

The Catastrophe of Cliché

Karl Kraus, *Cruiskeen Lawn*, & the Culture Industry

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Soon it will be ten years that I have not been myself. The last time I was myself I founded a polemical journal.¹

This 'polemical journal' founded by Karl Kraus was *Die Fackel* [The Torch] and, beginning on April Fools' Day 1899, it lampooned, excoriated and exposed the liberal elite of Vienna for 37 years.² Newspaper barons, the venal politicians they supported, and the jingoistic journalists they cultivated were its primary targets, but few were spared. The achievement and prolific output of the man 'hailed as the greatest satirist of his time and one of the foremost in twentieth-century European literature'³ is unmatched but, perhaps, it is Myles na gCopaleen who comes closest. *Cruiskeen Lawn* was written for *The Irish Times* by Brian O'Nolan (with some assistance) from 1940 and ran until his death 26 years later. Reckoned by some to run to over four million words,⁴ and written 'on a level of wit, invention and intellectual virtuosity without parallel,'⁵ the column gained a cult following and contributed to major Irish political and cultural debates. It has also, in recent years, begun to be viewed by critics less as a temporary expediency turned distraction and more as a realisation of O'Nolan's enormous talents.⁶ Building on that re-evaluation, this essay remembers that to make a literary career as a respected practitioner of 'Kleinkunst' prose forms, such as the aphorism, anecdote [...] sketch satire, parody, "gloss", would not at all have been out of place in the Vienna of a few decades earlier.⁷ It is argued that Kraus and Myles deserve to be analysed alongside each other specifically in relation to their critique of the culture industry and the influence of the cliché in the era of mass communications (although this is not the only significant parallel). It is also suggested that some aspects of *Cruiskeen Lawn* may be understood in the context of those whom Kraus influenced so much: the Frankfurt School theorists Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin.

Myles's last columns for *The Irish Times* were posthumous reprints of some of his earliest: the advertorial parodies which inform readers about the progress of his 'escort' and 'book handling' services:

Our trained handlers have been despatched to the homes of some of the wealthiest and most ignorant in the land to maul, blend, bash, and gnaw whole casefuls of virgin books. Our printing presses have been turning out fake Gate Theatre and Abbey programmes by the hundred thousand.⁸

The manner in which Myles satirises commercial interests that serve the vanity of the consumers of 'literature' and 'culture' with the external appearance of well-read libraries of books finds parallels in 'Bibliographical Musings,' a short essay by Theodor Adorno. Adorno narrates a surreal episode about 'the Potemkinian library I found in the house of an old American family on the grounds of a hotel in Maine':

That library displayed every conceivable title to me; when I succumbed to the temptation and reached for one, the whole splendid mass fell apart with a slight clatter—it was all fake. Damaged books, books that have been knocked about and have had to suffer, are the real books. Hopefully vandals will not discover this and treat their brand new stocks the way crafty restaurateurs do, putting an artificial layer of dust on bottles of adulterated red wine from Algeria.⁹

Adorno's 'vandals' bear a striking resemblance to Myles's book handlers. Just as surely as the original intentions of Myles's satirical version of the WAAMA League collapse into naked commercial interests, Adorno makes it clear that resistance to the influence of the book-as-commodity form is useless. The arguments of publishers are 'irrefutable': the impersonal pressure of the market means that 'the change that has taken place in the form of the book is not some kind of superficial process that could be stopped if, for instance, books kept their true nature in mind and seized on a form that would correspond to it.'¹⁰ Adorno's denial of the possibility of a book-form that could resist external market pressures fits neatly with his personification of the printed book as a tragic hero in the drama of the rise of industrial capitalism: 'Suffering is the true beauty in books; without it, beauty is corrupt, a mere performance.'¹¹ To illustrate his argument that 'the external form of a printed work is a force in itself,' Adorno conjures up the image of Kraus, who was 'compelled to make changes on galleys and even on page proofs, perhaps completely rewriting what had already been set.'¹² Kraus's repeated struggle of printing, correction, and reprinting, continually disrupting his work with strikethroughs and scribbled notes before restoring them to the main text in a fresh print run, is posed as an act of doubled consciousness facilitated by the printing process: 'For a writer capable of self-reflection,' Adorno concludes, 'print becomes a critique of his writing.'¹³

