and late, feature characters in pursuit of wealth. The problem, however, is that

the American dream becomes lost in translation on Irish soil. O'Nolan's characters' pursuits result in conditions that better reflect another text in his library: Oliver Goldsmith's 'The Deserted Village,' an account of a rural village decimated by capitalist forces.³³ In *The Poor Mouth*, Bonaparte O'Coonassa mentions the impact of immigration to America, observing that 'all the houses are empty [in Ireland] and everyone [is] away from home.'³⁴ When O'Coonassa stumbles on wealth in Ireland, finding a bag of gold in a cave, he is soon imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. Under the British repressive state apparatus, his guilt is guaranteed by virtue of his being Gaelic, and he follows in his father's footsteps, going to prison and reconfirming Ireland's cycle of fettered history.

The revolution of time and space that Myles attributes to Fordism in *Cruiskeen Lawn* ultimately exposes the affects and effects of money on culture and history. Money, space, and time are profoundly connected in O'Nolan's fiction. In the first conclusion of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, the narrating student receives a graduation gift from his uncle: a watch in a black box.³⁵ Although Long's *Assembling Flann O'Brien* and Gregory Dobbins's *Lazy Idle Schemers: Irish Modernism and the Cultural Politics of Idleness* identify a subversive potential in the inefficiency of the narrator's watch, the economic prospects for the whole of O'Nolan's characters seem grim at best.³⁶ This watch, typically gold, echoes throughout the novels and is mysteriously transmuted as de Selby's *Golden Hours* in *The Third Policeman*, wherein the relation between time and money is hellishly portrayed.³⁷ In fact, O'Nolan's preoccupations resemble the cultural critiques of Frankfurt School critic Walter Benjamin, who writes in 'One-Way Street': 'Beyond doubt: a secret connection exists between the measure of goods and the measure of life, which is to say, between money and time. The more trivial the content of a lifetime, the more fragmented, multifarious, and disparate are its moments.'³⁸ This is not to say that O'Nolan espoused socialism, but his writing reveals a deep distrust for capitalism as the sole justification for human pursuits.

Looking past the oft-mentioned metaphysical and epistemological games in *The Third Policeman*, the reader describes a plot about a crime committed for personal gain. The money that initially appears as a means to knowledge becomes the ultimate desideratum. The narrator's brief coming-of-age story comes to an end after he murders the owner of a big house, and all that follows is a hellish afterimage of his life. By happenstance, O'Nolan had written a book envisioned by Benjamin:

A descriptive analysis of bank notes is needed. The unlimited satirical force of such a book would be equalled only by its objectivity. For nowhere more naïvely than in these documents does capitalism display itself in solemn earnest. The innocent cupids frolicking about numbers, the goddesses holding

tablets of the law, the stalwart heroes sheathing their swords before monetary units, are a world of their own: ornamenting the façade of hell.³⁹

In the bowels of the industrial underworld hidden beneath the narrator's journey through the otherworld in *The Third Policeman*, the reader encounters the mechanical underbelly of capitalism: 'noise-machines,' 'ovens or furnace doors or safe-deposits such as banks have,' and innumerable 'knobs and keys [that appear like] American cash registers.'⁴⁰ The police demonstrate several absurd examples of manufacturing – objects without dimensions, or objects of value that cannot be taken into the upper world. After the narrator ponders the 'commercial possibilities of eternity,' he cannot keep his newly manufactured possessions, including 'precious stones' and 'banknotes.'⁴¹ This commercial underworld, where time ceases to exist, echoes the narrator's initial desideratum of an 'American gold watch.' At one point the narrator replies to the Sergeant, 'You appear to be under the impression [...] that I have lost a golden bicycle of American manufacture with fifteen jewels. I have lost a watch.'⁴² It is difficult to know whether O'Nolan had Ford's initial occupation in watch repair in mind, but *The Third Policeman's* connections between time and money, all leading to an unending (bi)cycle of a socioeconomic nightmare rooted in capitalist exploitation and modernisation, iterates Huxley's dystopian vision of Fordism, over which 'Big Henry' rather than Big Ben looms.⁴³

