

An Interview with the Brother

Micheál Ó Nualláin

Johanna Marquardt

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

This interview with Micheál Ó Nualláin, Brian O’Nolan’s brother and the only surviving member of his generation of the family, was conducted on 10 June 2014 in Monkstown, County Dublin. Its purpose was to obtain information about Brian O’Nolan’s private library at the John J. Burns Library, Boston College; the archive being the focal point of this issue of *The Parish Review*. It was Micheál who sold the last of his brother’s effects to Boston College in May 1997 and therefore he is in a position to answer questions about the purchase of the library, its contents and their provenance, and the reading practices of Brian and Evelyn O’Nolan.¹

Despite the seventeen-year age gap between them, Micheál’s relationship with Brian was a cordial one; a fact that Micheál has made clearer in *The Brother (Myles)* than in this interview.² He is grateful to his brother, who took on the role of the breadwinner and head of the family after their father died in 1937, when Brian was twenty-six and Micheál only nine. It is also apparent from various anecdotes as well as from the reproductions of many portraits in *The Brother (Myles)* that Micheál was intimately acquainted with much of Dublin’s literary and artistic scene of the mid-twentieth century. He shared many of his brother’s acquaintances, such as Brendan Behan, Maurice Walsh, Sean O’Sullivan, Patrick Kavanagh, and Anthony Cronin. His activities as the caricaturist Kilroy from 1948 to the present day mean that he was also familiar with Dublin’s journalistic scene.³ Micheál’s close relationship with his brother, as well as his involvement in Dublin’s bohemian scene, make him an ideal source of context-oriented and biographical research.

If we think of Micheál as a human archive, there are two key aspects that point to the potential and limitations of this interview: one is the nature of the archive as a source of information, the other the interview method itself. For views on the archive as a meaning-making apparatus I refer readers to a previous issue of *The Parish Review*.⁴ The interview method is best explained in terms of the qualitative interview developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. The determinants which inevitably come to bear on any interview situation are conceptualised by Bourdieu as field, habitus, and symbolic violence. The field in which a person interacts with others is a ‘social arena’ with its own particular ‘logic and taken-for-granted structure of

necessity and relevance.' As such it is 'both the product and producer of the habitus which is specific and appropriate to the field.'⁵ The habitus is thus the manifestation of one's past experiences in one's present behaviour. In this respect, the fields of Dublin's artistic scene and literary studies seem relatively compatible, especially in terms of their appreciation of cultural products and their accumulation of cultural capital. Nevertheless, the fact that one party has the initiative and asks the questions means that any interview is fraught with symbolic violence:

It is the interviewer who opens the game and sets the rules; and it is he or she who, most often unilaterally and without prior negotiations, determines the use and the subject matter of the interview, which can be ill-defined, at least in the eyes of the interviewee.⁶

There is an asymmetry in the power relation between interviewer and interviewee in favour of the former, which needs to be actively corrected by the interviewer, so that the interviewee can narrate his or her story.⁷

This means that my attempts to draw specific information from Micheál and his reactions to these attempts were what determined the outcome of the interview. Micheál seemed absolutely at ease during the interview. The age difference between us and the fact that we met on his territory will have counterbalanced the symbolic violence inherent in the interview situation. Whether the urgent letters that he said he needed to write or the phone calls he expected were genuine or a precaution against a tiresome interrogation I cannot tell. Micheál's mischievous sense of humour throughout the interview certainly permits the latter reading.

The difficulty lay rather in nudging the interview in the direction prescribed by our interest in Brian O'Nolan's personal collection. Micheál, not unlike his older brother Brian, is a refined anecdotist, and readers will notice that he was not shy to introduce his own topics into the conversation. Whether this was in defiance of being questioned, as he has been many times before, or a more natural predisposition remains unclear. Some of Micheál's anecdotes and vignettes can be found in his self-published *The Brother (Myles)*, in Anthony Cronin's *Dead as Doornails* and *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien*, or in *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*, edited by Timothy O'Keeffe, as well as in memoirs of and about Brian O'Nolan's contemporaries.⁸ Other anecdotes were new to me, but whether or not these have been rehearsed in previous conversations and how often is hard to tell.

