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'Something Entirely New': A Critical History of *An Béal Bocht*, 1941–75

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This article reconstructs an early reception of Brian Ó Nualláin's *An Béal Bocht* (1941) in which the novel was hailed as a breakthrough work that advanced the Irish-language prose tradition and promised to win new readers of Irish. The story of how this initial enthusiasm hardened into a critical diminishment of Ó Nualláin's achievement as an obscure parody involves the author's own efforts to associate the novel with Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach*, the dampening of the optimism which surrounded the Irish language in the 1940s, and the impact of Patrick C. Power's translation, *The Poor Mouth*, on how *An Béal Bocht* was understood. By charting the evolution of *An Béal Bocht*'s reception history, this article furthers contemporary scholarship on the promise Ó Nualláin's novel still holds for Irish-language prose.

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Introduction

In the eighty years since its first publication, *An Béal Bocht* has generated a substantial archive of reviews and responses, beginning with the multitudinous interventions of Ó Nualláin himself as editor, commentator, and perhaps reviewer. The novel has also been translated into many European languages, generating a vast international reception history. This article reads *An Béal Bocht* through its early readers and critics, recovering the significance of an initial wave of enthusiasm for its clear yet innovative Irish prose style, and arguing that an initial understanding of the novel's broad set of influences narrows to a focus on its debt to Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach*.

An Béal Bocht was first rejected by publishers Browne and Nolan following vigorous criticism by its appointed readers, for one of whom Ó Nualláin was 'the veriest tyro in the Irish language.'¹ The novel was subsequently published in 1941 by *An Preas Náisiúnta* (The National Press). Its supportive reviewers regarded *An Béal Bocht* as a fresh turn in Irish-language prose which paid homage to tradition but also promised to win new interest in learning the language. To meet high demand, a second edition appeared in 1942 by the same publisher. Then, after two decades in which, Ó Nualláin complained, the book was unobtainable² – and following an unsuccessful attempt to publish a new edition in 1957 – in 1964 Dolmen finally published a third edition. This edition introduced Ó Nualláin's own version of 'Times New Roman' or '*Cló nua-Rómhánach*' typography,³ was adjusted to incorporate his take on a modernised Irish spelling, and added further prefatory material. After Ó Nualláin's death in 1966, the book was translated into English by Patrick C. Power and published by Hart Davis, MacGibbon as *The Poor Mouth* in 1973. In 1975, this English-language version was republished by Picador with illustrations by Ralph Steadman and, also in 1975, Dolmen brought out a hybrid fourth edition in Irish which restored the 1941 text but substituted the typeface Ó Nualláin devised for a standard Roman script.

The years surrounding the publication of *The Poor Mouth* are of some importance to understanding the critical reception of *An Béal Bocht* overall. In the 1960s a sceptical

¹ The two Browne and Nolan reader reports are reproduced by Breandán Ó Conaire, in *Myles na Gaeilge: Lámhleabhar ar shaothar Gaeilge Bhrian Ó Nualláin* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar Tta, 1986), the more critical of which reads: 'I can safely assert that in an experience of sixty years this is quite the craziest piece of Irish I have ever met. What most surprises me is the self-assurance of the author – a man who demonstrates twenty times on every page that he is the veriest tyro in the Irish language. For want of knowledge he cannot begin, or continue, or finish a sentence properly. Constructions such as he writes have never before been seen in Irish and one earnestly hopes that nothing of the kind will ever be repeated' (103).

² Letter to Sáirséal agus Dill, 4 August 1956, in Flann O'Brien, *Collected Letters of Flann O'Brien*, ed. Maebh Long (Victoria, TX: Dalkey Archive Press, 2018), 208. Hereafter referenced in main text as *LET*.

³ The typeface is described as 'Times New Roman' or '*Cló nua-Rómhánach*,' in contrast to '*Cló Rómhánach*' in a Publisher's Note enclosed in the 1964 Dolmen third edition of *An Béal Bocht* (see *Myles na Gaeilge*, 118).

view emerged, quite opposed in sentiment to the earlier reception, which portrayed the novel as an obscure and somewhat inaccessible parody. When the Power translation appeared, it opened the novel up to many new readers yet inadvertently played to the sceptics by masking the range of the original's Irish-language references and making it harder to distinguish between satire and stereotype. An article by Breandán Ó Conaire published in 1973 and the discussion of *The Poor Mouth* in Anne Clissmann's 1975 monograph represent the terminus of the present article's review. At this point, Ó Conaire is alone in recalling the importance of the novel's earlier reception. His *Myles na Gaeilge: Lámhleabhar ar shaothar Gaeilge Bhrian Ó Nualláin*, a handbook to the Irish-language Ó Nualláin which remains the authoritative reference work on *An Béal Bocht* and much else besides, appeared in 1986. This article does not attempt to summarise or translate that larger and later work, but rather uses the map of the early criticism Ó Conaire provides in an appendix, and the remarks he makes about the early reception of the novel in 1973, to excavate the ground from which modern scholarship of *An Béal Bocht* has developed.⁴ To a substantial degree, the critical debate about *An Béal Bocht* is the result of Ó Nualláin's own efforts to secure its reputation, grow its readership, and even to generate its exegetical framework. Ó Nualláin's efforts to associate *An Béal Bocht* with Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach* and his controversial proposals to reform Irish spelling and typography in the 1950s contributed to the wave of cynicism in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet we shall also see how, particularly through his likely role in the earliest reviews, Ó Nualláin complicated the *An tOileánach* association. All of these interventions made their mark on critics and readers: shaping the way that two texts – not only *An Béal Bocht* but also its apparent satirical target, *An tOileánach*, along with their respective English translations – were received in the twentieth century.

The Editor's Prerogative: Myles, *An tOileánach*, and Other Gaelic Literature

An Béal Bocht's paratextual features foreground the text's debts to Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach*. The relationship is advertised by the original dustjacket of Ó Nualláin's novel, which mirrors the cover image of *An tOileánach*, and by the map of Corca Dorcha, commissioned from Seán O'Sullivan, which parodies the map of the Blasket islands included in the 1929 edition of *An tOileánach*.⁵ *An tOileánach* is alluded to again in the preface to the 1941 edition. As Jane Farnon notes, Ó Nualláin pointedly refers to the editing of the Irish text of *An tOileánach* by 'An Seabhac' (The Hawk), a pen-name of

⁴ Appendix E in Ó Conaire, *Myles na Gaeilge*, 329, and remarks, cited below, in Breandán Ó Conaire, 'Flann O'Brien, *An Béal Bocht*, and Other Irish Matters,' *Irish University Review* 3, no. 2 (Autumn 1973): 124. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25477702>.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 122–23.

Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, who removed all of its sexual subject matter but masked this censorship by stating simply that '*de dheascaibh an fhaid atá san scríbhinn dob' éigean roinnt d'fhágaint ar lár*' (due to the sheer length of the text I had to omit some of it).⁶ In his own preface to the first edition of the book, Ó Nualláin's 'editor' Myles na gCopaleen wryly comments on Ó Siochfhradha's amendments by noting that most of the original text had been removed both due to a lack of space and because some of the matter was not '*oiriúnach*' (suitable).

*Tá an scríbhinn seo go díreach mar fuair mé í ó lámh an údair acht amháin go bhfuil an mhórchuid fágtha ar lár de dheascaibh easba spáis agus fós de dheascaibh a raibh innti de thráchtas ar neithe nach bhfuil oiriúnach.*⁷

(This document is exactly as I received it from the author's hand except that much of the original matter has been omitted due to pressure of space and to the fact that improper subjects were included in it.)⁸

On the one hand, Ó Nualláin signposts *An Béal Bocht* as a parody of *An tOileánach* with the design of its front cover, its plot elements, and its frequent repetitions of variations on a phrase which is used only once at the end of *An tOileánach* but is picked out by Ó Siochfhradha in his preface and is also quoted on the 1929 title page: '*mar ná beidh ár leithéidí arís ann*' (because our likes will never be here again).⁹ On the other, he followed up the publication of *An Béal Bocht* in late 1941 with a *Cruiskeen Lawn* column published on 2 February 1942 that praised *An tOileánach*. The column lauded Ó Criomhthain again on 3 January 1957, the year in which Ó Nualláin attempted to republish the book and

⁶ Tomás Ó Criomhthain, *An tOileánach* (Dublin: Talbot, 1929), 5, cited and translated in Jane Farnon, 'Motifs of Gaelic Lore and Literature in *An Béal Bocht*,' in *Conjuring Complexities: Essays on Flann O'Brien*, eds. Anne Clune and Tess Hurson (Belfast: Queen's University Press, 1997), 92.

⁷ The phrase '*de dheascaibh easba spáis agus fós*' appears in the first edition (Baile Átha Cliath: An Press Náisiúnta, 1941) but not in all subsequent editions. Here Farnon (92) quotes from the third edition (Baile Átha Cliath: Cló Dolmen), 1964, which also reproduces this phrase on page 5. Unless otherwise specified, the present article refers to 1986 Mercier edition, which was reprinted in 2018 and is the most widely available, but does not reproduce the phrase in question. Myles na gCopaleen, *An Béal Bocht nó An Milleánach: Drochscéal ar an drochshaol curtha in eagar le Myles na gCopaleen* (Cork: Mercier, 1986).

⁸ Translated by Patrick C. Power in Flann O'Brien, *The Complete Novels: At Swim-Two-Birds, The Third Policeman, The Poor Mouth, The Hard Life, The Dalkey Archive*, introd. Keith Donohue (London: Everyman, 2007), 409. The passage is translated differently in Farnon, 92, where she uses the phrase 'most of it' instead of Power's 'much' to translate the word 'mórchuid.' *Foclóir Gaeilge - Béarla* supports both senses and the literal translation of 'great-part' or 'greater-part' suggests that the sense of 'the majority of it' is more apt here. 'Mórchuid' in *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* [online] available at: <https://www.teanglann.ie/ga/fgb/m%C3%B3rchuid> [accessed 6 December 2018].

⁹ Ó Criomhthain, *An tOileánach*, title page, 6, 265 and translated in Tomás O'Crohan, *The Islander*, trans. Gary Bannister and David Sowby (Dublin: Gill Books, 2012), 298.

when excerpts of *An Béal Bocht* appeared on radio.¹⁰ In these *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns, Ó Nualláin presents *An Béal Bocht* as a homage which he hopes will inspire readers to return to Ó Criomhthain's classic text. In this way, he encourages his readers to conclude that he is not satirising Ó Criomhthain but rather his editors and translators. The 1957 column attacks Robin Flower's 1934 translation of *An tOileánach*: 'a greater pile of bosh and bunk than Flower's "Islandman" has never been imposed on the unsuspecting public. Not only was it a mistranslation but it gives a wholly wrong impression, hiding inside its covers of opulent tweed.'¹¹ In 1960, Ó Nualláin preserves the ambiguity of this relationship when he describes *An Béal Bocht* to Timothy O'Keeffe as 'an ironical copy' of *An tOileánach* (*LET*, 243).

The preponderance of *An tOileánach* as a context in the critical history of *An Béal Bocht* was gradually established by Ó Nualláin during the first two decades after its publication. As it grew, this dominant contextual frame began to overshadow the early understanding that, although significant, *An tOileánach* represented just one aspect of a larger canvas of influence. To complicate matters, this initial understanding of *An Béal Bocht* was also influenced through a review by 'F. O'R.' for *The Irish Times* which Ó Conaire feels is likely to have been written by Ó Nualláin himself, 'ón bhfianaise láidir inmheánach sa léirmheas seo, agus ó fhianaise na litreach chuig Pádraig Ó Canainn 28 Samhain 1941' (from the strong internal evidence in this review and evidence in the letter to [his publisher] Patrick Cannon of 28 November 1941).¹² In the letter Ó Conaire mentions, Ó Nualláin provides Cannon with 'the names of about twenty papers where a copy would hardly be wasted.' The majority of those newspapers or journals do go on to publish a review.¹³ He also tells Cannon: 'I'll try and work a big review by myself in the "Times" and do what I can with the other dailies' (*LET*, 112). The review by F. O'R., entitled 'Myles Takes off His Coat!' and published on 13 December 1941 in *The Irish Times*, is likely the work of Ó Nualláin, although it may be written under his influence by an associate such as Niall Sheridan. Perhaps the choice of the pseudonym 'F. O'R.', which is a little too easily linked to Flann O'Brien, suits a game in which Ó Nualláin and Sheridan trick readers into thinking the review is a fake. Whoever is behind the

¹⁰ The letters surrounding *An Béal Bocht*'s potential republication in modernised Irish are in Ó Conaire, *Myles na Gaeilge*, 114–17 and details of its radio productions in 1946, 1957, 1957, 1958, and 1961 are given in *ibid.*, 119.

