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### Article

**How to Cite:** Katherine Ebury, 'New Contexts for Confession: Brian O'Nolan, Golden Age Crime Fiction, and Theodor Reik,' *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 4, no. 2 <(Spring 2020): 1–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.16995/pr.3351>

**Published:** 16 December 2020

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# New Contexts for Confession:

## Brian O’Nolan, Golden Age Crime Fiction, & Theodor Reik

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### Abstract

In this article I will be primarily concerned with the influence of a psychoanalytic criminological context on written first-person confessions of murder in Brian O’Nolan, with a specific focus on *The Third Policeman* (written 1939–40, published 1967). Responding to Keith Hopper’s use of a theorisation of the detective fiction genre in order to assess O’Nolan’s postmodernism, as well as work by Jennika Baines and Maebh Long, I will place O’Nolan within a historicist framework of Golden Age crime writing. Recent wider modernist criticism has shown an interest in exploring connections between modernism and Golden Age writing, including Matthew Levay’s recent *Violent Minds: Modernism and the Criminal* (2019) and I will connect O’Nolan’s work into this developing field through my own emphasis on the psychoanalytic thought of Theodor Reik. The first section of this article will address O’Nolan in relation to the genre of crime writing and outline the deep influence on him of the inverted detective novel form; the second section will address Reik’s criminological writing about confession, in order to build up a historical context for O’Nolan’s portrayal of criminal psychology; the final section will apply Reik’s ideas directly to *The Third Policeman* as well as to Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), which I will show to be similar in their dual engagement with psychoanalysis and with crime fiction beyond the ‘clue puzzle’ form.

### Keywords

genre, detective fiction, confession, law and literature, psychoanalysis

In *Troubling Confessions*, Peter Brooks sums up the different forces at work within the idea of confession in religious, literary, psychoanalytic, and legal contexts.

We worry about the trustworthiness of confessions because the speech-act that begins with the words 'I confess' seems to be marked by contradictory intentions and subject to contradictory uses by those receiving this most personal of utterances. We want confessions, yet we are suspicious of them. The law has seen the necessity of attempting to regulate and police confessions: it has tried to establish conditions of the confessional act that guarantee that it has been "voluntarily" made, all the while authorizing kinds of pressure to confess that run counter to voluntariness. And the law still today – as in medieval times – tends to accept confession as the queen of proofs.<sup>1</sup>

Brooks is strongly influenced by the thought of Freud's follower Theodor Reik, and indeed Reik will be the guiding spirit in my argument across this article which explores confession in Brian O'Nolan and in a wider culture of criminological thinking. This wider culture will be mostly represented by the psychoanalytic criminology of Reik and the crime writing of Agatha Christie.

In part, confession is overdetermined because of its traditional importance within religious and secular cultures. But I will explore how O'Nolan's representations of confession are also shaped by another force which undermines this apparent sense of justice: the automatic death sentence for capital crimes in Britain and Ireland in the period when O'Nolan was writing, which devalues the form and content of confession as this discourse cannot be used to rehabilitate or to ameliorate punishment.<sup>2</sup> Where Paul Fagan has productively argued of O'Nolan's short fiction that 'these texts are engaged in thinking through a rather proto-Foucauldian notion' of scepticism about the value of confession, *via* Freud, literary ethics, and the myth of Narcissus, I hope to offer a slightly different historicist and theoretical approach which shows that both Reik and Golden Age writers were there long before Foucault's critique.<sup>3</sup>

Here, I will be primarily concerned with the influence of a psychoanalytic criminological context on written first-person confessions of murder in O'Nolan, with a specific focus on *The Third Policeman* (written 1939–40, published 1967). The first section of this article will address O'Nolan in relation to the genre of crime writing and outline the deep influence on him of the inverted detective novel form; the second section will address Reik's criminological writing about confession, in order to build up a historical context for O'Nolan's portrayal of criminal psychology; the final section will apply Reik's ideas directly to *The Third Policeman* as well as to Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), which I will show to be similar in their dual engagement with psychoanalysis and with crime fiction beyond the 'clue puzzle' form.

## I: Brian O'Nolan as a Crime Writer

In this first section, I want simply to ask if O'Nolan's authorship of multiple confessional narratives shows him to be, at heart, a crime writer. While there has been some excellent work on O'Nolan and crime, including Keith Hopper's use of a theorisation of the genre in order to assess his postmodernism, Jennika Baines's work on murder and Maebh Long's illuminating chapter on *An Béal Bocht* in *Assembling Flann O'Brien*, we have not previously seen O'Nolan placed within a historicist framework of Golden Age crime writing.<sup>4</sup>

Recent wider modernist criticism has shown an interest in exploring connections between modernism and Golden Age writing, including Matthew Levay's recent *Violent Minds: Modernism and the Criminal* (2019). Levay addresses crime writing by Wyndham Lewis (*Mrs Dukes' Millions*, 1908) and by Gertrude Stein (*Blood on the Dining Room Floor*, written 1933), while Mark Byron and Sophia Barnes have recently printed the manuscript of an unfinished crime novel, *The Blue Spill*, which was written by Ezra Pound and Olga Rudge during the winter of either 1929 or 1930.<sup>5</sup> Pound, along with W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot, had also assisted the modernist musician George Antheil with his 1930 detective novel, *Death in the Dark*, published with Faber under the pseudonym Stacey Bishop. *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot* project has also made clear Eliot's investments in crime fiction as a reviewer for *The Criterion*.<sup>6</sup> Further, a subset of modernist, or modernist-adjacent, authors had a productive and successful second career as crime writers, including G. K. Chesterton *via* the Father Brown series and Cecil Day Lewis (under the pseudonym Nicholas Blake) *via* the Nigel Strangeways novels. Graham Greene originally distinguished between his serious novels and the thrillers he called 'entertainments,' but critics such as Levay now see Greene's output more holistically.<sup>7</sup> There is a great deal of evidence that O'Nolan particularly prized Greene's opinion and example, from the publication of *At Swim-Two-Birds* onwards, and we can only conjecture the crushing effect of his belief that Greene had been the rejecting reader of *The Third Policeman* for Longmans; Greene of all people might have seen its merits if he had indeed read it. Additionally, in the contemporary critical context we find that if we study a range of articles from the last few years, we see a move to publish work on crime authors such as Dorothy L. Sayers and Gladys Mitchell in traditionally modernist journals,<sup>8</sup> and even occasionally to read modernist works against the grain as crime fiction.<sup>9</sup>