So, while this interview provides information about the collection at Boston College, it will also give readers fresh insight into other aspects of Brian O'Nolan's life and work. Due to the emotional investment in the subject matter of the interview,

Micheál's opinions have to be viewed in the light of his relationship with Brian. As a final remark before moving on to the interview proper I need to mention that, aside from field, habitus and symbolic violence influencing the course of the interview, memories are, of course, often variable in their accuracy as well as their reliability. I would, however, like to point out that Micheál was quite clear on what questions he could answer and what information he did not have or did not recall.

After arranging the interview with his immensely helpful and generous sons Oisín and Aonghus Ó Nualláin, I am let into a beautiful Victorian terraced house in Monkstown by Micheál Ó Nualláin, 86 years old and in good health, if, however, as he puts it 'not too steady on his feet.' In the hall I am greeted by a portrait of "yer man" and a greying dog whose name, as I am later to find out, is Flann. The spacious front sitting room still sports its original wallpaper alongside many portraits by Micheál and Sean O'Sullivan, and a legless mannequin which observes the street from the window. Micheál and I settle down next to a couple of coffee tables full of papers. Micheál is obviously a busy man, and, indeed, it took Aonghus some effort to convince him that he could safely leave the phone without missing any urgent phone calls.

*Micheál opens the conversation asking if I had read his book *The Brother* (Myles) and states: 'Well I don't think I can add any more than that.' We shall see...*

JM: The questions that I'd like to ask you are mainly to do with Brian's private book collection. Two scholars of the International Flann O'Brien Society [henceforth IFOBS] went over to Boston College to write an inventory. And now the IFOBS is trying to interpret the significance of his library. But there are so many things that we don't know about, well, Brian O'Nolan's habits, him as a reader, and the way that the books ended up in Boston, for example. This is the issue of the journal of the IFOBS in case you'd like to have a look at it. [...] The inventory is in there. They listed all the books that you...⁹

MON: ... sent them?

JM: Yes.

MON: *(with a pleased tone of surprise)* Oh, did they? *(tries to find the inventory in The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 2, no. 1)

JM: There are about four hundred items in there.

MON: Are there, yeah? [...] Quite a number!

JM: How did you decide what you wanted to do with the books?

MON: Well, you see, I had a collection of paintings and drawings and books. So, I asked Boston College if they wanted to buy them and they did.

JM: Did you try to give them to the National Library of Ireland?

MON: No, but the National Library came out and looked at them. And recommended... [I donate them.] But they thought I was just going to give it to them (*chuckles*), so I didn't.

JM: The National Library simply expected you to give them the books.

MON: Oooh, yes, and it's a big collection, you know, quite large as you see from that [the inventory]. I put everything together, you see. [...]

JM: So, the National Library told you that it would be a good idea to contact Boston College?

MON: Yes, they recommended it. And they said we'd love to have it. [...] You just don't believe it! Because it's a big collection. And the National Library thought they were getting this for nothing. And then I had an offer from Boston, you see, that's why... and they wanted it. [...] I was onto this librarian I was dealing with – Mr O'Neill is his name – I don't know whether he's retired now. He probably is.

JM: Probably. It was 1997, wasn't it?

MON: I don't know what year. I can't remember. Probably around then, yeah.¹⁰ Anyway, it was him I was dealing with. So they came over actually to see it.

JM: Oh, did they?

MON: Oh, they did, yeah. So they did. I had to have several boxes made. His portrait was there, too, I mean two portraits. There's two more of them. I'll show you the one upstairs. And they got one that's hanging over there [in Boston]. Anyway... So. What else can I do for you?

JM: Well, just generally, what did books mean to you and to Brian?