¹¹ Myles na Gopaleen, 'Cruiskeen Lawn: Islanding,' *The Irish Times* (3 January 1957): 3. Hereafter referenced in main text as CL. The column is cited by Seán Ó Coileáin in his preface to Bannister and Sowby's translation of *An tOileánach*, *The Islander*, xi, which itself uses the Irish text of Ó Coileáin's edition (Dublin: Talbot, 2002).

¹² Appendix F in Ó Conaire, *Myles na Gaeilge*, 331. My translation. See O'Nolan's letter to Cannon (*LET*, 111–12).

¹³ The publications listed in the letter are: *The Irish Times*, *Irish Independent*, *Irish Press*, *Cork Examiner*, *Irish News* (Belfast), *The Bell*, *Dublin Magazine*, *Leader*, *Studies*, *Éigse*, *Standard*, *An Glór*, *Hibernia*, *Ar Aghaidh*, "T.C.D.", *The National Student*, *Father Matthew Record*, *Irish Rosary*, and *Catholic Bulletin*. Of these, the *Dublin Magazine*, *Studies*, *Éigse*, *Hibernia*, *Father Matthew Record*, and the *Catholic Bulletin* do not appear to have published a review.

pseudonym, F. O'R. strikes a very different note to the *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns which associate the book with Ó Críomhthain more directly:

An Béal Bocht pretends to be still another of the autobiographical sagas we have had from the West; indeed, in certain aspects of language and style it directly parodies Ó Críomhthain's fine book, *An tOileánach*. The location, however, is the newly-discovered Gaeltacht of Corca Dorcha (anglicé Corkadorky), a benighted little district that is simultaneously next door to Kerry, Connemara, and Donegal – a sort of amalgam Gaeltacht that has the physical and linguistic characteristics of all three, in addition to certain dismal distinctions, such as incessant rain, peculiar to itself.¹⁴

Here we are warned that the allusions to *An tOileánach* may be misleading: this is not a book set in one Gaeltacht region but in all and none of them at once, an 'amalgam Gaeltacht' which is 'newly-discovered.' In a similar mode, an advertisement published in *The Irish Times* in late November 1941 describes the novel as 'an entirely new work in Irish' and 'an exhaustive and illuminating treatise on the Gaeltacht district of Corkadorky.'¹⁵ Enter *An Béal Bocht*, in this early promotional material, as a new departure: a book that mobilises its satire and syncretism to take Irish prose beyond the texts it pastiches. The F. O'R. review concludes by elaborating on this idea under the subtitle 'Something Entirely New':

It is something entirely new. Even the Irish is somewhat new: the author has got to grips with the problem of evolving a clear unprovincial style, and shows up with skill the evocative, colourful, and humorous content of certain Irish words and phrases.¹⁶

F. O'R. claims that *An Béal Bocht* offers a reformed and 'unprovincial' Irish prose style; a 'somewhat new' self-consciousness for modern Irish prose which is appropriate to its new generation of university-educated metropolitan readers.¹⁷ These claims are not just advertising hype; many of Ó Nualláin's reviewers agree.

¹⁴ F. O'R., 'Myles Takes off His Coat!', *The Irish Times* (13 December 1941): 5, Ó Conaire, *Myles na Gaeilge*, 331–32. Sheridan was suggested to me as the probable author by Joseph LaBine, who notes that the more verbose and explicatory style is more comparable to articles and reviews Sheridan published in *Ireland To-day* than to Ó Nualláin's concise prose.

¹⁵ Advertisement, *The Irish Times* (29 November 1941), Flann O'Brien Collection, Burns Library, Boston College, box 17, folder 23. Thanks to Joseph LaBine for directing me to this clipping.

¹⁶ F. O'R., 'Myles,' 5

¹⁷ This point is made in Ó Conaire's conclusion to *Myles na Gaeilge* when he writes of *An Béal Bocht*: 'I ndeireadh thiar is ráiteas pearsanta é ó bhall den chéad ghlún Éireannach a fuair a gcuid scoláíochta ar fad faoi chóras nua an tSaorstáit [...] ball d'aicme a raibh spéis acu sa léann agus a raibh sé d'acmhainn acu oideachas tiú leibhéal a chur ar a glcann' (It is ultimately a personal statement from a member of the first generation of Irish people who received all their schooling under the new Free State system [...] a member of a class who were interested in learning and who had the potential to impart a level of education to their children). Ó Conaire, *Myles na Gaeilge*, 238–39. My translation.

The Early Newspaper Reviews: 1941–42

Many of the early reviews and all of those written in Irish are summarised by Philip O’Leary in his discussion of *An Béal Bocht* in *Irish Interior: Keeping Faith with the Past in Gaelic Prose 1940–1951*. O’Leary provides a valuable account of the novel’s context and reception, which deserves to be the starting point for students and critics of the novel. Not least of O’Leary’s observations is his account of other Gaeltacht parodies that had emerged during the 1940s: ‘while no one else approached in either length or quality Myles’s marvellous achievement here, several other writers of the time shared his satiric take on the narrative and thematic conventions of Gaeltacht autobiography.’¹⁸ For example, the magazine *Ar Aghaidh* published a satirical take by Micheál Ó Maoláin in July–August 1941, and, after the appearance of *An Béal Bocht*, the periodicals *An Glór* and *Comhar* published similar material by Máirtín Ó Direáin and Tomás Tóibín.¹⁹ Furthermore, O’Leary notes that Ó Nualláin’s

brothers Caoimhín and Ciarán had also to some extent anticipated the approach Myles would take in *An Béal Bocht*. In Caoimhghín’s ‘Mharbh Mé Fear’ (I killed a man), the narrator puts a garrulous Gaeltacht man who complains endlessly out of his misery by strangling him with his own beard. Ciarán used his regular column ‘Nuacht ón Ghealtacht’ (News from the Gaeltacht) [i.e. the Mad Area] to spoof the clichés of Gaeltacht life as presented in both the autobiographies and in rural fiction.²⁰

O’Leary also points out other Irish–language novels that display a similar level of satirical self-consciousness about the Gaeltacht. In 1939, Ó Nualláin’s brother Ciarán published a detective novel in Irish titled *Oidhche i nGleann na nGealt* (A Night in Madmen’s Glen) which led critics to place him alongside Máirtín Ó Cadhain as an innovative writer in Irish, and which was reprinted in 1941.²¹ Seosamh Ó Torna’s 1940 novel *Aill an Ghabhair* (a placename – Allagour) imagines a multinational entertainment company based in London trying to turn a Gaeltacht town into a theme park.²²

It was therefore not, in 1941, a completely new move to satirise the Gaeltacht autobiography or to write critically about the Gaeltacht. Instead, as F. O’R. suggests, the reviews register that Myles achieves something new with the Irish language in two main respects. The first is the syncretic breadth of reference in *An Béal Bocht*. An

¹⁸ Philip O’Leary, *Irish Interior: Keeping Faith with the Past in Gaelic Prose 1940–1951* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2010), 452.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 452–53.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 454. Caoimhín’s story is published in *Comhthrom Féinne* (March 1940): 15–16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 394.