While in the past O'Nolan's engagement with crime tropes seemed to mark him as a postmodernist (as argued by Hopper in particular), in this phase of the new modernist studies, it is far from anomalous to seek to place O'Nolan and his works within this wider modernist critical project and, specifically, in relation to Golden Age writing. Indeed, in Maebh Long's edition of *The Collected Letters of Flann O'Brien* we see O'Nolan call *The Third Policeman* a 'murder or mystery novel' both to Patience Ross

and to Longmans, and he also explicitly asks Ross to send the book to 'publishers who go in for mystery novels' after a run of rejections.<sup>10</sup> Ross actually seems to have only sent the manuscript to more high-brow presses, excluding core Golden Age publishers like Collins, Gollancz, and John Lane.<sup>11</sup>

In considering how we have so far missed the layered palimpsestic traces of O'Nolan's engagement with crime fiction, I have identified three difficulties that have prevented us from accurately appraising this potential influence:

- First, there is the problem of archival practice when working with popular fiction.
- Secondly, as I have begun to explore above, there is the difficulty of placing O'Nolan between modernism and postmodernism, which has left open the question of his relationship with popular culture, including crime fiction.
- Finally, a reified picture of Golden Age writing persists within contemporary culture (outside of scholarly communities which work directly on crime fiction), emphasising the 'clue puzzle' form over the inverted form.

In relation to the first issue, in reflecting on barriers to thinking of O'Nolan as a crime writer, I should highlight how archival practice with regard to popular fiction has also potentially deformed our engagements with O'Nolan and crime conventions. While we now have a full inventory of O'Nolan's library produced by Catherine Ahearn and Adam Winstanley and published in *The Parish Review* in 2013, this excellent scholarship cannot remedy the ephemeral nature of popular fiction, which rarely makes it into archives.<sup>12</sup> This is generally a problem in the new modernist studies: in which archive are the detective novels that we know W. B. Yeats read at the rate of four a week<sup>13</sup> or the many crime novels Freud read in the 1930s?<sup>14</sup> In O'Nolan's library are preserved four works of detective fiction which suggest either a more extensive collection or a set of wider borrowings from friends and libraries:

1. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *An Honest Thief and Other Stories* (1919 edition).
2. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Best Known Works of Edgar Allan Poe in One Volume* (1931 edition).
3. Jefferson Farjeon, *The Adventure of Edward* (1939 edition).
4. Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1949 edition).

If O'Nolan had a copy of Farjeon's little-known crime novel, which is now out of print, we can safely conjecture that he had read more famous works such as Christie's *Roger Ackroyd*. Still, these archival limitations mean that I will not be able to show direct influence or take a genetic approach in this article. Instead, I will offer a focus on intertextuality, including shared techniques and shared theoretical approaches to criminal confession.

Secondly, in relation to O'Nolan's relationship with popular culture, it is true that his often snobby persona in *Cruiskeen Lawn* tempts us to believe that he might be, after all, rather too 'high' for the influence of detective fiction to be relevant. For example, I draw your attention to the very funny column 'Good News and Bad,' from 8 September 1955:

All Affectations are odious, but there is one 'literary' one which would drive me up the walls, were it not that the walls are already crowded with former victims. You know what I mean, of course – the stories in newspapers and magazines giving insight into the private lives and habits of great men:—

- Einstein's favourite relaxation, apart from the violin, was reading detective stories.
- When he reached home late at night, at the height of his worries as head of a Labour Government, there was nothing Attlee liked better than to curl up with a rattling good detective story.
- Inspector X of the Yard, whose daily task is tackling and arresting armed thugs, wears a bowler hat and goes home every evening (third class) to his little place in Sussex. He tends his roses until the light fade and then – the slippers, the armchair, and a good detective story.

In one of the Sunday papers mentioned above there is a characteristic piece about a new London funny man, Frankie Howard. The biographer sees in Frankie's flat 'rows of bookcases filled with volumes he often reads – Agatha Christie thrillers ...' Imagine reading the same detective stories 'often'!

In the same paper we are introduced to Professor David R. Bates, occupant of the Chair of Applied Mathematics in Queen's University, Belfast. [...] How does he spend his spare time? 'Sitting in the lounge of his hotel yesterday,' the scribe says, 'in front of a bookcase packed with the detective novels that he sometimes reads, he spoke cautiously about the artificial moonlight idea...'

\* \* \*

Terrifying, is it not? Flabberbloodygasting. I wonder what does Agatha Christie read when she is at home? I wonder, also, whether, if it becomes widely known that a man is a divil for reading Plato, it follows that he must be by profession a dustman?

The offence rests.<sup>15</sup>

Here, Myles's reference to Plato in the conclusion might tempt us to read the joke as being at the expense of popular fiction, which is overvalued in comparison to deeper reading, but in fact I would suggest the real target is the 'great men' who use a fashion

for crime novels to burnish their credentials of 'normal' private lives, as well as the clichéd journalese which Myles often targets in his columns.

In an earlier column from 30 September 1954, Myles sees Christie's life and work as an intriguing example of metafictional interpenetration. In response to a report of Ernest Hemingway being involved in a plane crash in Uganda, Myles turns to Christie's famous 1926 disappearance (though he slightly garbles the facts, understandably, as he was only 15 at the time):

Did all this [Hemingway's plane crash and subsequent adventures] happen, or was it a sort of literary hallucination? It reminds me of the *cause célèbre* of the thirties when Agatha Christie, famed writer of mystery thrillers, suddenly disappeared off the face of the earth and caused police forces everywhere to be alerted. (She eventually turned up somewhere, bland and unhurt.) There *does* seem to be a danger that some authors tend to become the fictional characters of their own creation.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to the previous example, Myles shows investment in the content of Christie's writing, rather than the cultural capital it might or might not signify, *via* the story of this great unsolved mystery in Christie's biography – people genuinely feared that she had been murdered, and what happened is still not fully understood. We think of *At Swim-Two-Birds* in Myles's playful hypothesis that Christie as author is at the mercy of her characters and stories.

