

A Bilingual Report

An Béal Bocht @50 / The Poor Mouth @50
Maynooth University, 9 March 2016

Eimear Ní Dhroighneáin

Oifigeach Gaeilge Ollscoil Mhá Nuad & Taighdeoir

Bhailigh lucht leanúna Uí Nualláin le chéile tráthnóna Mhárta chun céiliúradh a dhéanamh ar a shaothair mar chuid d'imeachtaí Sheachtain na Gaeilge, eagraithe ag Oifig na Gaeilge. Ní dhéantar fíor-staidéar ar Bhrian Ó Nualláin nó ar a shaothair, faraor, ach go háirithe sa lá atá inniu ann agus muintir na hÉireann bródúil as blianta 1916 agus an comóradh náisiúnta thart timpeall ar an Éirí Amach. In ainneoin seo, os ár gcomhair amach, bhí léacht leath-lae, as Gaeilge, chun céiliúradh a dhéanamh ar 50 bliain atá Ó Nualláin faoin bhfód chomh maith leis an 75 bliain ó scríobh sé an saothar cáiliúil *An Béal Bocht*. I measc urlabhraithe an lae bhí Breandán Ó Conaire, Siún Ní Dhuinn agus Ian Ó Caoimh a labhair faoi shaol agus faoi shaothair Uí Nualláin, faoina shaol oibre mar scríbhneoir, mar iriseoir agus faoi rath leanúnach a leabhair, *An Béal Bocht* mar théacs Gaeilge. Cé gur chlódaigh na cainteoirí na réimsí éagsúla dá shlí beatha litríochta, bhí áit lárnach sa léacht don saothar *An Béal Bocht*.

Chuir Breandán Ó Conaire, údar ar *Myles na Gaeilge*, tús leis an léacht le páipéar a rinne cur síos ar shaol agus ar shaothair éagsúla an údair. Laistigh den pháipéar, darbh ainm 'Cáil agus Cúlra,' bhí réimse leathan d'eilimintí nasctha le Flann agus Myles araon. D'oscail Ó Conaire le ráiteas Montgomery nach raibh aon rud coitianta mar gheall ar Ó Nualláin agus lean sé air ag díospóireacht slí beatha ilghnéitheach Uí Nualláin. Mórthéama Uí Chonaire ná rath leanúnach *An Béal Bocht* mar théacs Gaeilge, ag déanamh cur síos ar stair an leabhair agus an t-aistriúchán ón mbunthéacs go teangacha eile, ina measc; Béarla, Rúisis, Gearmáinis agus Ollannach. Chuir Ó Conaire síos ar chló agus ar cháil Uí Nualláin le tagairtí de Chumann Idirnáisiúnta Uí Nualláin chomh maith leis an suim idirnáisiúnta in Ó Nualláin. Ag caitheamh solais ar ilchumas agus cumas inaistrithe an leabhair *An Béal Bocht*, bhí sé soiléir ó óráid Uí Chonaire gurbh é seo ceann de mhórthéamaí na léachta.

Ina dhiaidh, chuir an feiminí dháttheangach mór le rá Siún Ní Dhuinn síos ar pháipéar dar teideal 'Féiniúlacht na nGaeil i Scríbhinní Bhriain Uí Nualláin,' a d'ardaigh an cheist faoi fhéiniúlacht mhuintir na hÉireann i saothair Uí Nualláin. Chuir Ní Dhuinn béim ar bheogacht agus ar hibrideacht scríbhneoireacht Uí Nualláin

agus an oidhreacht mar chroílár chómhráite aitheantas na Gaeltachta. Bhí a hintinn leagtha ar obair dhátheangach phroifisiúnta Uí Nualláin chomh maith lena cholúnacha Mylesian. I dtaca leis an aird a tharraing Ní Dhuinn ar an aistriú teanga i scríbhneoireacht Uí Nualláin, ó Ghaeilge go dtí an dátheangachas agus sa deireadh Béarla amháin, chaoin Ní Dhuinn cailteanas Uí Nualláin i réimse phobal liteartha na Gaeilge agus í ag argóint riachtanas a aistrithe chun a shlí beatha a fheabhsú. Ag leanúint leis an téama céanna ardaithe ag Ó Conaire, thug Ní Dhuinn aird ar *An Béal Bocht* ag labhairt faoin lá ata inniu ann agus cé go bhfuil dul chun cinn dearfach i leith athbheochan na teanga, fágfar an leabhar ar leathaobh ó shiollabais in ainneoin an líon áise atá ar fail le staidéar a dhéanamh ar an Nua-Ghaeilge.