The figure of Kraus and his seminal critique of mass communications were central to the theoretical development of both Adorno and Walter Benjamin. In Adorno's essay on the German poet and feuilletonist Heinrich Heine, which rehearses and develops the arguments originally put forward decades before by Kraus, Heine's poetry is presented as a mode of literary production which takes 'a poetic technique of reproduction, as it were, that corresponded to the industrial age and applied it to the conventional romantic archetypes':

Heine's poems were ready mediators between art and an everyday life bereft of meaning. For them as for the feuilletonist, the experiences they processed secretly became raw materials that one could write about. The nuances and tonal values which they discovered, they made interchangeable, delivered them into the power of a prepared, ready-made language. For them the life to which they matter-of-factly bore witness was venal; their spontaneity was one with reification. In Heine commodity and exchange seized control of sound and tone.¹⁴

This is a circular movement by which nuances and imagery from the work of a singularly famous poet are transformed in the process of their mass reception by aspiring imitators and set to work in a new, heterogeneous dispersal of clichéd texts, which themselves then come to stand for the legacy of that figure. It parallels the form of Myles na gCopaleen's relentless critique of the derivative realist Irish literature and drama which originates with Synge and the Abbey Theatre. Satirising the scripts piling up in the Abbey Theatre, many of which were to burn unperformed in the fire of 1951,¹⁵ Myles offers a mass-produced Syngean template for any budding playwright, complete with characters, setting, and plot.¹⁶ Via the publishing marketplace, a flock of consumers and mediocre writers conspire to undermine originality.

The notion that the marketplace's transformation of internal literary structures is driven by a technique of reproduction which relies on 'ready-made materials' as a means of mediation between 'art and everyday life' also bears out a specific parallel with the satirical project of Brian O'Nolan's circle at University College Dublin. They planned to collaboratively create 'a parody of a generic best-seller, which would apply the principles of the industrial revolution to literature [...] to be constructed from a series of "readymade" fictional clichés.'¹⁷ At the same time as they critique it, Mylesian personae riotously embrace the ready-made as a literary practice, in an example of the problematic dualism which pervades the relationship O'Nolan's work has to the marketplace and commodity culture. This includes his treatment of Heine, who is a common context for both Kraus and O'Nolan, although in each case he is a 'Heine' encountered differently. For Kraus, Heine's works are engaged in an inverted process

of cultural reproduction: the original becomes the *ersatz*, the inferior substitute, and the derivative copy becomes the exemplar. In a passage which is likely to have been an influence on Walter Benjamin's conception of the work of art and its aura in the age of its technical reproducibility,¹⁸ there is a progressive diminution of authenticity:

This is the way it will play out: each follower of Heine takes one tile from the mosaic of his work until no more remain. The original fades because the repellent glare of the copy opens our eyes. Here's an original which loses what it lends to others. And can you even call something an original when its imitators are better?¹⁹

The notion of 'an original' which is excelled by its copies allows Kraus to sidestep various issues, such as the chronological inconsistencies in his argument or the contemporary status of Heine as Europe's most well-read German-Jewish poet and essayist.²⁰ Instead, Heine's style has 'since perfected itself into a modern machine,' and his prose 'has now been surpassed by the observationally inclined technicians, the style boys and the swindlers of charm.'²¹ Kraus thereby recreates 'Heine' as the perversely productive 'problem of Heine.'²² Instead of viewing him as naïvely antecedent to the appropriation of his style by the 'technicians,' Kraus places the overloaded signifier, 'Heine,' at the head of a train of gathering consequences in a dubious kind of immortality: 'Heine the poet lives on only as a carved youthful sweetheart,'²³ but Heine as the malign emblem of the '*Katastrophe der Phrasen*' [Catastrophe of Cliché] looms ever larger.²⁴