In short, in the two examples I have highlighted, Myles shows an ambivalent attitude to Christie's output, which does not preclude a deeper engagement by O'Nolan. Further, both of these examples from the 1950s columns occur from past the peak of Christie's fame, and beyond the Golden Age period, where my particular interest is located in O'Nolan's immediate response to crime tropes and the criminological thinking which inspired them (especially Reik, but also Freud) in the 1930s and 1940s. In O'Nolan's own biographical persona we find him willing to author Sexton Blake novels; if he was only teasing his correspondents about this, and was not the actual author of unidentified novels from the series, we can at least say that he felt no embarrassment in attaching his name to this kind of writing. Indeed, his father and brother Ciarán had previously written crime novels.<sup>17</sup> On 14 July 1939, he wrote to Ethel Mannin in response to her criticism of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, closing a joking, defensive letter with the claim that 'I am negotiating at present for a contract to write 6 Sexton Blake stories (25 to 30,000 words at £25 a time), so please do not send any more sneers at my art. Sorry, Art.'<sup>18</sup> This letter to Mannin is written around the time he began *The Third Policeman* (August 1939), so even as a joke it is hugely significant in explaining his trajectory at that time; the Sexton Blake claim, and this second novel, are

in part a response to Mannin's negative comparison of *At Swim-Two-Birds* to *Ulysses*. In making the claim to Ross that *The Third Policeman* is a 'murder or mystery story,' he adds further that it 'cannot be said to be a lot of highbrow guff like the last book,' while to Longmans he makes the 'murder or mystery' claim in the context of reflecting that 'I believe "At Swim-Two-Birds" is a flop so far.'<sup>19</sup> He also makes a fully documented and apparently serious offer to write Sexton Blake stories in October 1955, around the time of the two Myles columns about Christie discussed above.<sup>20</sup> While O'Nolan's authorship of the Blake stories remains a mystery, what we can say is that he appears to have valued genre-writing and to have been aware of the flexibility of his talent.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, and most importantly, we do not immediately recognise the influence of detective fiction on O'Nolan because of the dusty, reified, conservative, nostalgic version of crime fiction that has come down to us. Indeed, the importance of psychoanalysis for the Golden Age writing is only just now being appreciated within crime fiction studies. Recently Samantha Walton's *Guilty But Insane* has highlighted the importance of psychoanalysis in Golden Age detective fiction,<sup>22</sup> while Stefano Serafini has also explored the impact of Freud on 'the gray and hybrid zones where [Golden Age] conventions intermingle with those of the psychological thriller.'<sup>23</sup> Even Hopper, who persuasively frames O'Nolan as a crime writer, shows no knowledge of the diversity of the genre, making generalised claims that 'within the modernist paradigm the detective story was ultimately a celebration of human reason and deduction' and arguing that 'the opening line of [*The Third Policeman*], however, would seem to cancel out the first premise of the "whodunit".'<sup>24</sup> But in fact the Golden Age has various modes, including the 'inverted detective novel' which, I argue, is a form which particularly intrigued O'Nolan. In the 20<sup>th</sup>-century context, the origin of the inverted detective novel was claimed by the Golden Age writer R. Austin Freeman in 1924 as his own invention and as a natural offshoot of psychoanalysis.<sup>25</sup> This novel form offers a psychological portrait of a murderer in which we know the culprit of the crime throughout, usually involving first-person confession or a tight free indirect discourse focused on the criminal's interiority. Famous incarnations of the inverted or psychological detective story were produced throughout the 1920s and 1930s, an apex of the form, by other authors including Francis Iles's *Malice Aforethought* (1931) and Richard Hull's *The Murder of My Aunt* (1934).

The foundation of this Golden Age division between, on the one hand, puzzle style narratives with a detective figure and, on the other hand, Gothic explorations of criminal psychology, is laid in Edgar Allan Poe's output. There is a crucial difference between his Dupin detective narratives, represented most famously by 'Murder in the Rue Morgue' (1841), and the radically different first-person confessional study of the aftermath of murder and impending execution represented by 'The Tell-Tale Heart' (1843) and 'The Imp of the Perverse' (1845). These two innovations on Poe's part, these two styles for representing crime, are not even separated across his career: he was



writing the two modes simultaneously across the 1840s. As Stacy Gillis argues, for Golden Age critics of detective fiction 'Poe is positioned as the fountainhead of all that follows him,' although they often profoundly disagreed about which of his stories are the crucial origin of their crime writing.<sup>26</sup> Poe's non-puzzle stories such as 'The Tell-Tale Heart' and 'The Imp of the Perverse' share crucial similarities with O'Nolan's *The Third Policeman*, his short story 'Two in One,' and even with *An Béal Bocht*. (Although the narrator of *An Béal Bocht* is *falsely* convicted of murder, an important distinction, the crime/confession duality is still very much present, and he narrates his role in several other crimes.) The similarity between Poe's output and O'Nolan's work is no coincidence, because as we have seen, one of the few crime books to reach his archive at Boston College is a 1931 edition of *The Best Known Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. Indeed, Fagan has explored the value of Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart' to a reading of 'Two in One,' while I want to widen this claim by suggesting that Poe and O'Nolan are often writing in the same subgenre, the 'inverted detective novel.'<sup>27</sup>

Below, I have laid out some of the crucial differences between the two forms in a comparative chart:

<b>Clue Puzzle Form</b>	<b>'Inverted' or Psychological Form</b>
19 <sup>th</sup> -century precursors: Poe 'Murder in the Rue Morgue' (1841); Collins <i>The Moonstone</i> (1868); and Conan Doyle 'A Study in Scarlet' (1887).	19 <sup>th</sup> -century precursors: Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart' (1843) and 'The Imp of the Perverse' (1845), Dostoyevsky's <i>Crime and Punishment</i> (1866).
Usually third-person narration; may feature documents produced by witnesses or by a Watson figure.	Usually first-person or tight free indirect discourse.
Focused on the victims of crime and the evidence of that crime.	Focused on the criminal and their psychology.
A detective (or detective surrogate) is central to the narrative.	Either there is no detective in the narrative, or the detective is an antagonist.
The identity of the criminal and the ending of the narrative are tied together; closure is offered by unveiling the perpetrator of the crime.	The identity of the criminal is foregrounded from the beginning of the narrative through the trope of confession; closure still often comes from the revelation of how the culprit was caught and punished.
Golden Age versions: Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey series; Alan Melville's Mr. Minto series; Ngaio Marsh's Roderick Alleyn series.	Golden Age versions: Francis Iles's <i>Malice Aforethought</i> (1931), James M. Cain <i>The Postman Always Rings Twice</i> (1934), and Richard Hull's <i>The Murder of My Aunt</i> (1934).

There are also a few other terms used in the period to discuss this formal division of approaches to Golden Age fiction, but the distinction mostly remains stable and was consciously considered by authors themselves. For example, Victoria Stewart has explored Dorothy L. Sayers's generic anxieties surrounding texts with an interest in criminal psychology:

[Sayers] suggests that the term 'Detective Story' should be reserved for 'stories of crime and detection in which the interest lies in the setting of a problem and its solution by logical means. Psychological studies of the criminal mind are more properly called "crime stories".'<sup>28</sup>

O'Nolan's conscious vacillation between the two forms of Golden Age output is evident in his calling *The Third Policeman* a 'murder or mystery novel': a 'murder novel' would be inverted, a 'mystery novel' would be a clue puzzle story, a 'murder or mystery novel' tells of a murder, but locates the mystery elsewhere (in the narrator's beyond-the-grave status).<sup>29</sup> What should be construed from my above summary of the core division in Golden Age forms is that O'Nolan was interested in detective fiction *per se*, but especially inspired by the fictional possibilities offered by the inverted model of confessional writing embedded in the uniquely high stakes of capital crime.