MON: Well, he was a writer, he, well, see...

JM: I think Anthony Cronin wrote [in *No Laughing Matter*] that by the age of nine or twelve he had read every single book in the O'Nolan household.¹¹ Is that right?

MON: I don't know (*chuckles*). Could be, could be true. But I mean, he wrote his first book *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and that was a great success, but he didn't reap a lot of money out of it. And what happened was the war broke out at the same time that his book was published. And all the books were in this hangar outside London or wherever it was and had a direct hit by a bomb. So, the book was very rare and the few that were available were passed from one person to another. [...] But his best book he wrote immediately after that, was called *The Third Policeman*.

JM: Do you think that's his best book?

MON: Oh, absolutely, yes. Yes! [...] But they turned that down. And he couldn't understand this. Anyway, because he had... he told his friends that, and you can see what's coming, you know... he had to pretend... He pretended he had lost it. That he had lost the manuscript, that he had left it, he told all sorts of stories. He had left it on the bus or whatever or gone up to Donegal and he had it in the boot of his car and it

went off page by page... All these things, you know. [...] And the real blow was the fact that he was very poor. [...] The royalties of all his books! They're all over the world now. [...] They have them in China, they have them in Japan, and translations in mainland Europe... They're all there. So, he would have had all the royalties (*chuckles*). So, he would have been sitting pretty, instead he was quite poor. He had nothing.

JM: Such a shame!

MON: Yeah.

JM: But it was the market, wasn't it? Publishers didn't expect that people would demand such a book as *The Third Policeman* at the time.

MON: Oh, I know!

JM: They thought it was too fantastic and too depressing.

MON: Yeah. But anyway, the thing is he used to write a column then in *The Irish Times*.

JM: *Cruiskeen Lawn*.

MON: *Cruiskeen Lawn*! That's right. And that became very famous. The war was on but that didn't much concern Ireland, you know?

JM: Well, it was called the Emergency, wasn't it?

MON: It was.

JM: A strange euphemism, I think.

MON: Well, it probably is. Anyway, his column, well, his column was greatly appraised by... someone from America, who was a writer, who I think I have it in my book.

As Micheál tries to find the name in The Brother (Myles), he stumbles across his paintings which are printed in that text.

MON: That's Brendan Behan there.

JM: You painted portraits of Brendan Behan, Patrick Kavanagh, Maurice Walsh, Sean O'Sullivan, and Jimmy O'Dea, didn't you?¹²

MON: Oh, I did, yeah! That was his [Brian's] violin, he used to play the violin...[...] These are just illustrations here of some of his work. [...] That's the portrait upstairs and that's the one in Boston as well. I painted two of them [...].¹³

JM: Which one is your favourite portrait of your brother?

MON: I don't really know. I've several of him, you see? There's that one [entitled 'Myles When He was 46 Years of Age.' It shows Brian sitting in his study, reading something he has just taken from his typewriter. In the background there is a photograph of seven of the O'Nolan children with Brian, the eldest, standing upright at the centre of the picture.]¹⁴ That's a photograph. And that's them when they were young. That's Brian there. And they're all dead... That's his typewriter again, that's the back view of it. But, uh... What am I looking for? Oh, yeah! I'm blind without my

glasses. I thought I had it. 'Writers as diverse as James Joyce, Graham Greene, S.J. Perelman and Dylan Thomas gave his work high praise during his lifetime.'¹⁵ So I found the bit, yeah, that's it. He was a young man when he died, 56. So anyway. That's the book. Now. Where were we? What else can I tell you?

JM: I'm sure you've read the *Cruiskeen Lawn* column where...

MON: Oh, I did, I read it a lot.

JM: Do you know the one about book handling?¹⁶

MON: Yeah.

JM: Do you believe he wrote that because he himself didn't always read what he bought?

MON: Well, the book handling was part of a number of other ideas. Book handling was one. The other one was... dummies you could take to, say, a play or something and speak to.¹⁷ And, I mean, he was very inventive.