In the case of O'Nolan, Heine's satirical travelogue, *Die Harzreise*,²⁵ formed part of his university syllabus and is identified by Caoimhghín Ó Brolcháin as the source of three characters in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Both texts also adopt a framing narrative involving 'the unnamed, lazy student who neglects his studies,' but the source material is transformed in O'Nolan's novel. The re-inscription of Heine's satirical accounts of rural life at the level of 'aestho-autogamy' includes the revival of a character from *Die Harzreise* who 'is, incidentally, obsessed by the colour green' in the form of Trellis, 'who would read no book which lacked a green cover.'²⁶ A 'trellis' in the sense of a supporting framework for green climbing plants is a kind of weird horticultural analogue for the dispersion of authorial intentions into unintended consequences. In O'Nolan's hands, Heine's character is shunted outwards one meta-literary level, as an obsession with green becomes, fittingly enough in the context of Adorno's reflections, an obsession with green book covers. In a work which is now more well-known to English-speaking readers than *Die Harzreise*, one might say that O'Nolan embodies Kraus's prediction for Heine, as he 'takes one tile from the mosaic

of [Heine's] work,'²⁷ mines it for raw material, and hurls it into his 'novel of fragments that interrogate and question form and genre.'²⁸

The engagement of O'Nolan with Germanic sources continues with the direct parallels between Myles and Kraus himself, whom Keith Hopper notes 'as one of Myles's satirical influences.'²⁹ There are indications that, at least by the early post-war period, Kraus was a known and discussed figure amongst Irish intellectuals. In 1947, O'Nolan may have listened to a discussion of Kraus on a BBC radio broadcast on the Third Programme by Eric Hobsbawm,³⁰ following the recent reprint of his play, *The Last Days of Humanity*, a surreal anti-war parody in which, according to Kraus, all 'the words spoken [...] no matter how unlikely, are true quotations.'³¹ He may also have encountered an essay discussing Kraus by Béla Menczer in the *Dublin Review* in 1950.³² The closest to a direct reference in O'Nolan's own work is the mention of a certain 'Kraus' in the sprawling footnotes to *The Third Policeman* as one of the 'demented apostles' of the mysterious de Selby. This 'credulous Kraus' is the author of '*De Selby's Leben*,' 'usually unscientific and unreliable' but 'worth reading' for his thoughts on the most bizarre theory advanced by de Selby regarding the origin of night and day.³³ The footnote identifies Kraus's father as an industrialist with a jam factory in North Germany. This is more or less true of the real Kraus, allowing for a certain Mylesian inflection. In fact, the interests of the historical figure were in neighbouring Czechoslovakia, and Kraus's father manufactured paper, instead of jam. It is worth noting that jam and jam factories are a recurring trope in *Cruiskeen Lawn*.³⁴

A side-by-side evaluation of the writers reveals a shared consciousness of the influence of clichéd, ready-made language in the age of mass communications. For both Kraus and O'Nolan, a reliance on cliché is a symptom of debasement within communities of user-producers whose only antidote is correction, through a form of quotation which Benjamin describes in his essay on Kraus as that which both 'saves and chastises.'³⁵ As will be demonstrated, a keen eye for the empty phrase is how Kraus and O'Nolan distinguish themselves from their own cultural milieu: Myles in the bilingual context of the Gaelic Revival, and Kraus amidst the coffee-shop *avant-garde* of the 'Young Vienna' movement.

Die demolirte Literatur [The Demolished Literature] is Kraus's 'first major publication,' a stinging polemic against the coterie of 'Young Vienna' modernists 'encamped' in the Café Griensteidl.³⁶ The physical demolition of this famous coffeehouse, where Kraus was a regular, in 1897, is the occasion for his satirical demolition of contemporary writers like Herman Bahr, Richard Beer-Hoffman, and Felix Salten. The Viennese literati are lampooned as layabouts, egotistical peacocks, and, most importantly, linguistically incompetent purveyors of 'Un-German': 'For years he has been working on the third line of a novel,' runs one comment, 'since he

ponders every word in several changes of dress.'³⁷ It is easy to imagine the ripples of scandalous sniggering which announced the entrance of Kraus, the student dropout, actor, moneyed scion, and occasional journalist, into the centre of the 1890s Viennese coffeehouse scene. Turning his attention to Salten, he tells the reader:

You have to imagine his literary production in this way: A witty gossip of sorts, he keeps a whole collection of the stories of his more accredited friends in reserve and so never has to use more than a tenth of them. Although he apparently came by his personality cheaply at some sale, pure artistic genius hasn't paid off in the long run. He who was always enjoined in his circle to look down his nose at newspaper writers, soon put into the harbour of journalism [...]. Fortunately, the intonation of modern style still remained in his ears from before, his friends had sent him on his way with some defenceless observations, and he hastily snatched up a few corrupt witticisms that had fallen from the table.³⁸