## II. Theodor Reik on Criminal Confession

I will now focus on Theodor Reik as a central, but neglected, theoretical context for examining confession in O'Nolan's writing, as well as in the inverted detective novel form in general. While there is no proof that O'Nolan read Reik (it was not retained in his library if he did), Reik was very famous in the period that O'Nolan was writing and most aspects of Reik's thought were available in English, albeit not always in his own words. His works were published in German in the 1920s and translated into English in the 1930s and 40s. The extent to which both modernist and middlebrow authors were aware of Reik is indicated by the 1936 publication of *The Unknown Murderer* in an English translation by Dr Katherine Jones in Virginia and Leonard Woolf's Hogarth Press.

In *The Unknown Murderer*, Reik writes that 'We recognise how little we know of psychological conditions and motives in the psychogenesis of capital crimes.'<sup>30</sup> Reik believes that it is crucial for the psychoanalyst – and he suggests it also ought to be important for a wider society – to value the confession beyond the mere admission of guilt or guilty plea: 'The problem is to lead the criminal to a recognition of his guilt in the psychological sense ("Do you recognize that you are guilty?") and not in the legal sense ("Do you admit to being guilty?").'<sup>31</sup> This is a journey that O'Nolan's narrators,

in *The Third Policeman* and elsewhere, will try and fail to make, as I will explore directly in the final section of this article. Similarly, in *The Compulsion to Confess* (1925), Reik sees repression and the compulsion to confess as related, reciprocal processes, with the will to confess a key cause of the return of the repressed.<sup>32</sup>

In outlining his theories across his different works, Reik seeks to upend a tradition of criminological thought – criminals do not confess because they are repentant or betray themselves because they are stupid, but rather on an unconscious level they wish to be caught. He argues self-betrayal causes criminals pleasure both in the confession itself and in subsequent punishment through subjection to power, even if that pleasure occurs at the expense of the criminal's life. He suggests, further, that the crime itself works as a confession of unconscious guilt and works alongside the death drive: 'In some cases, especially as in the neuroses in which masochism stands out, the need for punishment will even be the predominant meaning of the [crime itself].'<sup>33</sup> In developing this argument, Reik anticipates by fifty years and more Foucault's paradigm of confession and the incitement to discourse as 'perpetual spirals of power and pleasure.'<sup>34</sup> In the period in which O'Nolan was working there was a great deal of cultural anxiety and scepticism around the value of confession, which was shared by Reik himself. He is clear that he does not mean that confessional utterances and texts can be easily and straightforwardly read and interpreted by the psychoanalyst. He argues that, 'For the perpetrator also, the crime is a traumatic event that has flooded the psychic apparatus [...] sometimes it takes the criminal years before he knows what he has done and what his deed means.'<sup>35</sup> Emphasis on plausible, normal motives suggests a simplistic view of the mind, Reik argues:

Without understanding the course of certain ego-agencies, the unconscious need for punishment and the compulsion to confess, certain confessions will, of course, be difficult to comprehend. The criminal himself can say nothing as to the nature of the unconscious processes, the result of which is the confession. This means that he can say nothing that would suffice for their explanation.<sup>36</sup>

Reik argues that this distortion, associated with a view of the crime as 'a traumatic event that has flooded the psychic apparatus' of the perpetrator, may have a palpable effect on the form and content of the confession itself.

On a textual level, it seems worth setting the examples of fictional first-person confession to capital crimes in the inverted detective form directly alongside each other, to see how well they fit with Reik's theories of traumatic confession. First, we have one example from Poe, whose unique style and role as formal originator I have already discussed:

'The Tell-Tale Heart' (1843)

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.<sup>37</sup>

Secondly, we have a section of Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) when Dr Sheppard, our narrator, writes his confession and transforms the narrative, revealing that he has been lying to us all along:

I suppose I must have meant to murder him all along. [...] I am rather pleased with myself as a writer. What could be neater, for instance, than the following: '*The letters were brought in at twenty minutes to nine. It was just on ten minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread. I hesitated with my hand on the door handle, looking back and wondering if there was anything I had left undone.*' All true, you see. But suppose I had put a row of stars after the first sentence. Would somebody then have wondered what exactly happened in that blank ten minutes?<sup>38</sup>

Finally, we have several examples from O'Nolan:

1. *The Third Policeman* (1939–40/1967)

Not everybody knows how I killed old Phillip Mathers, smashing his jaw in with my spade; but first it is better to speak of my friendship with John Divney because it was he who first knocked old Mathers down by giving him a great blow in the neck with a special bicycle-pump which he manufactured himself out of a hollow iron bar.<sup>39</sup>

2. *An Béal Bocht* (1941)

I am noting down the matters which are in this document because the next life is approaching me swiftly — far from us be the evil thing and may the bad spirit not regard me as a brother! — and also because our likes will never be there again.<sup>40</sup>

3. 'Two in One' (1954)

If Kelly and I must each be either murderer or murdered, it is perhaps better to accept my present fate as philosophically as I can and be cherished in the public mind as the victim of this murderous monster, Kelly. He *was* a murderer, anyway.<sup>41</sup>

In these examples, we see how fictional criminal confession in the inverted detective novel form strains at the limits of formal and psychological realism, as described by Reik; further, we often find a dark humour in these passages which suggests a difficulty in suspending our disbelief, as well as a flat tone which reflects both a masochistic self-exposure and the presence of trauma. Earlier examples of criminal confessions, as Brooks argues, such as the public *amende honorable* or the Newgate Calendar, tend to offer closure: 'In the demand for a final confession by the convicted criminal — who will be executed with or without it — we may recognise society's need to confirm its assignments of guilt and punishment, and, beyond that, perhaps a generalised desire for transparency.'<sup>42</sup> However, this is usually missing in both Reikian criminal psychology and in the inverted detective novel form. Instead, formal features of the inverted form hinder the reader's likely sense of closure, suggesting counterintuitively that it was not always the primary purpose of fictional confessions to provide resolution to the narratives in which they appear.