JM: So, do you think that when Brian bought a book, he also read it? Or would he sometimes leave it?

MON: Ah, he would always read a book!

JM: Because some people are like that, they buy books but they don't end up reading them.

MON: Oh, I'd say if he bought a book he'd read it, of course. Yeah.

JM: Most of the books in the inventory are quite... quite heavy I'd say, quite canonical more or less, you know, the great authors of the past... Did he read light stuff as well?

MON: I couldn't tell you. He may have.

JM: That seems to be absolutely absent from his collection. But maybe, you can never tell, because people pass books on.

MON: Yeah. I wouldn't know about that. He may have bought some books but...

JM: Did you talk about what you read in your family?

MON: How do you mean?

JM: Well, if you read a book and you like some ideas or something did you talk about that?

MON: Not really, no. I still read a lot, you know?

JM: I noticed that Oisín [Micheál's youngest son] seems to read a lot.

MON: Does he? Yeah.

JM: And Hermon [Oisín's wife]. They seem to be very well read...

At this point, because I feel 'well-read' may be the wrong expression here, I find it necessary to comment on the fact that I am German and ask Micheál to correct me. He responds without an accent: 'Ich spreche nur ganz wenig Deutsch' [I only speak a little German]. When I ask him where he had learned the language, he just about manages to reply: 'Well, I was parachuted in

during the war and I had to learn to...' before he breaks out laughing, probably at my incredulous face.

MON: No, I'm only joking! (*still laughing*) No, I learnt it from *Schallplatte* [a record]. And I used to have it on when I was working or whatever and would be listening and to pick it up, you know?

JM: I tried to learn Irish last year when I was here to do some research but it's not really there anymore. I can say: '*Is mise Johanna*' [I am Johanna] ...

MON: Well, it's a difficult language, I'd say. [...] I had Irish from birth. I had to learn English.

JM: When did you first come into contact with English?

MON: When I was about seven or eight. [...] I was told Irish would never be spoken to you. Never! I couldn't believe it. And I didn't have any English, anything whatever! So, there you are.

JM: There's a very active Irish-speaking community in Dublin as well, isn't there?

MON: Well, there is, yeah, quite a number, that's true.

JM: I didn't know that. I thought it was all in the Gaeltacht.

MON: Well, mostly, yeah. Brian wrote a book in Irish called *An Béal Bocht*. [...] It was a skit. Mainly humorous, you know? Like, for instance, he'd say: 'We'll go hunting now.' And this meant breaking into houses, know? So anyway, what else can I give you?

JM: There are books where we're not really sure if they were Brian's or...

MON: Sexton Blake!

JM: Sorry?

MON: Sexton Blake. He was supposed to have written [...] many books for Sexton Blake.¹⁸ But I don't believe he did.

JM: Don't you?

MON: No. [...] I doubt it. I doubt it.

JM: That's interesting. I've a colleague who's not going to like that.

MON: Well, anyway, I don't know. I've no way of knowing.

JM: Do you know anything about Evelyn O'Nolan's reading habits? Was she a great reader?

MON: I don't think so. I doubt it. I doubt it. When he was in his job in the department of local government, she was in the typing pool.

JM: That's how they met, I presume?

MON: Yes, yes, yeah. Because he would bring down stuff to be typed. And she would type it or whatever. And this would be official stuff for the department, you know?

JM: It's very difficult to know, if you're looking at a collection that was owned by, or collected by two people, you can't tell which book was his or hers.

MON: I know, I know, yeah. Well, he didn't have a huge collection of books himself. He used to use libraries.

JM: Where did he go?

MON: Well, he would have gone to... there are public libraries everywhere! There was a library in Blackrock, for instance, a library in Dún Laoghaire and so forth. So he would have gone to any of these.

JM: That's an important bit of information, actually.

MON: Is it?