In this satirical onslaught against the circumstances of 'literary production' in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, which 'netted Kraus a physical attack from Salten,'³⁹ the *artiste* is really an inauthentic imitator and *poseur*, his *avant-garde* persona a commodity which is purchased 'cheaply at some sale.' And far from standing aloof from economic life (as Kraus's private income permitted him to do) in a city with an addiction to the printed word, 'pure artistic genius' plays second fiddle to a transactional relationship with the press. In the same way that Myles derides Seán Ó Faoláin and his troupe of 'hired literary men,'⁴⁰ Kraus's witticisms expose what Adorno describes as the 'embarrassing' truth about artists in bourgeois society which is laid bare in the figure of Heine:

Since the existence of a bourgeois art in which artists have to earn their livelihoods without patrons, they have secretly acknowledged the law of the marketplace alongside the autonomy of their laws of form and have produced for consumers. It was only that this dependency was not visible behind the anonymity of the marketplace. It allowed the artist to appear pure and autonomous in the eyes of himself and others [...]. Heine [...] brought the commodity character of his art, previously latent, to the fore. He has not been forgiven for that.⁴¹

This remains a theme of Kraus's writings for many years: the interchange between supposed literary artists and hack journalists and a formulaic 'modern style' that anyone, regardless of talent, can easily imitate. Yet Kraus finds a way for Salten to 'preserve his individuality' amidst the crowd: 'he still succeeds in confusing the dative

and the accusative cases with undiminished youthful enthusiasm.' Salten's 'individuality' consists in a disregard for the rules of grammar to the extent that he 'could be recognised even in unsigned articles.'⁴²

In *Cruiskeen Lawn*, grammatical nit-picking is also a strategy for the satirist to distinguish himself from his opponents. It falls to the scholarly pedant, equipped with superior critical faculties, to sift and scrutinise the tide of linguistic abuses which arrive with the daily newspaper. Contesting this space is not an inconsequential pursuit, for this 'cacophony of voices' is, as Stephen Young points out in his defence of *Cruiskeen Lawn*,

the arena in which words create the conventional wisdom of the society it serves. Here are the truths, half-truths and fictions that supply us with the requisite voices in which to 'perceive' and 'understand' the reality of a particular place at a particular time. Here fictions become facts, and facts fictions; as new vocabularies overtake the old, new realities appear and, in their turn go down before yet newer ones.⁴³

In cultures which are regulated by the printed word, to take on the misprinted, the clichéd, and the incompetent in the domain of language is a prerequisite activity to attacking the received ideas and mystifications of society at large. In the hands of the satirist, the ready-made cliché is turned against itself when it is reproduced in the act of quotation. This is why quotations lifted from provincial newspapers, advertisements, and letters make up a substantial proportion of the word count of *Die Fackel* and *Cruiskeen Lawn*. For Kraus, whose method of composition was to paste down his target on a large sheet of paper and scribble his attack around it,⁴⁴ the pages of *Die Fackel* are where the falsifications of the compromised press are restaged in order to be dismantled. Whilst his tendency to moralise on the consequences of such writing is far more pronounced when compared with Myles, they both hammer away at the same writers and institutions with remarkable consistency, as if attempting to hold back a tide. In the case of Kraus, the threats which journalism and cliché represent to the mind has world-historical proportions:

Through decades of practice the newspaper reporter has brought us to that degree of impoverishment of the imagination which makes it possible for us to fight a war of annihilation against ourselves [...]. He has the imagery of heroic qualities at his disposal, and his abuse of language embellishes the abuse of life.⁴⁵