Within an Irish context, the Anglo-Irish Big House and the barracks are clear echoes of colonialism, but the images of modernisation in *The Third Policeman* are undoubtedly American. In either case, the historical distortions in the novel – reflected by its images of infinite regress: chests, boxes, and Wonderland entrances – can only be cleared up by following the money. The narrator's crime is not, in fact, the catalyst to hell; rather, it is the social and material conditions wrought by capitalism on Ireland as a whole. Keith Hopper identifies the novel's affiliations with J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, noting the return of Pegeen and the murder with a loy.⁴⁴ Indeed, the opening act of *Playboy* parades a history of Ireland's political economy, mentioning the Boer Wars, potato harvests, landlords, agents, and bailiffs. Carol Taaffe similarly notes the influence of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* on *The Third Policeman*, with its initial depiction of domestic frugality and political futility (specifically mentioning Charles Stewart Parnell).⁴⁵ Divney later argues that killing Mathers, owner of the big house, would be an act of 'social justice.'⁴⁶ In *The Third Policeman*, however, the Big House behind the Big House is the industrial underworld. Paradoxically, the nightmarish revolution in the novel is that time has stopped, and the significance of the American gold watch is that Ireland's culture and history have become uprooted and revalued by market exchange. Now monetary relations, rather

than historical relations, determine social value. In the underworld 'there is an eight-day clock [...] with a patent balanced action but it never goes.' Not only has time ceased, but space loses its measurability. The underworld 'has no size at all [...] because there is no difference anywhere.' One implication is that difference is subsumed by the equalisation of market value. All things, material and cultural, are equally exchangeable and thus, like pastiche, divorced from historical context. It is worth noting that the underworld entrance – first tucked into the woods like a faerie mound, then appearing with 'ecclesiastical hinges' – becomes suffused with mechanical and financial imagery, realising MacCruiskeen's 'Machine Age.'⁴⁷ These vestiges of history have ceased to exist because time is money.

Eamonn Hughes's 'Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' locates a cultural critique shared between O'Nolan's writing and Benjamin's influential essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.' Hughes writes, 'We can see the contention between modernity and tradition arising in *Cruiskeen Lawn's* fascination with steam trains, gramophones, cinema, [and] lithographic illustrations of various mad machines.'⁴⁸ Hughes's anti-authoritarian reading, wherein elite structures are undercut by O'Nolan's inclusion of mass culture, suggests a liberationist potential to modernity. However, in O'Nolan's writing, I would add, that potential is soon negated by capitalist revaluation. O'Nolan recycles his cultural critique in his later novels, and perhaps Burlingame's text added momentum to O'Nolan's focus. In *The Dalkey Archive*, before depositing De Selby's D.M.P. into the Bank of Ireland, Mick asks Mr Heffernan if the bank will accept any object for deposit: 'But suppose something – a box, say – was in reality an infernal machine? A time-bomb, for instance?' Reflecting the capitalist revaluation of Irish traditions, Mick turns to the bank rather than the church for a sense of security: 'Perhaps there is a certain monastic quality in banks, a sacred symbolism in money, silver and gold.'⁴⁹ (He initially opens his bank account with the use of a gold watch.) The implications are ominous: De Selby's doomsday device is capable of reducing all history, an archive, to a state of simultaneity evocative of Jameson's pastiche. Similarly, *The Hard Life: An Exegesis of Squalor* equates capitalism with the erasure of history. Manus outlines the mission of his new correspondence university in a letter to his brother, Finbarr:

We really aim at the mass production of knowledge, human accomplishment and civilisation. We plan the world of the future, a world of sophisticated and genial people, all well to do, impatient with snivellers, sneaks and politicians on the make; not really a Utopia but a society in which all *unnecessary* wrongs, failures, and misbehaviours are removed.⁵⁰

He earlier states, 'I know this industry I'm entering on is only in its infancy, [but] there's bags of money in it if the business is properly run.' It turns out that Manus's education system obliterates humanistic ideals, reorganising all knowledge through capitalist imperatives.⁵¹ The end result is that Myles's 1947 prognosis in *Cruiskeen Lawn* that Fordism eradicates 'domestic drudgery and squalor' inevitably fails, as he says, in the face of 'ignorant money-sodden men assum[ing] demagogic roles.'⁵² Long finds some positive value in the scientific results of Manus's enterprise, but it is clear that Manus, once the object of squalor, will now perpetuate squalor in other people's lives by reducing education to an exploitative business model.⁵³