For Reik, in contrast with Freud, all confession is ultimately pathological, connected to a desire for punishment and to the death drive, giving confession to capital crime a special place in his theory; for this reason, he would argue directly against the death penalty on several occasions. I would argue that, for 20<sup>th</sup>-century authors such as O'Nolan, the idea of the death sentence itself placed particularly acute pressure on the idea of confession as voluntary or involuntary self-incrimination in the inverted detective novel form. This was because if a capital offender confessed and pleaded guilty, they would have a very limited opportunity to explain their crime because of the mandatory death sentence in murder trials. Because of this restriction, in some cases, a confession *in itself* was sometimes considered grounds for an insanity defence.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment in Britain from 1949–53 note that straightforward confession by the accused was, in the period in question, actively discouraged as part of arraignment proceedings: 'We understand that in England a plea of guilty is very rarely accepted in murder cases at the present time; and that some judges will never accept such a plea but always insist on strict proof,' while in Scotland a guilty plea for murder was not permissible.<sup>44</sup> By the 1950s, Reik's thought had been assimilated into psychoanalytic practice and public discourse to the extent that the Royal Commission investigating capital punishment acknowledged that 'in some very rare cases the existence of capital punishment may act as an incitement to murder on the mentally abnormal.'<sup>45</sup>

In a historical context where the death sentence is mandatory, as in Britain and Ireland in O'Nolan's day, to confess is thus, both metaphorically and literally, to ask for execution. In a different context, Fagan has argued that O'Nolan 'asks us to confront the emotional and ethical ambiguity of experiencing somebody else's destruction for our own aesthetic pleasure' and the context of both Reik's theory and capital crime

tends to literalise and render even more grotesque this symbolic transgression.<sup>46</sup> In the next section, which examines the comparatively experimental examples of *The Third Policeman* and *Roger Ackroyd*, I will examine how destabilising questions about the death penalty and the psychology of the condemned person might indeed be raised by a fictional confession, with the confessional writing showing traces of neurosis and masochism which undermines common sense notions of criminal responsibility. While the Gothic, circular narrative of *The Third Policeman* – where, as we know, the narrator turns out to have died soon after his crime without realising it – is an extreme case, I would argue that confession is arresting across the inverted detective novel form, offering as much uncertainty as resolution, given that the confession appears to be governed by irrational, compulsive forces as suggested by Reik in *The Unknown Murderer* and *The Compulsion to Confess*.

### III. Narrative Confession in O’Nolan & Christie

This final section of my article will explore how Reik’s influence was felt across modernism and the Golden Age, using O’Nolan’s relationship with Christie as a case study. Within O’Nolan’s *œuvre*, Reik’s concept of confession is at work most powerfully in *The Third Policeman*, in which we see a fantastic world that echoes and repeats the narrator’s experience of his crime as a trauma in the form of repeated, distorted reference to bicycles, to Mathers and his house, to the police, to de Selby who is powerfully connected with the crime’s motive, and perhaps especially to the death penalty. In Christie’s case, I have chosen to focus on *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), both as a potential influence on O’Nolan and as a text which shares a Reikian inflection.

Authors who wrote mainly ‘puzzle style’ Golden Age fictions, such as Christie, also engaged substantially with the inverted form that I have previously described, often fusing the two forms. As Serafini argues of a range of interwar thrillers, ‘The intersections, metamorphoses, and intertextual exchanges between the classic detective story and the psychological thriller in the interwar period testify to the mobility of crime writing, which constantly transgresses the boundaries on which it is founded,’ concluding that this blurring of forms also reflects medical and psychoanalytical discourses for examining the criminal mind.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, he argues that ‘by the end of World War II, psychoanalysis had become the dominant ideology for many detective writers.’<sup>48</sup> I have touched on O’Nolan’s play with these two forms via the phrase ‘murder or mystery novel’ in describing *The Third Policeman*. In *Roger Ackroyd*, as well as later in *Endless Night* (1967), Christie’s readers were shocked because they believed that they were reading a ‘clue puzzle’ narrative, in which the narrator could not be a suspect but only a witness or aid to the detective, but found that instead the novel

belonged to the inverted form as the text both hid and revealed the narrator's potential to murder in terms of means, motive and opportunity. The author of the narrative in *Ackroyd*, Poirot's sidekick, Dr Sheppard, waits until the very end to confess murder to us, revealing at the same time that he has already committed suicide to escape justice. In short, in reading *Ackroyd*, readers have been reading a dead murderer's confession all along without knowing it.

In both O'Nolan and Christie's narratives we see a battle between Reikian conflicting forces of repression and confession; both narrators express their guilt and fear of the death penalty through their construction and narration of an alternate reality that both hides and obliquely reveals the crime. For O'Nolan's narrator this is the fantastic world of the Parish, for Christie the distortions Sheppard introduces to his diary of the investigation which he imagines marking with a row of stars. Carl R. Lovitt writes about the confessional genre of true crime that:

Murderers who confess write almost nothing about the crimes themselves. Nathan Leopold [...] apologises at the beginning of his confession to any reader who "has bought this book in the expectation of reading a description of my crime itself" and hopes "that he can return his book to the bookstore."<sup>49</sup>

In *The Third Policeman*, the narrator tells us 'There is little to tell about the murder' and, though he does allow us to witness the extreme physical violence of the crime ('I do not know how often I struck him after that but I did not stop until I was tired'), it is told in less than two full pages.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, to Christie's narrator, the crime is only 'that blank ten minutes,' which he would prefer to indicate in his narrative through 'a row of stars after the first sentence,' rather than to tell it directly.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Sheppard tells the details of the crime (his plan, his procedure, his alibi) but leaves Poirot's direct account of the murder as an act of violence to stand without challenge or further reflection. Through Reik, I am thus able to highlight the role of the competing forces of repression and the compulsion to confess as traumatic repetition in both Christie and O'Nolan's narratives, as we see an inexhaustible desire to tell the story of the crime combined with an inability to do so to the narrator's satisfaction.

Shoshana Felman summarises a similar predicament to that experienced by O'Nolan's narrator and Christie's Sheppard for the protagonist of Tolstoy's short story *The Kreutzer Sonata*, who cannot live with being found 'not guilty' at his trial for wife-murder, and who must thus travel and tell his story to bystanders:

Having been pronounced 'not guilty,' freed, he nonetheless remains chained to the bloody murder that no washing will erase, eradicate, or cleanse out of his life. He thus becomes the haunted captive of the bloody saga of which he has

become the bearer and whose guilty secret he will try, but remains inherently unable, to divulge. His destiny henceforth is to remain a hostage to the story of his violence: a (willing or unwilling) medium to the transformation of his case into a legend.<sup>52</sup>

For Felman, *The Kreutzer Sonata's* emphasis on confession reveals an imbalance between law and psychoanalysis, in which 'a judicial case becomes a legal trauma in its own right and is therefore bound to repeat itself through a traumatic legal repetition.'<sup>53</sup> Reik thus anticipates Felman, and other critics working at the intersection of law and trauma/affect, and also illuminates both Christie's and O'Nolan's texts.