Dead bodies invite dead metaphors, and *vice versa*. Empty idioms, whether florid or formalistic, which are dictated by the necessity of capturing the topical and feeding it to 'passive print addicts,'⁴⁶ tend to dull the edge of trauma and implicitly legitimise violence. Myles, too, is fascinated by the linguistic clichés that infest Irish obituaries, placing them in new comic or critical contexts to demonstrate their constant recycling of the bland image of the ever-same 'patriot,' he who spoke the Irish language at a time when it 'was neither profitable nor popular.'⁴⁷ In May 1913, Kraus used the term '*Katastrophe der Phrasen*' [Catastrophe of Clichés] to describe how the lazy use of lifeless metaphors in everyday language leads to lifeless bodies on the battlefield: 'Now that businessmen avoid submerged rocks and barristers safely reach for the shore, admirals can do it no longer. [...] But if the shore is a euphemism for the shore and the rocks a hollow phase for the rocks – then a war is inevitable!'⁴⁸

In defining a way of writing, the cliché also defines a way of reading, speaking, and thinking. Bad writing colludes with authority because censorship and self-censorship depend upon clichéd language and decorative ornamentation: the euphemism, particularly in depictions of war, is a calmativ strategy which tends to be encouraged by officialdom. In 1933, Kraus attacks the bland descriptions in the German press of Hitler's concentration camps and the internment of Communists and other undesirables. Hybrid phrases such as '*Schutzhaft*' [protective custody] are here as repressive as rubber truncheons and 'nationalistic organisations,' but in the pages of *Die Fackel*, they teeter on the edge of demolition: 'We had been able to imagine that by its very set up,' Kraus quips, 'such a camp serves concentration more than diversion.' Banal ways of describing horror blunt its impact, but the Nazi co-opted *Berliner Tageblatt* plumbs new depths when it 'chooses the simple definition that a concentration camp is a temporary curtailment of liberty with an educational aim. But in many cases, one may also speak of a spiritual rehabilitation.'⁴⁹ Myles inherits his own consciousness of how language is moulded and rendered false in the hands of professional groupings from O'Nolan's personal experience within the Irish Civil Service. He is keenly aware of how the ineffectual elements of a country's administration are mirrored in its thickets of worn-out euphemisms, which are propelled into popular diction *via* questionnaires and forms. And as Seamus Deane puts it, to be sensitive to cliché in this way is to become aware of a sinister reversion:

The compendium of bureaucratic conventions satirised by [O'Nolan] in his Mylesian disguise is additionally potent because it contains within itself an inversion; the written word, the documentary procedure, the obituarist's format, has become the speech of the common populace. In a bureaucratic

world, the formatted document is sovereign; speech is no longer prior to such conventions; it is an after-mimicry of them.⁵⁰

But the familiarity and ubiquity of the empty phrase is matched by its vulnerability to collapse in the hands of those who insist on drawing out its ulterior absurdity and imbuing it with meaning. By reconstructing cliché within a self-consistent logical system, as in the Catechism of Cliché, Myles draws attention to the consequences of the banalities of everyday verbal production and consumption. He does not often evoke the same feeling of an apocalyptic stalling of the imaginative faculty which Kraus predicts as a consequence of cliché, but a grim sense of a fallen, perverted mode of linguistic production emerges in *Cruiskeen Lawn* when it becomes the scene of a comic yet ghastly dance of the dead metaphor. Myles creates an alternative world by treating worn-out phrases 'not as isolated infelicities but as a connected system; an alternative intellectual world becomes founded on error or poverty of imagination' and the sense of the uncanny is heightened by the fact that 'all its materials are recognisable.'⁵¹ This Ireland is, says a later persona, a 'grim sort of fairyland, not really understanding the enormous issue then being decided.'⁵² Like Kraus's writing, the lapsarian gloom of *Cruiskeen Lawn* depicts 'the earthly creation not as open book, but as a much damaged Monday morning paper, abounding in misprints, legible only in its advertising section, and destined for a cosmic demise.'⁵³

Krausian satire often climaxes in bizarre inversions, such as in the vignette, '*Die Welt der Plakate*' (1909): 'when a train takes us outside the city, we do see a green meadow – but this green meadow is only a poster which that lubricant manufacturer has concocted in league with nature in order to pay his respects to us in the country as well.'⁵⁴ These inversions are mirrored in *Cruiskeen Lawn* as structuring principles which deliberately confuse original and copy, man and machine. Opponents such as 'Mr Seán O'Casey and Mr Paul Carroll' have no autonomous existence but are in fact 'invented by the Abbey.'⁵⁵ The *ersatz*, the inferior substitution, becomes the exemplar in the heteronymous worlds which arise in the Mylesian universe, where source texts, characters, and writers are pulped, reconstituted, and performed in a parodic second life. The mechanical reproduction of texts is figured as bodily degeneration. Ireland becomes an incoherence of stereotypes which themselves are misattributed, misread, and misprinted. The ambiguous intermixing of the copy and the original developed first by Kraus in relation to Heine is used in a different way by Myles to score points throughout his commentary on linguistic questions: 'In final punning riposte to *An Glór*'s terming Irish literary work in English as "Ersatz Irish Literature," Ó Nualláin suggests that the contemporary writing in Irish should be termed Erse-atz Irish Literature.'⁵⁶ The presentation of the individual, the nation, and the national language