²² *Ibid.*, 436–37.

English-language review published in the *Leader* describes the novel as 'The Gaeltacht of the Books' and remarks that

An Béal Bocht records the life-story, up to the present, of a native of the synthetic Gaeltacht of Corkadorky which lies within a few hours journey by ass-cart of the Blaskets, Galway, and the Rosses. Readers and admirers of Tomas O Criomhthain [sic], of Muirís O Suilleabháin [sic], of Máire, of Seosámh MacGrianna [sic], of Sean MacMaoláin [sic], of Padhraig Og O Conaire [sic] and of others who have depicted the life and people of the various Gaeltacht areas will find in *An Béal Bocht* plenty of carefully and skilfully distorted echoes of their work.²³

These reviewers register the fact that, as F. O'R. explains, *An Béal Bocht* only 'pretends to be still another of the autobiographical sagas we have had from the West.'²⁴ In fact, the novel's montage of style and subject matter ranges across the dialect-regions and literatures of the Irish language. This review also captures the essence of a text which sets itself more ambitious goals than pastiche or parody: in recognising the value of its sources it is a gift to 'admirers' of these modern Irish-language works, which are 'carefully and skilfully' distorted. O'Leary records that this point is echoed in the review by 'P. E. Mac Fh.,' whom he identifies as an tAthair Eric Mac Fhinn. This book could only have been written by a writer '*a bhfuil cleachtadh aige ar éigse agus ar sheanchus na Gaedhealtachta agus taithneamh aige ionnta*' (familiar with the literature and traditional lore of the Gaeltacht and fond of them), Mac Fhinn claims, and such a satire adds to the tradition it satirises rather than belittles it: '*Ní féidir rud a aoradh, le héifeacht ar bith, ach an rud a bhfuil fiúntas ann*' (it is not possible to successfully satirise anything that is not of value).²⁵ Reviewers were not united on this point. O'Leary points out that reviewers writing in Irish for *An Síol*, the *Irish Library Bulletin*, and the *Irish Rosary* felt that *An Béal Bocht*'s literary value was compromised by its excessive parody.²⁶ This division of the audience – into conservatives who were outraged by the novel versus a newer generation who were energised by it – was undoubtedly part of Ó Nualláin's promotional strategy; he explains to Cannon that 'if the book doesn't provoke a row with the die-hards, I will have to whip one up by showers of pseudonymous letters to the papers' (*LET*, 112).

²³ Review of *An Béal Bocht*, *Leader* 83, no. 22 (27 December 1941): 540.

²⁴ F. O'R., 'Myles,' 5.

²⁵ P. E. Mac Fh., 'New Books: *An Béal Bocht*,' *Ar Aghaidh* (January 1942): 6, cited and translated in O'Leary, *Irish Interior*, 458, 594.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 455, 457.

The *Leader* also describes *An Béal Bocht* as being set in a ‘synthetic Gaeltacht,’ adopting a similar practice to F. O’R., who uses the term ‘amalgam Gaeltacht.’ A recognition of the intentional artificiality of the novel’s setting also features in a review by ‘Manus O’Neill’ for the *Standard*. O’Neill writes:

On the surface, the story is a parody of that famous autobiography of a Blasketman, *An tOileánach*, but only on the surface. The parody is a mere cage in which Myles na gCopaleen entraps the creatures he wishes to put to the one hundred and one celestial tests of excruciating satire [...]. This is one of the daftest, bitterest, most hardhitting and outrageous books ever written in modern Irish: it is also one of the best.²⁷

This final sentence featured in *The Irish Times*’s advertisement for the second edition of *An Béal Bocht* in 1942.²⁸ In the review, O’Neill establishes a distinction between the parodic level of *An Béal Bocht*, which is interpreted as a superficial container, and the satirical core, in which the ‘creatures’ of *An Béal Bocht* are subjected to ‘one hundred and one celestial tests of excruciating satire.’ The parodic level of the novel as a fake autobiography is understood by early reviewers as a gateway into a fictional world, ‘an imaginary Gaeltacht,’ as the reviewer for the *National Student* writes, which is a stage for a much larger satirical tableau – the entire literary tradition in the Irish language – than just fictional representations of life in the West.²⁹

The early reviews do not simply attest to the satirical uses of a ‘synthetic Gaeltacht’ in *An Béal Bocht*; they often comment upon its implications for the Irish language, and this is the second major theme they share. *An Béal Bocht*, it is claimed, represents a new departure in prose style. This style is popular, readable, and not obscure despite its breadth of reference; in another review possibly contrived by Ó Nualláin or an associate of his, the *Dublin Evening Mail* notes that ‘people are brushing up their Irish to read Myles na gCopaleen: a tribute that cannot be gainsaid.’³⁰ L. O. R. writes in the *Irish Independent* that it is ‘very noteworthy’ that the Irish is ‘simple’: ‘*an-inspéise, Ghaedhilg simplí go leor* [sic].’³¹ The *Connacht Tribune* reiterates this point, remarking on the suitability of the novel’s language, style, and print for new readers of Irish.³² Equally

²⁷ Manus O’Neill, ‘Live Irish,’ *Standard* (2 January 1942).

²⁸ ‘Myles na gCopaleen Makes History!’, advertisement, *The Irish Times* (17 January 1942), Flann O’Brien Collection, Burns Library, Boston College, box 17, folder 23.

²⁹ An Pucan Meidhreach, *National Student/Comhthrom Féinne* (December 1941): 14.