Finally, O'Nolan's depictions of social engineering, both Huxleyan and Fordist, continue in *Slattery's Sago Saga*. Among Ford's global projects was what would come to be known as Fordlandia, a rubber-extracting project in Brazil, which, although built to reduce rubber costs for tire production, took on the appearance of utopian social engineering. Ford attempted to import the American dream, its lifestyle and conveniences, into the rainforest. As Greg Grandin writes in *Fordlandia*, 'Ford would spend tens of millions of dollars founding [...] two American towns, complete with central squares, sidewalks, indoor plumbing, hospitals, manicured lawns, movie theatres, swimming pools, golf courses, and, of course, Model Ts and As rolling down their paved streets.'⁵⁴ In *Slattery's Sago Saga*, MacPherson announces to Tim Hartigan, 'Beginning in about eight months, my fleet of new sago tankers will ply between Irish ports and Borneo. There are boundless sago reserves, all of the East Indies – in Sumatra, Java, Malacca, Siam and even in South America.'⁵⁵ Doctor Baggeley later refers to the use of sago in Brazil. Like Huxley's *Brave New World*, *Slattery's Sago Saga* weaves worlds into an overlapping satirical texture. O'Nolan's final vision for the unfinished novel will never be known, but it becomes clear that sago would have had a profound effect on Ireland's saga, erasing cultural traditions through modernisation. Baggeley declares to Tim, 'It is essential that you should be instructed in this new big thing, a thing that will change radically the history of Ireland and later the whole social tilt of Western Europe.'⁵⁶ Baggeley, like O'Nolan, prophesises a brave new Ireland.

Notes & references

¹ Roger Burlingame, *Henry Ford* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1957). See Catherine Ahearn and Adam Winstanley, 'An Inventory of Brian O'Nolan's Library at Boston College,' *The Parish Review* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 35.

² Roger Burlingame, *Henry Ford* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1954), 14. The content and pagination are the same as O'Nolan's 1957 copy.

³ Myles na gCopaleen, *Cruiskeen Lawn*, *The Irish Times* [hereafter CL], 14 April 1947, 4. Myles takes issue with Ford's Corkonian authenticity in the 25 August 1959 column, reminding readers that Ford's father, although 'born near Cork, was of English descent' and 'his mother was Dutch.' CL, 25 August 1959, 6.

⁴ David L. Lewis, *The Public Image of Henry Ford: An American Folk Hero and His Company* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976), 382.

⁵ CL, 14 April 1947, 4.

⁶ *Ibid.* Ford established his own weekly newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*, in which he sought to propagate his ideologies, including his anti-Semitism. Burlingame, 103–4. As Greg Grandon writes: 'Ford's anti-Semitism [...] was not just a holdover sentiment from America's receding agrarian past but also one element of a larger sinister appraisal of the world he helped create.' Greg Grandon, *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City* (New York: Picador, 2009), 71.

⁷ Since its original appearance in *The New Yorker*, the essay has been published under E. B. White, omitting Richard L. Strout's influence on White. 'Lee Strout White' was a penname acknowledging both authors.

⁸ Anthony Cronin, *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien* (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1998), 156.

⁹ Miriam Nyhan, *Are You Still Below? The Ford Marina Plant, Cork 1917–1984* (Cork: Collins Press, 2007), 109.

¹⁰ Nyhan's *Are You Still Below?* documents the rise and eventual demise of Ford's plant in Cork, offering a panoply of facts, graphs, and images regarding auto and tractor sales, social influences, and trade disputes surrounding the Cork plant from 1917 to 1984. Personal accounts of Ford workers offer an ethnographic window into the issues of the time.

¹¹ Flann O'Brien, *The Poor Mouth: A Bad Story about the Hard Life* (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1996), 53–4.

¹² Flann O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998), 43.

¹³ Maebh Long, *Assembling Flann O'Brien* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 25.

¹⁴ 'Man and the Machine,' *The Irish Times*, 27 March 1937, 8.

¹⁵ O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, 33, 47.