as a fakery perpetrated by those on all sides of Ireland's cultural debates, an *ersatz* assemblage of commoditised textual fragments, also demonstrates a parallel with the argument of Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Based on their research into the American system of market research and advertising, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that, as a result of the culture industry's colonisation of subjectivity itself, 'any person signifies only those attributes by which he can replace everybody else: he is interchangeable, a copy.'⁵⁷ They are passing judgement on the American culture industry as exemplified by Hollywood, where 'the defiant reserve or elegant appearance of the individual on show is mass-produced like Yale locks, whose only difference can be measured in fractions of millimetres.'⁵⁸ Myles is equally fascinated with the Gallup polls that construct a statistical blueprint of the 'average American':

Dr Gallup's American must have some significance; even if his existence is purely statistical, devoid of nuance and true personality – reflect, please, that in 'democracies' that is the only sort of existence that a citizen has. He becomes a ludicrously simplified entity. [...] A question is: how does this American, so polyglot and – genic in origin, become thus? How and how fast are the native attributes of immigrants reduced and broken down and absorbed into the American Way of Life? How long does it take, for instance, for the Irish immigrant to take to chewing gum, having good teeth, wearing double-breasted jackets with deep lapels, drinking Manhattans, and taking an interest in Synge, the Abbey Theatre and Richard Brinsley Sheridan?⁵⁹

Myles makes the exports of the Irish culture industry complicit with the absorption of 'polyglot' and diverse cultures into a set of bland cultural stereotypes under the auspices of the 'American Way of Life.' An implied Irish identity which is multitudinous and resistant to categorisation is replaced by 'Paud and Paudeen drooling on the stages of the West End, with "poetry" slobbering out of their unwashed mouths.'⁶⁰

Comparisons with Adorno and Kraus in the context of Heine and his 'consequences' also contribute significantly to the re-assessment of the value of *Cruiskeen Lawn* which is currently underway. It shares with *Die Fackel* a prescient style of satire that responds to the age of mass communications through its up-to-the-minute commentary on events as they take place, whether that is a recent procurement by the Friends of the National Collections or the destruction of the Abbey Theatre.⁶¹ This breakneck pace and dependence on quoting from everyday texts challenges the stereotypical notion that the worth of a literary work correlates with its elevation from the quotidian, challenging the critics who disregarded the columns in the spirit of

Kraus's aphorism: 'Criticism does not always demonstrate its customary incisiveness: it often ignores the most worthless ephemera.'⁶² O'Nolan was perhaps not destined to spend all of his time crafting novels and poems at a safe distance from his audience. Instead, he and Kraus were writers who were intimately and productively involved in the 'worthless ephemera' of everyday society. The attack on mystification and cliché cannot be separated from the cheap, well-thumbed pages of transitory forms and genres in which it can both be found and countered. As contributor and castigator, Kraus's work is devoted to proving the social and historical significance of these errors and empty phrases, which he saw as tiny emblems of the coming catastrophe. In the context of a life's literary work largely consisting of sketches, essays, commentaries, and short poems, his career offers new terms by which the majority output of O'Nolan, in the fragmentary and intertextual columns of *Cruiskeen Lawn*, can be understood. It is in 'little-art,' the miniaturised and fast forgotten forms of what was described in Kraus's time as *Kleinkunst*, or literary cabaret, where the satirist confronts the consequences of the commoditised, mass-produced media.