³⁰ Popshúil Mairnéalach, ‘Gael in the Pillory,’ *Dublin Evening Mail* (24 December 1941): 3. The pseudonym is drawn from Chapter Three of *An Béal Bocht* (44). The defence of the novel resembles the article by F. O’R., and phrases such as ‘it would be a mistake to think his function is to shatter a sham structure by force of ridicule’ exhibit a Mylesian sharpness and density.

³¹ L. O. R., ‘Leabhair Nua,’ *Irish Independent* (17 February 1942): 2. My translation.

³² D. Ó C., review of *An Béal Bocht*, *Connacht Tribune* (20 December 1941): 3.

as significant in the early reviews is their agreement with F. O'R.'s prediction that 'even the Irish is somewhat new.'³³ The *Nationalist and Munster Advertiser* describes the novel as 'A New And Quaint Departure In Irish Literature' and notes 'the way in which Myles jumps his scenes and characters from Dingle and Blasket Islands to Aran, Connemara, Tory Island, and Folcarragh [sic] and blends their various dialects into a composite Irish literary style [that] no other writer of Irish we know of has succeeded in doing.'³⁴ The review in Trinity College's student magazine, *A College Miscellany*, remarks on the unusual popularity of *An Béal Bocht* compared to other Irish prose publications ('the first edition of *An Béal Bocht* has been completely sold out and a second edition is on its way') and makes a similar point: 'it is something completely new in modern Irish literature, and something that was definitely needed.'³⁵

The repeated assertion that *An Béal Bocht* is something new helps to shed light on the context which made the novel necessary and which catapulted it to some success. As Ó Conaire observes, 'one reviewer saw it as the first manifestation of the new urban generation in Irish writing.'³⁶ That is, *An Béal Bocht* was not received as a text which parodied and sneered at the Irish-language prose tradition, but rather as a modernising work which was accessible to new readers and represented an educated, self-conscious, and metafictional turn in the history of Irish literature. A 'composite Irish literary style,' which is also easy to read for those less skilled with Irish, emerges as the novel's enabling achievement in Irish prose for its first generation of readers. In the context of an Irish prose tradition, whether modernist or naturalist in orientation, in which writers tend to show fealty to a given dialect, this achievement of *An Béal Bocht* is striking.³⁷ However, as the novel matures, the enthusiasm of the 1940s gives way to responses that strike a different note.

Scepticism and Translation: The 1960s and 1970s

Little is published about *An Béal Bocht* in the 1950s apart from pieces by Ó Nualláin himself, who wrote about the novel in *Cruiskeen Lawn* and orchestrated radio broadcasts in anticipation of a third edition by Sáirséal agus Dill, a project which was brought to an end by disagreements about payment terms and orthography (*LET*, 224). As Ó Conaire informs us in 1973, Ó Nualláin also set the scene for his simplified Irish spelling system and new Roman type in a two-part article for the magazine *Comhar* which was published

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ 'Literary Notes,' *Nationalist and Munster Advertiser* (7 January 1942): 1

³⁵ Anon., Review of *An Béal Bocht*, *T.C.D.: A College Miscellany* (5 February 1942): 62.

³⁶ Ó Conaire, 'Flann O'Brien, *An Béal Bocht* and Other Irish Matters,' 124.

³⁷ Examples of consistent writing within a single dialect of Irish include the adherence to Galway dialect in Ó Cadhain, the dialects of poets like Seán Ó Riordáin and Máirtín Ó Direáin, and of course the specificity of memoirs from specific Gaeltacht regions. However, as Risteárd Ó Glaisne contends (see footnote 42), the question of whether Ó Nualláin's novel successfully blends Irish dialects or renders them convincingly remains open.

in October 1957 and March 1958.³⁸ Here, writing as ‘Melius na Gopaleen,’ Ó Nualláin first offers a linguistic theory that regards the phonics rather than the written form of words as the proper basis for meaning – ‘*I measc daoine an focal labhartha an bunrud.*’³⁹ On this basis, the article proposes seven reforms to Irish spelling, including measures such as eliminating double letters, replacing the morphemes *-omh*, *-amh*, and *-umh* with a circumflex over the vowel, introducing the letter *v* to replace *-ibh* or *-imh*, and various other simplifications.⁴⁰ These bold orthographic proposals were implemented in the edition published by Dolmen in 1964, together with a new form of Times New Roman script for the Irish language.

Several readings of the novel published in the 1960s focus on these solutions to the great problems of Irish-language writing, solutions which turn out to be as divisive as the novel itself. Even prior to the controversial new edition’s appearance, the tone of reviews had changed. Risteard Ó Glaisne published a reflection on Ó Nualláin’s Irish-language writing in *Comhar* in 1962, in which he damns *An Béal Bocht* with faint praise and quotes from an earlier review by a frequent critic of Myles, Thomas Hogan, who describes the novel as ‘a parody on Gaelic autobiographies which is so neat it is occasionally as dull as the originals.’⁴¹ Ó Glaisne also challenges the earlier view that *An Béal Bocht* masterfully blends Irish dialects, writing instead: ‘*Ach chun an fhírinne a insint, níl fianaise ar bith in An Béal Bocht go bhfhéadfadh Myles aon chanúint a scríobh chomh beacht sin go gceapfaí gur de bhunadh na Gaeltachta é*’ (But to tell the truth, there is no evidence in *An Béal Bocht* that Myles could write any dialect so precisely that it would be thought to be of Gaeltacht origin).⁴² In 1965, Máirtín Ó Cadhain concedes that *An Béal Bocht* will be counted ‘*i gcónaí ar aora móra phróis na Gaeilge*’ (always among the great Irish prose satires) but he attacks the spelling changes made for the new edition, which he says is littered with typos, and criticises aspects of the new typeface.⁴³ Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha also writes critically on the new edition’s spelling and typeface for *Comhar*.⁴⁴ The present article shall not dwell on the spelling or typography debate, save to point out that Ó Nualláin’s effort to modernise the Irish language – and the fierce

³⁸ Conaire, *Myles na Gaeilge*, 140.

³⁹ Melius na Gopaleen, ‘Guna Nua Do Chaitlín,’ *Comhar* 16, no. 10 (October 1957): 18. Available on request from New York Public Library.

⁴⁰ Melius na Gopaleen, ‘Guna Nua Do Chaitlín: II,’ *Comhar* 17, no. 3 (March 1958): 12. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20550399>.