Ar deireadh, bhí páipéar ag Ian Ó Caoimh dar teideal 'Cúlra agus Comhthéacs' ag cur síos ar oibreacha neamhtheoranta ildánacha Uí Nualláin. Bhí páipéar Uí Chaoimh dírithe ar an inaistritheacht foirimíúil teangeolaíoch i saothair Uí Nualláin. Léiríonn Ó Caoimh mhórphointe an leabhair *An Béal Bocht* leis an íomhá den ghnáthfhear Gaeltachta. Phléigh Ó Caoimh athchóirithe éagsúla ar *An Béal Bocht* ó dhrámaí nuaaimseartha, úrscéalta chomh maith le hinaistritheacht an téacs. Chaith Ó Caoimh solas ar cheist lárnach atá forleathan i saothair Uí Nualláin, an scríbhneoir nua-aoiseach é nó an scríbhneoir é bainteach leis an ré i ndiaidh na nua-aoise é. Tacaíonn Ó Caoimh lena chuid oibre sa ré nua-aoiseach ag moladh eilimintí feiceálacha tríd síos obair Uí Nualláin. Bhí páipéar Uí Chaoimh cuimsitheach, géarchúiseach agus ba bhealach iontach é le críoch a chur leis an léacht.

Bhí sé mar phibhléid agus mar ónóir d'Oifig na Gaeilge seasamh taobh leis na cainteoirí agus leis na saineolaithe seo i ndiaidh na léachta dearfach fáisnéiseach seo. Cé go mbíonn an-chuid cainte ar shaothar Béarla den leabhar *An Béal Bocht*, ag Patrick C. Power 1973, creidim gur ardaigh an léacht seo mórfhadhb eile i leith chíoradh cuimsitheach shaothair Uí Nualláin mar scríbhneoir dhátheangach; ganntanas ar obair chritice ar a shaol agus ar a shaothair. Scallfadh sé an croí agat nuair a smaoiníonn tú ar na foinsí tagartha a bhí ag na cainteoirí agus go raibh orthu braith ar fhoinsí ón mBéarla le tacú lena gcuid argóintí, in ainneoin na dtairiscintí eolacha agus éirimiúla a thug na cainteoirí dúinn. B'fhéidir go bhfuil sé in am dúinn filleadh ar shaothair dhátheangach agus ar shaothair Ghaeilge Uí Nualláin agus teanga na Gaeilge a thabhairt ar ais dó agus Ó Nualláin a thabhairt ar ais don teanga. Leanfaidh mé liom ag tabhairt a ainm cleite air, Myles na gCopaleen, pé scéal é.

* * *

Daniel Curran

Maynooth University

Although March remains a meteorological anomaly in Ireland, the afternoon of 9 March afforded a welcome break from the frenetic shifts in weather. To borrow the words of Flann himself, on this March day 'the sun had climbed steeply out of his hiding and was [...] standing benignly in the lower sky pouring down floods of enchanting light and preliminary tinglings of heat,'¹ and all the while Flanneurs gathered in Maynooth University as part of *Oifig na Gaeilge's* programme for *Seachtain na Gaeilge*. In a year of historical and cultural centenaries, Flann O'Brien and his works are unfortunately being overlooked despite the very important anniversaries of his life and work. Going some way to assuage this, what we had in store for us was a half-day conference, *as Gaeilge*, to mark both the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Brian O'Nolan and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the publication of *An Béal Bocht*. Speakers included Breandán Ó Conaire, Siún Ní Dhuinn, and Ian Ó Caoimh who discussed topics ranging from O'Nolan's career in journalism to the continued success of *An Béal Bocht* as an Irish language text. Whilst covering all aspects of O'Nolan's literary career, the conference placed due emphasis on *An Béal Bocht*.