¹⁶ Flann O'Brien, 'Slattery's Sago Saga,' in *The Short Fiction of Flann O'Brien*, ed. Keith Hopper and Neil Murphy (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2013), 96 (emphasis added).

¹⁷ O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, 11. A different Huxley appears in Brian O'Nolan's personal library: Sir Julian Huxley, Aldous's older brother, who penned the introduction to Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959), translated by Bernard Wall from *Le phénomène humain* (1955).

¹⁸ In *Brave New World*, Ireland is part of the World State's colonial experiment, reminiscent of Anglo-Irish relations in history. In the novel, the World Controller Mustapha Mond says, 'The experiment was tried, more than a century and a half ago. The whole of Ireland was put on to the four-hour day. What was the result? Unrest and a large increase in the consumption of *soma*; that was all.' Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), 234. Here, Huxley seems to parody the Stage Irishman's proclivity for idleness and substance abuse.

¹⁹ Huxley, *Brave New World*, 34. As Burlingame records in his source notes, 'Ford's original statement, "History is more or less bunk," was made to Charles M. Wheeler and was published by him in an article in the *Chicago Tribune* on May 25, 1916.' Burlingame, 193.

²⁰ CL, 10 May 1944, 3.

²¹ See Anne Clissmann, *Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), 95; Keith Hopper, *Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-Modernist* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), 239; Carol Taaffe, *Ireland through the Looking-Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen, and Irish Cultural Debate* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), 53; and John Garvin,

- 'Sweetscented Manuscripts,' in *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*, ed. Timothy O'Keeffe (London: Martin, Brian & O'Keeffe, 1973), 55.
- ²² 'Twenty-One Years at Cork: History of Ford Cars in Eire,' *The Irish Times*, 19 April 1938, 2–3.
- ²³ Niall Sheridan, 'Brian, Flann and Myles,' in O'Keeffe (ed.), 40, 41–2.
- ²⁴ Huxley, *Brave New World*, 67.
- ²⁵ Cronin, 148.
- ²⁶ Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Culture,' in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 125.
- ²⁷ O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, 316.
- ²⁸ Sheridan, 42.
- ²⁹ Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 234.
- ³⁰ O'Brien, *Slattery's Sago Saga*, 114, 132. Ford himself had considered running for the presidency. Burlingame, 123.
- ³¹ MacPherson's own genealogy is interesting. Although Ned Hoolihan is Irish, and then Irish-American, MacPherson's heritage is Presbyterian Scottish, evoking images of Ireland's plantation history. She embodies old and new forms of imperial influence.
- ³² Flann O'Brien, *The Dalkey Archive* (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1993), 98.
- ³³ Ahearn and Winstanley, 38. This copy was the property of his wife Evelyn, although Brian would obviously be familiar with the work.
- ³⁴ O'Brien, *The Poor Mouth*, 67.
- ³⁵ O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, 311.
- ³⁶ Long, *Assembling Flann O'Brien*, 24; Gregory Dobbins, *Lazy Idler Schemers: Irish Modernism and the Cultural Politics of Idleness* (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2010), 201.
- ³⁷ Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman* (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1999), 9.
- ³⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'One-Way Street,' in *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 87.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ O'Brien, *The Third Policeman*, 131, 132.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 136, 137.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 36, 62.
- ⁴³ Huxley, *Brave New World*, 78.
- ⁴⁴ Hopper, 187.
- ⁴⁵ Taaffe, 81.
- ⁴⁶ O'Brien, *Third Policeman*, 15.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 115, 133, 128, 71.
- ⁴⁸ Eamonn Hughes, 'Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics*, eds. Edwina Keown and Carol Taaffe (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 119.
- ⁴⁹ O'Brien, *Dalkey Archive*, 169, 168.
- ⁵⁰ Flann O'Brien, *The Hard Life* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 1996), 112.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 111. O'Nolan anticipates another theorist of the postmodern, Jean-François Lyotard, whose *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979) predicts that profit margins will become the sole legitimization narratives for organising knowledge and institutions (51).
- ⁵² *CL*, 14 April 1947, 4.
- ⁵³ Long, 4.

⁵⁴ Grandon, 9.

⁵⁵ O'Brien, *Slattery's Sago Saga*, 104, 115.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.