⁴¹ Risteard Ó Glaisne, ‘Scríbhneoireacht Ghaeilge Myles na gCopaleen,’ *Comhar* 21, no. 4 (Aibreán 1962): 18, citing Thomas Hogan, ‘Myles na gCopaleen,’ *The Bell* (November 1946).

⁴² Ó Glaisne, ‘Scríbhneoireacht Ghaeilge,’ 19. My translation.

⁴³ Máirtín Ó Cadhain, ‘Leabhar atá ar Aora Móra Phróis na Gaeilge,’ *Feasta* 18, no. 1 (April 1965): 25–26. My translation.

⁴⁴ Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, ‘Melius Locuta Causa Finita,’ *Comhar* 24, no. 1 (January 1965): 17–18. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20551873>.

response this generated in the pages of the Irish-language print media of the 1960s – is a fascinating and barely touched area for future research.

The writing on *An Béal Bocht* in the 1960s and 1970s also reflects a change in the novel's reception: it loses its status as a new departure in the style and content of Irish-language literature (perhaps surpassed on this measure by the success of Ó Cadhain's *Cré na Cille*) and begins to be seen as an obscure work. In 1960, John Jordan writes in *Hibernia* that *An Béal Bocht* is 'a bookish book' whose humour is inaccessible to those without a broad familiarity with Irish 'autobiographical treatises' of which even the best 'are a bit dubious.'⁴⁵ Benedict Kiely writes in 1973 that:

The *Catch-22*-style joke about 'An Béal Bocht' when it first appeared thirty-two years ago was that by pouring ridicule on many of things that the more staid Gaelic revivalists revered, it proved beyond doubt that the Gaelic revival was, in fact, reviving. But by the nature of the case it was an in-joke, and since only a fraction of the Irish people read or spoke the Irish language it was an in-joke within an in-joke. Worse still: only a fraction of that fraction was prepared to be amused.⁴⁶

Kiely reverses the earlier idea that the novel contributes to the cause of the modern Irish-language prose by expanding its readership and engaging with its traditions. Kiely's view makes more sense when we consider that critics were somewhat gloomier about the prospects for Irish-language literature in the 1970s than they had been in the optimistic 1940s. For example, in an essay for *The Pleasures of Gaelic Literature* (1977) collection edited by Jordan, which promoted the appreciation of Irish-language literature, Breandán Ó hEithir ends his discussion of Ó Cadhain as follows: 'I have a feeling that in time, the weak and struggling plant that is contemporary writing in Irish will be seen to have had its roots in *Cré na Cille*.'⁴⁷ Perhaps the long experience of this 'weak and struggling plant' made *An Béal Bocht* seem, to critics like Jordan and Kiely, more like a failed experiment than a new departure.

⁴⁵ John Jordan, 'The Saddest Book Ever to Come out of Ireland,' *Hibernia* (5 August 1960), republished in Rüdiger Imhof (ed.), *Alive Alive O!: Flann O'Brien's At Swim-Two-Birds* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1985), 51.

⁴⁶ Benedict Kiely, 'Getting the Point,' *The Irish Times* (17 November 1973): 12.

⁴⁷ Breandán Ó hEithir, 'Cré na Cille' in *The Pleasures of Gaelic Literature*, ed. John Jordan (Dublin: Mercier, 1977), 84. It should be noted that this collection contains a powerful affirmation of the value of *An Béal Bocht* by Brendan Kennelly, which strikes a different note to the responses earlier in the 1970s: 'By taking the clichés of other writers, and by repeatedly inserting them into his own vivid, animated narrative, Myles na gCopaleen achieves unflinching satiric and comic effects. He mocks evasion; he parodies inertia. And in showing the verbal tiredness of others, he proves his own tremendous exuberance. The language of *An Béal Bocht* is remarkable for its sustained energy. There is nothing flabby or soft about it. It has an intellectual cut and keenness, a constant hitting of the satirical bull's-eye, a stabbing accuracy, that simply cannot fail to delight any mind which recognises that a respect for language is a respect for life itself. Unless we try, with all our hearts and minds, to say what we mean, we do not mean what we say. That is what I mean by "respect"' (90–91).

Despite the growing popularity of Flann O'Brien after Ó Nualláin's death and the appearance of *The Third Policeman* in 1967, this gloomy outlook on Irish-language writing is the backdrop to the publication of Patrick C. Power's translation of *An Béal Bocht* as *The Poor Mouth* in 1973. Power was one of several candidates to translate the novel, and he was picked out and discussed in letters between Ó Nualláin's wife Evelyn, his publisher Timothy O'Keeffe, and Ó Nualláin's brother Caoimhín. According to a letter by Evelyn to O'Keeffe, in contrast to the specimen translations proposed by O'Keeffe's company, MacGibbon & Kee, she had 'come across lately an example of the translation of a part of *An Béal Bocht* which *does* have a certain amount of that verve which is so evident in Brian's writing.'⁴⁸ The source was Power's *A Literary History of Ireland*, a well-received work published in 1969, which won Power the authority to translate *An Béal Bocht*. *A Literary History* divides Irish literature into distinctive chapters: those covering literature written in Irish, which is linked to the ancient medieval tradition, and that written in English, either linked back to the Anglo-Norman invaders or framed as a part of the Anglo-Irish Revival. Power divides his coverage of Ó Nualláin's work into two parts on either side of this linguistic divide: an account of *An Béal Bocht* (together with a translated passage) is provided in the Irish section, but *At Swim-Two-Birds* is not dealt with until the 'Irish Literature in English' section.⁴⁹ By boxing off an 'Irish Myles,' this book provides an early example of a formal tendency to elide both the continuity of Ó Nualláin's literary project across the three earlier novels and the importance of English-language writing to *An Béal Bocht* (Declan Kiberd alerts us to the latter in an article for *Comhar* in 1984⁵⁰). Despite the lucidity and success of Power's translation, it is also an influential act of interpretation which bears the same relation to *An Béal Bocht* as the interpretation of *The Islandman* in the hands of its translator, Robin Flower, does to *An tOileánach*. This slippage is understood at the earliest stages of the translation process, such as when Evelyn's support for an English-language version by Power is backed by Caoimhín in a subsequent letter, but not without qualification. Caoimhín writes:

If adverse criticism be made, it could be said that the translation is a little too easy-going. It is not always faithful in detail and though this may not always matter there is danger of overlooking small points. For example, he translates *is fíor duit fírineach* [sic] as 'I think you're right'! In fact the jocose reinforcement – truly true – recurs

⁴⁸ Letter from Evelyn O'Nolan to Timothy O'Keeffe, 22 October 1969, Flann O'Brien Collection, Burns Library, Boston College, box 7, folders 1–3.