Breandán Ó Conaire, author of *Myles na Gaeilge*, opened proceedings with an engaging paper on the life and works of the author. The paper, titled '*Cáil agus Cúlra*,' served as an erudite and accomplished whistle stop tour of all things Flann and Myles. Ó Conaire opened with Niall Montgomery's famous claim that 'there was nothing noticeably ordinary about' Flann and proceeded with due acumen to bolster this claim by discussing the diverse nature of O'Nolan's literary career(s). A key thematic concern for Ó Conaire was the continued success of *An Béal Bocht* as an Irish-language novel, detailing its prolific history of translation into languages including English, Russian, German, and Dutch. The paper also addressed the ever-growing popularity of O'Nolan by discussing the burgeoning success of the International Flann O'Brien Society as well as growing academic interest in Flann's work from abroad. Highlighting the versatility and translatability of *An Béal Bocht*, Ó Conaire's paper established a key thematic concern for the rest of conference.

Next, prominent bilingual feminist Siún Ní Dhuinn presented a paper titled '*Féiniúlacht na nGael i scríbhinní Gaeilge Bhriain Uí Nualláin*' which tackled the question of Irish identity in the works of Brian O'Nolan. Ní Dhuinn's paper highlighted the vitality and hybridity with which O'Nolan wrote and its legacy within discussions of Gaeltacht identity. The paper paid particular attention to the correlation between the bilingual dimension of O'Nolan's journalistic career and the popularity of his Mylesian columns. In discussing O'Nolan's move from Irish through a hybrid bilingualism to

English, Ní Dhuinn lamented the loss of O'Nolan within the Irish-language literary community whilst arguing for the necessity of his move to English to further his own career. Continuing with the trend established by Ó Conaire's paper, Ní Dhuinn turned her attention to *An Béal Bocht* by discussing how, in a time when great strides in reviving the Irish language are being made, the novel remains conspicuously absent from many syllabi despite its amenity to modern Irish language studies.

Finally, Ian Ó Caoimh's paper '*Cúlra agus Comhthéacs*' was a wide-ranging treatise which laboured a robust argument for the seemingly infinite versatility of O'Nolan's works. While Flanneurs may sometimes emit an exhausted sigh at the ever-widening gyre of interpretative criticism on the author, Ó Caoimh's paper was an invigorating perspective on the formal and linguistic translatability of O'Nolan's works. One point emphasised in the paper was the Everyman quality of the Gaeltacht 'person' portrayed in *An Béal Bocht*. Ó Caoimh discussed the many formal adaptations of *An Béal Bocht*, which include everything from modern stage productions to graphic novels, as well as the text's translatability. Ó Caoimh's paper also highlighted some of the central issues surrounding the study of O'Nolan's novels such as the debate about whether or not O'Nolan can be classed as a modernist or a postmodernist. While siding with the postmodern side of the debate, Ó Caoimh was also quick to acknowledge the distinctly modernist aspects of O'Nolan's works. Ó Caoimh's paper was comprehensive, insightful, and a great way to conclude the conference.

And so, having had our Mylesian appetites sated for the moment, we emerged into the benign rays of the sun on a fresh spring day. While *Oifig na Gaeilge* presented an excellent programme for *Seachtain na Gaeilge*, they must also be applauded for hosting a highly successful Irish-language conference on Brian O'Nolan and his works. While there has been much talk of overturning Patrick C. Power's 1973 English translation of *An Béal Bocht*, this conference also highlighted another issue I believe needs to be addressed in studying O'Nolan as a bilingual writer, that being the dearth of Irish language criticism on his life and works. It is rather unfortunate that all three of the papers had to rely on English language criticism despite the obviously meaningful contributions each paper made to the study of the author. Perhaps this conference can stand as a paradigm within O'Nolan studies. Perhaps now is the time, as Ní Dhuinn's paper highlighted, that we make a concerted effort to bring O'Nolan back to the Irish language and the Irish language back to O'Nolan.

Notes & references

¹ Flann O'Brien, *The Complete Novels* (London: Everyman, 2007), 252.