Along with creating an alternate reality, where the murder is both told and not told and punishment is threatened but always deferred, each narrator creates a shadow self – when O'Nolan's narrator enters the Parish, he loses his name and gains 'a soul' who consistently speaks the truth of his guilt to him when he cannot acknowledge it. The narrator reflects, 'I knew also that my soul was friendly, was my senior in years and was solely concerned for my welfare. For convenience I called him Joe.'<sup>54</sup> Sheppard creates a division between 'Dr Sheppard' as potential suspect and the 'I' who writes the narrative – when Poirot accuses Christie's narrator, Sheppard records him as eschewing the second person, saying obliquely not 'you,' but 'Dr Sheppard' must have committed the crime.<sup>55</sup> Within the idea of confession itself, we also see these narrators vacillate between auto-confession and confession for a broader audience. The narrator of *The Third Policeman* denies his guilt, to himself, to Joe, and to others, within the plot of the novel, so that we can picture this as an auto-confession (especially given his secret beyond-the-grave status). But he is also, at least in the opening, conscious of an audience who may or may not know of his crime and its context ('Not everybody knows [...]; but first it is better to speak of').<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in Christie, at the end of the narrative Poirot has insisted that Sheppard must finish his story and confess his crime, but Sheppard initially begins to write completely unprompted, out of an impulse within himself and without apparent sense of audience (auto-confession): 'Mrs Ferrars died on the night of the 16–17<sup>th</sup> September – a Thursday.'<sup>57</sup> Seemingly, he never kept a diary until he became a criminal.

Reik's theory also has a bearing on characterisation and on the emotional content of confessional narratives by O'Nolan and Christie. He argues that the appearance of rational thought in a confession, which might lead to presumption of premeditation and a harsher view of the crime, could instead represent insanity more fully than an emotional, regretful confession:

A criminal who recounts his deed entirely without affect, like a police report, may be compared to a neurotic who tells of the very essence of his disturbance



in such a manner that any indication of affect is missing. In such a case, the emotion is often found to be a displaced one. The need for punishment is certainly of determining influence in this displacement of affect.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, in O'Nolan's confessions we see a striking flatness and off-handedness of tone and a similar lack of affect to that described by Reik, as he risks banality in challenging the reader's wished-for experience of the drama of fictional confession. As we know, opening his narrative, the narrator of *The Third Policeman* confesses immediately, ramblingly. Similarly, closing his narrative, about to commit suicide to save himself from disgrace and the death penalty, Christie's Dr Sheppard designs his suicide unemotionally to mirror his original role in the death of Mrs Ferrars with veronal, yet his last recorded words are about cucurbits: 'I feel no pity for her. I have no pity for myself either. So let it be veronal. But I wish Hercule Poirot had never retired from work and come here to grow vegetable marrows.'<sup>59</sup> This ending has a similar dark humour to that which we have found in criminal confessions across this article. Sheppard's utterance does create a symbolic expiatory relationship between himself and his victim in choosing the same drug: but in repeating the phrase 'no pity,' the confession also registers an apparent lack of affective response and a blank acceptance of the demand for his death that society has made.

The centrality of confession and revelation in O'Nolan's and Christie's texts affects their formal structure and creates a circular narrative designed for rereading. O'Nolan's narrator's compulsion both to repress his crime and to confess it is reflected within his spirals of narrative, as he describes a set of experiences flowing from his original crime, only to immediately forget and to begin to re-narrate it. O'Nolan had originally considered the title *Hell Goes Round and Round* for his novel, which reflects a Freudian/Reikian view of trauma beneath the theological meaning. Similarly, the psychoanalyst Pierre Bayard writes that *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* 'is a book that contains at least two books, explicitly composed for the sake of a rereading.'<sup>60</sup> Indeed, in reading against the grain of Christie's plot, Bayard argues that beyond the first two readings of the plot (one where we trust the narrator, one where we distrust him as a murderer), the novel changes again and we should start to consider Sheppard's confession a false confession designed to shield his sister. Bayard therefore takes an O'Nolan-style metafictional approach in doubting that Christie-as-author understood the meaning of her own story; as in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, her characters have deceived her. Both *The Third Policeman* and Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* tempt us to reread immediately from the beginning and to fill in the gaps within their narratives. In Christie, we reread in the light of the final confessional revelation that our narrator is indeed the culprit and that he has already died by suicide, while in O'Nolan we reread from the insight that the narrator is also dead, murdered by his accomplice John

Divney. When O'Nolan explained the plot of his novel in a 1940 letter to his friend William Saroyan, he explained it explicitly in terms of revelation and rereading:

When you get to the end of this book you realise that my hero or main character (he's a heel and a killer) has been dead throughout the book and that all the queer ghastly things which have been happening to him are happening in a sort of hell which he has earned for the killing. [...] It is made clear that this sort of thing goes on forever – and there you are. [...] I can never seem to get everything just right. Nevertheless, I think the idea of a man being dead all the time is pretty new.<sup>61</sup>

As Felman has explained, traditionally 'a dying speaker is a naturally authoritative storyteller: he borrows his authority from death,' but in the case of Christie and O'Nolan I would argue that an ending which proves to us that our storytellers are speaking from beyond the grave tends to wrong-foot us and creates circular narratives, where the speaker must keep speaking to maintain their authority.<sup>62</sup>

Beyond confession per se, traces of Reik's work that could have influenced O'Nolan include an anthropological focus on crime which encompasses superstition and magical thinking, and which speaks to the fantastic texture of O'Nolan's work, as well as to its form and content. This is a crucial element of difference between O'Nolan and Christie, as O'Nolan bends genres to include the fantastic and the Gothic within the inverted detective novel form, fitting in more fully with a Reikian emphasis on magical thinking in criminal psychology. Reik suggests that fantasies of the death penalty confessed to by his patients display a particularly Gothic, medieval atmosphere, with a particular emphasis on torture:

In surveying some of the unconscious self-punishment of neurotics, we find such strange kinds of imagined punishment not known to modern penal legislation as castration, burial alive, immurement, suffocation, being put in irons, and various other excruciating kinds of capital punishment.<sup>63</sup>

As readers, we tend to instinctively resist the execution of *The Third Policeman's* narrator when Sergeant Pluck announces his unjust decision to 'hang [the narrator] by the windpipe before high breakfast time,' without 'trial or preliminary proceedings, no caution administered and no hearing before a Commissioner of the Public Peace,' even though we know from access to the narrator's own confession that he is guilty of a similar crime, if not this crime.<sup>64</sup> This is perhaps because of the Gothic, excessive cruelty of the policemen's treatment of the narrator; all of their procedures – the public execution that they plan, the way they build the gallows in front of him, the way the

sentence is repeatedly averted – had been reformed out of modern penal practice as inhumane.<sup>65</sup> Further, O’Nolan’s character experiences an additional epistemological torture, which speaks of his masochistic desire for punishment, in the form of the science fiction details of the narrative, including MacCruiskeen’s inventions and his experience of eternity and the Atomic Theory, as well as his repeated memory loss.