⁴⁹ Patrick C. Power, *A Literary History of Ireland* (Cork: Mercier, 1969), 122–24, 172–73.

⁵⁰ Declan Kiberd [sic], 'An Béal Bocht agus an Béarla,' *Comhar* 43, no. 4 (April 1984): 20–27. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20555375>.

constantly and shouldn't be paraphrased [...]. The same thing applies to the forms of address, which are medieval and courtly throughout and contrast ludicrously with the utter squalor and poverty of the speakers [...]. These are small points but fidelity to some extent depends on the like in a translation otherwise attractive.⁵¹

The 'small points' that Caoimhín identifies in a translation that is 'a little too easy-going' contribute to the changing critical trajectory of *An Béal Bocht*. For example, the developing narrative that the novel refers merely to certain specific Gaeltacht autobiographies of 'dubious' merit, as Jordan writes, can only be reinforced by a translation which masks its wider literary references, such as the play between medieval and modern forms of Irish words. Similarly, a translation which overlooks 'small points' in favour of readability risks flattening its prose and dulling the edge of its satire.

The Poor Mouth furnishes ammunition for attacks on *An Béal Bocht*. In *Hibernia* in November 1973, Bernard Share, noting 'the healthy state of the Myles industry,' launches a withering critique of the translation that effortlessly extends to an attack on Ó Nualláin himself:

The point is that the whole *raison d'être* of the book was that it is written in Irish. Half the jokes are linguistic, and those that are not are situational. The rest are of such refined Mylesian quality as to have almost eluded the author himself. This is an elegant production, furbished with some quaint and unsuitable illustrations and a travesty of Sean O'Sullivan's original map of Corcha Dorcha [sic], apparently aimed at convincing the non-Irish reader that forelocks are still being doffed West of Holyhead. And this state of affairs is basically the fault of nobody but the author. The ironies have all gone up in smoke, and the little that remains is of such refined subtlety as to delude even the reader following it with the Irish original. Or vice versa.⁵²

Rather than combining a depth of reference with readable Irish, the novel, in Share's reading, has become obscure by design and resistant to interpretation, whether in translation or in the original. In this account, *An Béal Bocht* ceases to exist as a break with the clichés of Irish-language fiction and instead, through the problematic of its obscure, 'untranslatable ironies,' becomes no more than a catalogue of those clichés. Prompted by comments like 'or vice versa,' one suspects that Share is judging the original text in the light of the Power translation rather than the other way around.

⁵¹ Letter from Caoimhín Ó Nualláin to Evelyn Ó Nualláin, 29 November 1969, Flann O'Brien Collection, Burns Library, Boston College, box 7, folders 1-3.

⁵² Bernard Share, 'A Cluster of Untranslatable Ironies,' *Hibernia* 30 (November 1973): 14.

Earlier in his review, Share also describes Ó Nualláin as a writer who squanders his talent in comic writing: ‘Beckett (after *Murphy*, a very funny book) seems to have seen that humour would lead him only into self-parody. Not so Myles. After *At Swim*, he didn’t break the mould, but preserved it in vinegar. The resultant pickles, to say the least, were mixed.’⁵³ Share places *An Béal Bocht* within this narrative of ruined potential: ‘Myles, had he gone on writing in the Irish of *An Béal Bocht*, might have also slammed a door behind him. But instead he imprisoned himself, with occasional forays, inside a column.’⁵⁴ The narrative connects *An Béal Bocht*, as Ó Nualláin’s last published novel in the early phase of his career, to the sense of a climax for a writer whose work quickly declines afterwards. In the first critical monograph to be published on Ó Nualláin, Clissmann concludes her chapter dealing with *An Béal Bocht* (which also deals with *Faustus Kelly* and, very briefly, the short stories ‘John Duffy’s Brother,’ ‘The Martyr’s Crown,’ and ‘Two in One’) with the judgment that ‘apart from *An Béal Bocht*, the writing of these years, was, in the main, ephemeral and inconsequential.’⁵⁵ As the Power translation was available, it was also possible for Clissmann to commence an Anglophone critical habit of discussing *An Béal Bocht* with the caveat that the ‘version referred to here is the translation published by Patrick Power in 1973.’⁵⁶ Despite this limitation, Clissmann’s analysis is perceptive, noting the relationships between *An Béal Bocht*, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and *The Third Policeman* and dealing with two of its intertexts: Séamas Ó Grianna and Tomás Ó Criomhthain.⁵⁷

However, the practice of referring to *An Béal Bocht* when the text in question is, in fact, *The Poor Mouth*, establishes an alternative, Anglicised, branch of criticism that invariably builds Power’s translation into its core assumptions. The translation is a critical repositioning of the novel that changed the course of its later reception, eroding the nuances appreciated by early reviewers. Maebh Long addresses this development in her reading of the use of proper names in Ó Nualláin’s original and Power’s translation in *Assembling Flann O’Brien* (2014), where she also cites Caoimhín’s comments on the latter. Long concludes that the Anglicised context for Power’s translation, such as previous English-language translations of the Gaeltacht autobiographies, results in a flattening of *An Béal Bocht*’s satirical significance: ‘the distance between satirically presenting an Irish stereotype, and *being* a stereotype, is drastically reduced when read in English.’⁵⁸

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Anne Clissmann, *Flann O’Brien: A Critical Introduction to his Writings* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1975), 268.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 234–50.

⁵⁸ Maebh Long, *Assembling Flann O’Brien* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 136.