JM: Yes, because otherwise people might assume that the collection at Boston College is really representative of his reading habits.

MON: Some of [those books] he would have bought or whatever, or somebody would pass them on to him or whatever. But I mean, he didn't have that many books as such because he, as I say, he used libraries. And then there's the National Library as well. He used to work in there. He used to do some writing in there. [...] So there you are.

JM: Are there any of his books that you didn't give to Boston College? Is there anything that they didn't want, that they excluded?

MON: No, they took everything that I gave them. The only books that I would have are his own books [...] the books that he'd written. See? I have a whole lot of translations of his books. I can't read them, of course.

JM: I'm fascinated at how his ideas, his whimsical ideas spread across the world and, basically, when you meet somebody and mention the name Flann O'Brien, most of them, if they are in the know, will ask you: 'Is it about a bicycle?'

MON: I was speaking at some function or other, about his life and everything, and I said that, allegedly, when he died and went up to the pearly gates St Peter asked him was it about a bicycle (*laughs*).

JM: Yes! That sounds likely.

MON: But what I enjoyed was when he had the atomic theory and how the bicycle is hung for murder.

JM: Did he tell those stories in conversation before they entered the novels?

MON: He may have. He would have tested them in several pubs and that, you know? Especially for his column and that, you know? He used to test things out, see how they worked.

JM: He was a well-known character around Dublin, wasn't he?

MON: Oh, yeah! He was very well known indeed. Oh, yeah.

JM: So I suppose people would expect him to deliver a funny story when they met him.

MON: Possibly, but I mean, he wouldn't be like that, really. He would go to the pub, you know, and drink there, and he used to have a great habit, when he was in the pubs, a whole lot of tricks with matches. (*To explain, he picks up a pencil and paper and*

draws boxes indicating the way Brian would have laid the matches.) To remove two matches and leave three boxes. And the way to do that would have been, if I can remember it, (*crosses out two 'matches' and indicates the boxes that are left over*) [...] and that gives you one, two, three. These sort of tricks. He had a whole lot of them. He used to do it in pubs and so on. [...] Anyway. But the biggest and most important thing about it all was that my father died in 1937. And Brian was the only person who had a job. And he took over his job to raise the whole family. And that's not generally known.

JM: Now you mention it, I don't think it's mentioned in [Cronin's *No Laughing Matter*].¹⁹

MON: Anthony Cronin used to come out to me just to get some things, you know, and he talked to me many times about different things. But he knew him well, you see, he was a colleague. But I don't regard that as a very good autobiography [*sic*] at all. It's a bit of a begrudger's book.

JM: Why, though? I don't think there was a lot of competition between them. They were quite different writers, weren't they?

MON: Oh, yeah! Cronin was a poet. Anyway, but Brian did write a little poetry now and again. There's a piece I remember that he wrote for *Blackrock College Annual*.

JM: 'Ad Astra!'

MON: 'Ad Astra.' You know it? 'And when at night the sky is damascened with gold, methinks the endless sight eternity unrolled.'²⁰ Yeah!

JM: Did he write more poetry that he didn't publish?

MON: He may have, yeah. Well, in *At Swim-Two-Birds* there are some...

JM: Well, 'The Workman's Friend.'

MON: 'A Pint of Plain is your Only Man.'

While we are looking at his painting 'A Pint of Plain is Your Only Man,' which adorns the back cover of The Brother (Myles), I remark that its style reminds me of Picasso, which prompts Micheál to tell me the tale of how he bartered some of his drawings with Pablo Picasso for his suit. A photograph of Micheál wearing the suit in question can be found next to his 'Résumé of Curriculum Vitae' in The Brother (Myles). We then go upstairs, past paintings of Mozart, of astronauts over Connemara, the original of the portrait of Brian which adorns a commemorative 55c Irish stamp issued for O'Nolan's centenary in 2011, and past Micheál's studio in which a portrait of Brian O'Driscoll with daughter rests on an easel, to look at Micheál's painting of Avoca Terrace, the O'Nolan family home in Blackrock. He comments on several of his paintings, sometimes the serious artist, sometimes revealing a mischievous sense of humour not entirely unlike his brother's.

