

## Note

### *'Ceist Gan Réidhteach'* & Republished Sources in the IFOBS Brian O'Nolan Bibliography

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I frequently search online for print material and ephemeral publications by Brian Ó Nualláin. The point of these searches is to discover something about Ó Nualláin in print that could potentially affect scholarship or, even better, lead to uncovering some 'new' creative work. This latter notion is perhaps the most exciting aspect of researching Ó Nualláin – the distinct possibility of uncovering something old that we, paradoxically, might refer to as 'new.' Your man liked a good paradox.

Recently while perusing Abebooks, I encountered a source written in Irish by 'Brian Ua Nualláin' published in *Éire, bliainiris gáedéal* in 1940. There's a source listed on the IFOBS Brian O'Nolan Bibliography that was published in *Éire* in 1939 but nothing for '40. After some searching, I also discovered a copy signed by Brian O'Nolan amongst the archival materials in the John J. Burns Library at Boston College. Having no clue about the title for the 1940 article, I clicked 'add to cart' and hoped for the best.

The problem in this case is that I cannot read Irish (*Ardteist* level at best). However, I know that my best chance of having a successful foray in the digital archive rests with these Irish publications. I notice that most older journals set in uncial typeface are indexed improperly on bibliographies more often than not (most indexers can't read Irish either, apparently). Fortunately for me, there are two shining examples from *The Parish Review* 1, no. 2 that I know to follow. The first is Marion Quirici, whose article 'Brian O'Nolan in the Archive: Assembling Myles and Flann' deals with bibliocentric bias and prepared me for the inevitable disappointment of not finding something 'new.' My other predecessor is Jack Fennell, who has gone to great lengths in articles and translations to explain the nuances of O'Nolan's Irish. Take for instance the rarefied version of Flann's actual name, 'Brian Ua Nualláin,' which Anthony Cronin notes is a 'somewhat pedantic Irish version' of his actual name. The moniker itself is an oddity rarely seen amongst the canon, but I would argue (in my ignorance of most Irish) that Brian O'Nolan used it for formal writing or when publishing in high

profile journals. His piece in the 1940 copy of *Éire* appears alongside addresses written by 'An tUachtaráin' Douglas Hyde and 'An Taoiseach' Éamon de Valera.

*So what did I find?*

In short, I found nothing new. The 1940 copy of *Éire* contains a republished version of 'Ceist Gan Réidhteach' (1932), which is already available in *Myles Before Myles* where it is published in English as 'An Insoluble Question.' Having the physical copy enables me to note a necessary change to the 'Ceist Gan Réidhteach' entry on the society's bibliography page: the date of the reprint obviously needs to be changed from '39 to '40 and dates of reprints and republications of O'Nolan's short stories should be listed wherever possible to assuage future disappointments.

So, I lied before. There is something kind of 'new.' But, before I share it, I want to stress the importance of looking at old journals and ephemeral publications – a point that Quirici has also argued. In being book-biased we miss what is likely very important information about O'Nolan. *Éire, bliainiris gaeleal* itself is a curious artefact. It's also hard proof that O'Nolan was writing under his own name and republishing stories in Irish even after becoming a civil servant. He might have had the permission of his minister but how could he pass up the opportunity to publish alongside de Valera and Hyde? The journal also gives us new insight into which few details about his life O'Nolan allowed to go to print: we get to see the kind of blurb that comprised his 1940 writer-bio. In the *Fógraí* section of the magazine, amongst adverts for holiday travel and Huet motors, is this paragraph about 'Brian Ó Nualláin':

*is cuimhin le luchtléighthe 'Scéala Eireann' nahaistíagus na scéala grinn agus áiféise do scríobh Brian Ó Nualláin ar Leathanach na Gaedhilge tamall beag de bhlianta ó shoin. Is truagh géar linn gan leabhar díobh a bheith ar fagháil. Ach, duine ar bith a gheibheann an blas ceart ortha, ní cheilfidh an t-ainm cleite a tharraing Brian chuige le déannaighe, ní cheilfidh san an t-ughdar air. (Ó Faracháin, 'Fógraí', xxxii)*

The write-up seems partly prophetic. Ó Faracháin correctly describes O'Nolan's writing for *Scéala Eireann* as 'ridiculous' ('áiféise'). The bio also calls our attention to the various pseudonyms O'Nolan was capable of creating. It seems prophetic, at least to me, of the 'comic newspaper' writing ('an scéala grinn'), which he began to publish in the fall of 1940 as Myles na gCopaleen. This is the name and writing through which we know him so well, but so little.