Writing in 1995, Eugene McKendry pinpoints the unintended consequences of the manner in which *The Poor Mouth* eclipsed *An Béal Bocht* as a reference point for scholars and international readers when he critically reviews a Swedish translation of the novel which is based not on the Irish original but on the Power translation. His review corrects the many errors and misreadings in the Swedish version which are the result of a translator working from the English translation who is neither 'competent in the original language,' nor 'familiar with the content matter, whether technical or cultural.'⁵⁹ The most dangerous product of such a translation of a translation is the simplification of Ó Nualláin's intentions, such as the comment in the Swedish translator's postscript that *An Béal Bocht* attacks 'irländska nationalisterna' (Irish nationalists). Such 'interpretations,' writes McKendry, 'tend to be too static, simplistic, and outdated, fitting into the kind of neat little boxes which Brian Ó Nualláin spent his literary life displacing.'⁶⁰

The exception to the prevailing revisionism during the 1970s is scholarship by Ó Conaire, which has informed the present article's investigation throughout. In 1973, he prefigures the larger-scale work of *Myles na Gaeilge* by publishing, in English, a sequence of important corrections to the developing narrative around *An Béal Bocht*. In part of this article, Ó Conaire also discusses the early critical reception of *An Béal Bocht*, quoting from the welcoming reviews in the *Dublin Evening Mail* and the *Standard* discussed above. He treats negative reviews, such as the 'withering' attack in the *Irish Library Bulletin*, as proof of its 'satirical success'. Ó Conaire surmises that:

the importance of the work was commented on from a number of points of view. One reviewer saw it as the first manifestation of the new urban generation in Irish writing, another as a healthy debunking and a salutary warning to all future autobiographers, another as a much needed reintroduction of a lusty and inventive humour and of a lively new prose-style into modern Irish. A number of dialect forms are, in fact, used in the book and the language, though not wholly accurate, has a fresh, simple, concrete, vibrant – celtic – ring to it.⁶¹

By taking a closer look at the reviews that Ó Conaire summarises, we also learn that the concept of a 'synthetic' or 'amalgam' Gaeltacht as the setting for *An Béal Bocht*, appeals to reviewers as a figure for its cosmopolitan new style.⁶² However, these aspects of the

⁵⁹ Eugene McKendry, 'Klagomunnen and the Limits of Translation,' *Moderna Språk* 89, no. 2 (1995): 142.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁶¹ Ó Conaire, 'Flann O'Brien, *An Béal Bocht*, and Other Irish Matters,' 138–39.

⁶² Review of *An Béal Bocht*, *Leader*, 540; F. O'R., 'Myles,' 5

original novel were overshadowed in readings that emerged at the time of a translation which brought *The Poor Mouth* to a much larger international audience.

Conclusion: The 1980s and Beyond

The 1980s bring a sea-change into criticism of *An Béal Bocht* with the publication of Ó Conaire's handbook, *Myles na Gaeilge*. Written in Irish and informed by his assiduous, unparalleled research into the original work and its reception, Ó Conaire's scholarship discloses an almost limitless breadth and depth to Ó Nualláin's Irish-language reading, together with a Joycean capability to synthesise this diverse set of materials into an extraordinarily rich literary texturing. Ó Conaire's excavation of the novel's influences and techniques sets the scene for the many readings that follow. For example, he anticipates the succession of postcolonial and historicist readings of *An Béal Bocht* by mapping the terrain of the culture wars in which Ó Nualláin fought,⁶³ demonstrating that he should be 'seen in proper perspective as a child of his generation and not, as so often appears, as a special case. Many of his chosen targets had in fact been singled out by others long before his time.'⁶⁴ Equally, by revealing *An Béal Bocht* to be a vast intertextual composition, a *summa* in miniature form of an entire literary tradition, *Myles na Gaeilge* also opens a path for more theoretically inclined readings, which explore the text as a pivot between the modernist and postmodernist phases in the Irish novel.⁶⁵

⁶³ For example: Richard Murphy, "A root of the new sprout?": Flann O'Brien, Minor Literature, and the Modern Gaelic Canon,' in *Is it about a bicycle?: Flann O'Brien in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Jennika Baines (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), 67–82; Sarah McKibben, 'The Poor Mouth: A Parody of (Post) Colonial Irish Manhood,' *Research in African Literatures* 34, no. 4 (2003): 96–104; Aisling Ní Churraighín, 'Béal Bocht an bhéaloidis: Myles na gCopaleen agus a luath-chritíc ar an bhailiú ghairmiúil,' *Comhar Taighde* 3 (Deireadh Fómhair 2017), available at: <http://comhartaighde.ie/eagrain/3/nichurraighin/>; Gregory Darwin, 'As ucht a bhochtanaís Ghaeiligh': Parody, Poverty, and the Politics of Irish Folklore in *An Béal Bocht*, *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 17–28, available at: <https://doi.org/10.16995/pr.3227>; and Louis de Paor, 'Myles na gCopaleen agus drochshampla na ndea-leabhar,' in *Ag Caint leis an Simné? Dúshlán an Traidisiúin agus Nualitricíocht na Gaeilge* (Conamara: Cló Iar-Chonnacht), 148–65.

⁶⁴ Ó Conaire, 'Flann O'Brien, *An Béal Bocht*, and Other Irish Matters,' 124.

⁶⁵ For example: Brian Ó Conchubhair, 'An Béal Bocht and An tOileánach: Writing on the Margin: Gaelic Glosses or Post-modern Marginalia,' in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 191–204; Ian Ó Caoimh, 'Timpeall chun an Teampaill: idirthéacsúlacht iarnua-aoiseach *An Béal Bocht*,' *Comhar* 73, no. 1 (January 2013): 15–18 and *Comhar* 73, no. 2 (February 2013): 17–21; Brian Ó Conchubhair, 'The Bildung Subject and Modernist Autobiography in *An Béal Bocht* (Beyond *An tOileánach*),' *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 39–50, available at <https://doi.org/10.16995/pr.3230>; Neil Murphy, 'Myles na gCopaleen, Flann O'Brien, and *An Béal Bocht*: Intertextuality and Aesthetic Play,' in *Flann O'Brien: Contesting Legacies*, eds. Ruben Borg, Paul Fagan, and Werner Huber (Cork: Cork University Press, 2014), 143–55.

This article has built on Ó Conaire's map of early responses to recuperate the sense of excitement and promise for the future of Irish prose that *An Béal Bocht* created in its first generation of readers. It has also argued that the efforts by Ó Nualláin to facilitate the continued success of *An Béal Bocht* may have contributed to the scepticism about the novel which developed during the middle period of its reception. He associates *An Béal Bocht* with *An tOileánach* to a degree that gives rise to the false idea that it is a simple pastiche or parody. Further, by tying up the eventual publication of the third edition with a controversy about orthography, he gives ground to the equally false idea that the humour of the original text is obscurantist. The story of how those attitudes gave way to the plethora of brilliant modern scholarship on the novel is an account for a future article. Suffice to say that, eighty years on, *An Béal Bocht* continues to gleam as 'something entirely new,' a fresh turn in Irish-language prose for a new generation of readers, which did and continues to win interest in the language.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