Reik also discusses pathological criminal behaviour such as the murderer’s return to the scene of the crime, his unconsciously leaving clothing, weapons or other evidence behind, even to the extent of the behaviour of criminals defecating at the scene of the crime. Reik argues that ‘All these superstitions [...] testify to a belief in the existence of a magic bond between the murderer and his victim. The murdered man is supposed to be not quite dead and to be able to revenge himself on his murderer.’<sup>66</sup> These ideas particularly speak to the role of haunting in *The Third Policeman*, including the narrator’s initial experience of being haunted by the undead Mathers and attempting to placate him,<sup>67</sup> as well as the way Mathers is ultimately transformed into Policeman Fox, a figure of the law.<sup>68</sup> The superstitions discussed by Reik suggest a fear of being killed by the murdered person in revenge, and these offerings or sacrifices made by the criminal attempt to offer an escape from the *lex talionis* or principle of equivalence that demands their death. However, these behaviours are ultimately all forms of confession reflecting unconscious guilt. Fittingly, we see the narrator bring Divney, his own murderer (and accomplice in Mathers’s murder), into the fantastic world of the Parish by inadvertently haunting and frightening him to death.<sup>69</sup> Christie’s response to Reikian criminological thinking is thus ultimately more realistic and conservative than O’Nolan’s, despite this shared influence and their mutual engagement with the inverted detective novel form. O’Nolan’s use of the countervailing force of the science fiction genre offers a deeper engagement with the magical thinking central to psychoanalysis.

In concluding this article, it is worth reflecting on how Brooks argues for the value of theorising contemporary real criminal confessions in relation to concepts of ‘unreliable narration’:

The story of what goes on in that closed room, where interrogations lead to confessions, always leaves us uneasy, like so many modern narratives proffered by ‘unreliable narrators,’ narratives indeed that give us no basis for judging what reliability might mean. And in the case of confession, that unreliability can be contagious, since it suggests that the more the guilt confessed, the more guilt there will be to confess, since the act of confession produces further culpability.<sup>70</sup>

Reik, as well as contemporary critics such as Felman and Brooks, offer arguments about criminal confession that apply not just to O’Nolan’s *œuvre* (though I argue they

are crucial to a reading of his work) but also to a whole culture of confession in the context of capital punishment – arguments which leave readers as uneasy now as then. Indeed, O’Nolan’s representation of confession is the product of a specific historical context. Despite his Catholicism, confessions by O’Nolan’s characters do not generally do the transformative work associated with confession in a religious or psychoanalytic framework, where forgiveness, redemption, and rehabilitation are offered. O’Nolan’s confessions reflect what Reik calls a ‘need for punishment’ which offers a ‘displacement of affect’ as well exhibiting features of a delusional, or ‘paranoid rationality,’ in ways that shed light on the general psychology of the O’Nolan protagonist and especially demonstrate the role of that context in the form, content, and texture of *The Third Policeman*.<sup>71</sup>

### Competing Interests

Katherine Ebury serves on the advisory board of *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O’Brien Studies* but had no involvement with the peer review or acceptance process of this article.

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### Notes & references

<sup>1</sup> Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>2</sup> For more on O’Nolan and capital punishment specifically, please see Katherine Ebury, “‘nothing in the world would save me from the gallows’: O’Nolan and the Death Penalty,” in *Flann O’Brien: Gallows Humour*, eds. Ruben Borg and Paul Fagan (Cork: Cork University Press, 2020), 34–47.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Fagan, “‘I’ve got you under my skin’: ‘John Duffy’s Brother,’ ‘Two in One,’ and the Confessions of Narcissus,” in *Flann O’Brien: Contesting Legacies*, eds. Ruben Borg, Paul Fagan, and Werner Huber (Cork: Cork University Press, 2014), 61.

<sup>4</sup> Keith Hopper, ‘Chapter 6: Relative Worlds: Kit Marlowe Meets Philip Marlowe in the Fourth Dimension,’ in *Flann O’Brien: A Portrait of the Artist a Young Post-Modernist*, revised 2nd edn (Cork: Cork University Press, 2009), 193–228 (221–226); Jennika Baines, ‘The Murders of Flann O’Brien: Death and Creation in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, *The Third Policeman*, *An Béal Bocht*, and “Two in One”,’ in Borg, Fagan, and Huber (eds), 207–18; Maebh Long, ‘Ireland on Trial,’ in *Assembling Flann O’Brien* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 107–48.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Levay, *Violent Minds: Modernism and the Criminal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Ezra Pound’s and Olga Rudge’s *The Blue Spill: A Manuscript Critical Edition*, eds. Mark Byron and Sophia Barnes (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, T. S. Eliot, 'Recent Detective Fiction. An Omnibus Review of Sixteen Detective Novels and of Problems of Modern American Crime, by Veronica and Paul King,' in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: Literature, Politics, Belief, 1927–1929*, eds. Frances Dickey, Jennifer Formichelli, and Ron Schuchard (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2015), 105–9.

<sup>7</sup> See Levay, 'Cases of Identity: Late Modernism and the Life of Crime,' in *Violent Minds*, 169–210.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Eric Sandberg "'The Body in the Bath": Dorothy L. Sayers's *Whose Body?* and Embodied Detective Fiction,' *Journal of Modern Literature* 42, no. 2 (2019): 1–20, and Paul Peppis 'Querying and Queering Golden Age Detection: Gladys Mitchell's Speedy Death and Popular Modernism,' *Journal of Modern Literature* 40, no. 3 (2017): 120–34.

<sup>9</sup> Amy Griswold, 'Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* as Detective Story: Is Dowell a Murderer?,' *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 60, no. 2 (2017): 152–66. See also Roger Poole, who argues much the same, 'The Real Plot Line of Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*: An Essay in Applied Deconstruction,' *Textual Practice* 4, no. 3 (1990): 390–427.

<sup>10</sup> Brian O'Nolan to Longmans, 18 January 1940, in Flann O'Brien, *The Collected Letters of Flann O'Brien*, ed. Maebh Long (Victoria: Dalkey Archive Press, 2018), [hereafter abbreviated as *Letters*], 66–7; Brian O'Nolan to Patience Ross, 24 January 1940, *Letters*, 67; Brian O'Nolan to Patience Ross, 22 March 1940, *Letters*, 72.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 71–2. See also his letter to Eric Gillet, where he sums up the novel as 'a very orthodox murder mystery in a rural district' (1 May 1939, *Letters*, 48).