In 'Bibliographical Musings,' Adorno argues that the commodification of the book-form cannot be counteracted by 'attempts to resist this external development from within through a loosening of literary structure' which 'have some of the impotence of attempts to conform without giving anything up.'⁶³ But the columns of *Cruiskeen Lawn*, like the endless volumes of the *Die Fackel*, paradoxically provide a form of resistance to the culture industry, its clichés and its commercial depredations of the written word, precisely by 'giving up' the book-form's false promise of aesthetic autonomy and becoming immersed in the swarming printed culture they critique. In the case of *Cruiskeen Lawn*, one must bear in mind that this critique constitutes only one facet of a form which favours multiplicity over univocality, disintegration over cohesion. 'Myles was an expert in believing six times as many impossible – or possible things – within a single column' notes Alana Gillespie in a recent article,⁶⁴ and Joseph Brooker describes Myles as a 'function of style,' which serves to 'offer a principle of continuity for the column. Disparate materials are notionally unified by the attachment of his name.'⁶⁵ But in Kraus's *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, at least, such a preference for the chaotic and the fragmentary over lofty and elevated discourse was widely defended:

Not all birds are bearded vultures, sea-eagles, or condors who can rise up 12,000 feet in the glacial clear air in order to survey the entire expanse of earth below! There are also precious and charming little birds like the wren, the kingfisher, the hooded titmouse. They are perhaps more original, more remarkable, even more wonderful than the big birds!⁶⁶

Notes & references

- ¹ Karl Kraus, *Dicta and Contradicta*, trans. Jonathan McVity (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 118.
- ² Jonathan McVity, 'The Twist, *Dicta and Contradicta* in Context,' in Kraus, *Dicta and Contradicta*, 130.
- ³ Harold B. Segel, 'Introduction,' in *The Vienna Coffeehouse Wits: 1890–1938*, ed. and trans. Harold B. Segel (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993), 30.
- ⁴ John Wyse Jackson, 'Introduction,' in Flann O'Brien, *At War: Myles na gCopaleen 1940–1945* (London: Duckworth, 1999), 8.
- ⁵ Niall Sheridan, 'Brian, Flann and Myles,' in *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*, ed. Timothy O'Keeffe (London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1973), 40.
- ⁶ For an example of the former view, see Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), 511. For the latter, see Joseph Brooker's chapter on Myles in *Flann O'Brien* (Tavistock: Northcote, 2005); Stephen Young, 'Fact/Fiction: Cruiskeen Lawn, 1945–66' in *Conjuring Complexities: Essays on Flann O'Brien*, eds. Anne Clune and Tess Hurson (Belfast: Queen's University Press, 1997), 111–8; and Carol Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008).
- ⁷ Segel, 'Introduction,' 35.
- ⁸ Myles na gCopaleen, 'Escorts Ltd.,' *The Best of Myles: A Selection from Cruiskeen Lawn*, *The Irish Times* (6 August 1971): 14.
- ⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Bibliographical Musings' in *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nichol森 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 24.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.* 23.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.* 29.
- ¹² *Ibid.* 21–2.
- ¹³ *Ibid.* 22.
- ¹⁴ Adorno, 'Heine the Wound' in *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nichol森 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 81–2.
- ¹⁵ Anon., 'Abbey Theatre Goes Up in Flames: Early Morning Outbreak,' *The Irish Times* (18 July 1951): 1; (28 July 1951): 5.
- ¹⁶ O'Brien, *At War*, 153–4.
- ¹⁷ Taaffe, 35.
- ¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, Howard Eiland, et al. (London: Belknap Press, 2008), 19–55.
- ¹⁹ Karl Kraus, 'Heine and the Consequences' in *The Kraus Project*, ed. Paul Reitter and Daniel Kehlmann, trans. Jonathan Franzen (London: The Fourth Estate, 2013), 59.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.* 25, n. 17.
- ²¹ *Ibid.* 59.
- ²² *Ibid.* 59.
- ²³ *Ibid.* 61.
- ²⁴ Karl Kraus, *Die Fackel* 374/375 (May 1913): 1.
- ²⁵ Heinrich Heine, *Die Harzreise*, ed. Alphonse Naus Van Daell (London: D.C. Heath & Co., 1929).
- ²⁶ Caoimhghín Ó Broilcháin, 'Comparatively Untapped Sources' in Clune and Hurson (eds), 12–3.
- ²⁷ Kraus, 'Heine and the Consequences,' 59.

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