MON: That's Tom Murphy, the playwright, when he was a young man and had his hair. Long time ago. 1974. And this is Brian's portrait here. You can't see it from over there because of the reflection from the window. [...]

JM: And there's a smaller version of the Mozart painting! Do you play any instrument?

MON: The gramophone. [...] No, I'd love to play an instrument, though. There's the hall now. [...] That's the hall of Avoca Terrace. That's the house in which he wrote *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman* and his column. Ten years of his column! Brian wanted me to paint his portrait, you see. He suddenly got married and disappeared and my sitter was gone (*chuckles*).²¹ That's why I got him... See I had my studio over there (*points across Belgrave Square*) and he stayed there a few nights. That's why he... I'd never finished the thing [apart from the background], you see, so he didn't know when I'd finished it, turned it around, he couldn't believe I could remember all that [detail from their room in the house at Avoca Terrace]. So I said: 'I've a photographic memory.' (*laughs out loud*) So there you are. [...] Anything else?

Cue the obligatory lengthy goodbye, complete with a few more anecdotes about Brian's puzzles, Bloomsday, drinking in O'Rourke's in Blackrock with Brian and Sean O'Sullivan, about how Brian fooled an army doctor into believing he was quite blind etc. and my many thanks, which, I hope, brought across my heartfelt gratitude.

Postscript

While the interview certainly meanders through anecdotes and issues that were not necessarily on the agenda, it also sheds light on a few questions and, as always, opens the floor for new ones. When it comes to Brian O'Nolan's private library, Micheál Ó Nualláin says that neither he nor the staff at Burns Library played an active part in the selection of the books now held at Boston College. According to him, they were selected by Brian O'Nolan and his wife Evelyn, whose role as a reader in the O'Nolan household he doubts. It remains uncertain whether Evelyn O'Nolan had already given away any of Brian's books before her death. The only books that were not given to Boston College in 1997 were some of Brian O'Nolan's own works, which included many translations.

Due to the nature of the archive, the collection can only provide an incomplete, rather than an exhaustive, record of what Brian O'Nolan actually read. Firstly, not every book which is collected is also read by its collector. Secondly, we now know that O'Nolan borrowed extensively from friends and public libraries. This circumstance is comically exacerbated in O'Nolan's own invention of the book handling scenario in *Cruiskeen Lawn*, where Myles advertises the fictional service of leafing through books,

marking passages and scribbling in texts for paying customers so that they can appear well read without having to go to the trouble of actually reading the books themselves.²² Book ownership only works towards accumulating cultural capital if one can prove that one has read the books; indeed, the satire works on the assumption that many books remain unread. And while we cannot determine the author's opinion from this satirical piece, we can safely say that the text shifts the focus from book ownership to the act of reading.

We know from personal accounts that Brian regularly received books from friends, which he may well have kept or passed on. Cronin remarks on this practice in *No Laughing Matter* with regard to the copy of the two-volume Odyssey Press edition of Joyce's *Ulysses* that is now held at Boston College, which was lent to him by the poet Donagh MacDonagh, as it was not widely available in Ireland in the 1930s.²³ As Micheál states, Brian also frequented public libraries, so scholars may consider contacting the aforementioned public libraries in County Dublin or the National Library of Ireland to see if records of what he requested still exist. But that, again, says nothing about the books, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, magazines, and newspapers which were openly accessible in these libraries at the time.

How Brian O'Nolan acquired the books which have remained in his collection and why they have remained there, in other words, what type of a book collector he was, cannot be conclusively resolved.²⁴ And the significance which book possession held for him cannot be conclusively determined either. The fact that books have always been relatively expensive, especially considering O'Nolan's modest means, has to be taken into consideration. All in all, it seems that O'Nolan was more of a book user, i.e. a reader, than a book collector; that is to say, he definitely read far more books than he bought or acquired otherwise.