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Ahearn and Adam Winstanley, 'An Inventory of Brian O'Nolan's Library at Boston College,' *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 2, no. 1 (2013): 46–64. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.16995/pr.3289>

<sup>13</sup> Ann Saddlemeyer, *Becoming George: The Life of Mrs W. B. Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 393.

<sup>14</sup> Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Freud: In His Time and Ours*, trans. Catherine Porter (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2016), 336.

<sup>15</sup> Myles na gCopaleen, *Cruiskeen Lawn*, *The Irish Times* [hereafter abbreviated as CL], 'Good News and Bad,' 8 September 1955, 7.

<sup>16</sup> CL, 'Dorian Gray, Esq.,' 30 January 1954, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Pádraig Ó'Méalóid highlights that 'When O'Brien's father died they found amongst his papers a crime novel he had written, and which had been accepted by publishers Collins, but which never saw print, as the elder Nolan was unhappy about their payment terms.' Pádraig Ó'Méalóid, 'The Cardinal and/or the Corpse: An Exegesis of Rumour,' *Unluckiest Man Who Ever Lived: Some Essays on Flann O'Brien* (Poisoned Chalice Press, forthcoming 2020). Ciarán O'Nualláin's Irish-language detective novel, *Oidhche i nGleanna na nGealt* (1939), is briefly discussed by Ian Ó Caoimh in 'The Ideal and the Ironic: Incongruous Irelands in *An Béal Bocht*, *No Laughing Matter* and Ciarán O'Nualláin's *Óige an Dearthár*,' in *Flann O'Brien: Problems with Authority*, eds. Ruben Borg, Paul Fagan, and John McCourt (Cork: Cork University Press, 2017), 154.

<sup>18</sup> Brian O'Nolan to Ethel Mannin, 14 July 1939, *Letters*, 55–6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 198–200. As Ó'Méalóid points out, O'Nolan made subsequent claims to have written Blake novels in a 1962 interview and a 1964 *Cruiskeen Lawn* column. Ó'Méalóid believes that O'Nolan may have written Blake stories, but has productive doubts about the Stephen Blakesley pseudonym as a likely candidate (n.pag.).

<sup>21</sup> While full engagement with this second point would require a further separate article, I am undoubtedly influenced by Carol Taaffe's approach, which astutely takes O'Nolan beyond a simple modernist/postmodernist divide: see Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen, and Irish Cultural Debate* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008) and "'irreverence moving towards the blasphemous": Brian O'Nolan, *Blather*, and Irish Popular Culture,' in Borg, Fagan, and McCourt (eds), 21–33. Further, on O'Nolan as a genre writer, see Jack Fennell's excellent work on his science fiction: 'Irelands Enough and Time: Brian O'Nolan's Science Fiction,' in Borg, Fagan, and Huber (eds), 33–45; and 'Myles In Space: Science Fiction and *Cruiskeen Lawn*,' *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 64–77. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.16995/pr.3128>

<sup>22</sup> Samantha Walton, *Guilty but Insane: Mind and Law in Golden Age Detective Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Stefano Serafini, "'The Ghost of Dr Freud Haunts Everything Today": Criminal Minds in the Golden Age Psychological Thriller,' *CLUES: A Journal of Detection* 37, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 20.

<sup>24</sup> Hopper, 222–3.

<sup>25</sup> R. Austin Freeman, 'The Art of the Detective Story,' *Nineteenth Century and After* (May 1924): 718.

<sup>26</sup> Stacy Gillis, 'Detecting Histories, Detecting Genealogies: The Origins of Golden Age Detective Fiction,' *CLUES: A Journal of Detection* 37, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 14–15.

<sup>27</sup> Fagan, 72–4.

<sup>28</sup> Victoria Stewart, *Crime Writing in Interwar Britain: Fact and Fiction in the Golden Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 124.

<sup>29</sup> *Letters*, 67.

<sup>30</sup> Theodor Reik, *The Unknown Murderer*, in *The Compulsion to Confess: On the Psychoanalysis of Crime and Punishment* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 27.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>32</sup> Theodor Reik, *The Compulsion to Confess*, in *ibid.*, 212.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>34</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978), 45.

<sup>35</sup> Reik, *Compulsion to Confess*, 265.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>37</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Tell-Tale Heart,' in *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe* (London: Penguin, 2006), 187.

<sup>38</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (London: Harper Collins, 2002), 367.

<sup>39</sup> Flann O'Brien, *The Complete Novels* (New York: Everyman's Library, 2007) [hereafter abbreviated as CN], 223.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>41</sup> Flann O'Brien, 'Two in One,' in *The Short Fiction of Flann O'Brien*, eds. Neil Murphy and Keith Hopper, trans. Jack Fennell (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2013), 67.

<sup>42</sup> Brooks, 160–1.

<sup>43</sup> On the case of William O'Shea in Ireland in 1943, see Ian O'Donnell and David Doyle, 'A Family Affair: English Hangmen and a Dublin Jail, 1923–54,' *New Hibernia Review* 18, no. 8 (2014): 110–1.

<sup>44</sup> Sir Ernest Arthur Gowers *et al.*, *Royal Commission on Capital Punishment, 1949–1953, REPORT, Presented to Parliament by Command of Her Majesty September 1953* (also known as Gowers Commission Report) (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1953), paragraph 557, page 196.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 60, page 21.

<sup>46</sup> Fagan, 70.

<sup>47</sup> Serafini, 28.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>49</sup> Carl R. Lovitt, 'The Rhetoric of Murderers' Confessional Narratives: The Model of Pierre Riviere's Memoir,' *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 22, no. 1 (1992): 24.

<sup>50</sup> CN, 231–2.

<sup>51</sup> Christie, 367.

<sup>52</sup> Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 101.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>54</sup> CN, 240.

<sup>55</sup> Christie, 358.

<sup>56</sup> CN, 223.

<sup>57</sup> Christie, 9.

<sup>58</sup> Reik, *Compulsion to Confess*, 279.

<sup>59</sup> Christie, 368.

<sup>60</sup> Pierre Bayard, *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd? The Murderer who Eluded Hercule Poirot and Deceived Agatha Christie*, trans. Carol Cosman (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 36.

<sup>61</sup> *Letters*, 69.

<sup>62</sup> Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious*, 28.

<sup>63</sup> Reik, *The Compulsion to Confess*, 288.

<sup>64</sup> CN, 308.

<sup>65</sup> See CN, 313–4, as well as Chapters 11 and 12.

<sup>66</sup> Reik, *Unknown Murderer*, 80.

<sup>67</sup> 'The man was old Mathers.' CN, 239.

<sup>68</sup> 'I knew he was not Fox but Mathers. I knew Mathers was dead.' CN, 389.

<sup>69</sup> See CN, 400–4.

<sup>70</sup> Brooks, 32–3.

<sup>71</sup> Bayard, 85–92.