Notes & references

¹ For an account of the acquisition of the Brian O'Nolan collection by the Burns Library at Boston College, see Mark Sullivan, 'Burns Acquires Papers of Two Irish Writers,' *Boston College Chronicle*, 8 May 1997, http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/rvp/pubaf/chronicle/v5/My8/burns.html

² Micheál Ó Nualláin, *The Brother (Myles)* (Dublin: self-published, 2011).

³ See Micheál Ó Nualláin, *Kilroy is Here* (Dublin: self-published, 2009).

⁴ See Maebh Long, 'Twenty-Three Archival Aphorisms,' in *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 1, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 8–14; Marion Quirici, 'Brian O'Nolan in the Archive: Assembling Myles and Flann,' *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 1, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 31–42.

⁵ Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu* (London: Routledge, 1992), 84.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, 'Comprendre,' in Pierre Bourdieu et al., *La Misère du Monde* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1993), 905, my translation.

⁷ *Ibid.* 906. For an insight into Bourdieu's interview technique, see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, trans. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). For a discussion of language as a political device, see Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁸ See Anthony Cronin, *Dead as Doornails* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 110–28; Anthony Cronin, *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien* (London: Grafton, 1989); *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*, ed. Timothy O'Keefe (London: Martin, Brian & O'Keefe, 1973); John Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), 127–43; Tony Gray, *Mr Smyllie, Sir* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1991), 162–82.

⁹ Catherine Ahearn and Adam Winstanley, 'An Inventory of Brian O'Nolan's Library at Boston College,' *The Parish Review* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2013). Throughout this interview, ellipses denote pauses in the conversation, while ellipses within parentheses are employed to indicate omissions.

¹⁰ The collection was acquired by Boston College in May 1997. See Sullivan, 'Burns Acquires Papers.'

¹¹ Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 19. For a further discussion of Brian O'Nolan's reading habits as a boy, see Ciarán Ó Nualláin, *The Early Years of Brian O'Nolan/Flann O'Brien/Myles na gCopaleen*, trans. Róisín Ní Nualláin, ed. Niall O'Nolan (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1998), 42–3.

¹² See Ó Nualláin, *The Brother (Myles)*, 34, 15, 30, 19, 12.

¹³ *Ibid.* The paintings listed are as follows: 'Myles's Own Violin,' 32; 'Flann O'Brien's Map of Ireland,' 23; 'Coffee for One,' 24; 'Scéal Beath Threannmhar' and 'Research Bureau,' 25; 'A Pint of Plain is Your Only Man,' 26; 'Untitled,' 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 'Myles When He was 46 Years of Age,' 48.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 'Myles at Work at His Typewriter,' 38; 'Untitled,' 7.

¹⁶ Myles na gCopaleen, *Cruiskeen Lawn*, *The Irish Times* [hereafter CL], 5 November 1941, 2.

¹⁷ Flann O'Brien, *The Best of Myles*, ed. Kevin O'Nolan (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 24.

¹⁸ See Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 198–201.

¹⁹ See Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 87. In fact, the episode is recounted at length; Cronin even quotes Micheál Ó Nualláin. *Tá brón orm!*

²⁰ Flann O'Brien, *Myles Before Myles*, ed. John Wyse Jackson (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2012), 13.

²¹ According to the 'Chronology' in *The Complete Novels*, this portrait was produced in 1948. Flann O'Brien, *The Complete Novels*, ed. Keith Donohue (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), xxii–xxxiii.

²² CL, 5 November 1941, 2.

²³ Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 54. For an insight into Brian O'Nolan's reading habits in his student years, see Niall Sheridan, 'Brian, Flann and Myles (The Springtime of Genius),' in O'Keefe (ed.), 32–53.

²⁴ For reflections on book collecting, see Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking my Library' in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 59–67.