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Brian Ó Nualláin and An Gúm

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This article discusses Brian Ó Nualláin's interactions with An Gúm in the late 1930s and early 1940s. It documents his efforts to have a collection of his early essays, material from *Cruiskeen Lawn*, and a translation of Brinsley MacNamara's play *Margaret Gillan* published in Irish. Drawing on new archival material and published letters, the article reconstructs the correspondence between An Gúm and Ó Nualláin. It discusses the publisher's attitude toward Ó Nualláin and his material as well as the perception of Ó Nualláin within the Irish-language scholarly community and literary establishment, in particular by Tadhg Ó Donnchadha (pen name 'Torna') and Risteard Ó Foghludha (pen name Fiachra Éilgeach). An Gúm's rejection of the *Cruiskeen Lawn* collection came not only on the heels of the destruction of the remaining copies of *At Swim-Two-Birds* but also the rejection of *The Third Policeman*, which may well be a contributing factor to the disappointments he experienced at this time. In conclusion, the article discusses how Ó Nualláin found himself at odds with official State ideology.

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In 1921, the Rev. Gearóid Ó Nualláin, Professor of Irish at Maynooth College and Brian Ó Nualláin's uncle, issued a manifesto in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* entitled 'A New Era in Irish Literature.'¹ In the manifesto, Gearóid criticises '[t]he narrow outlook, the scantiness of material,' and 'the adhesion to worn-out traditional methods of treating hackneyed themes' in contemporary Irish-language literature.² 'One grows tired,' Gearóid complains, as Ireland lurched from the Anglo-Irish War of Independence to the Civil War,

of the eternal *spéirbhean*.³ [...] Men are living, men are dying, for the great ideal of a free and independent nation [...], the mantle of Freedom has descended at last on our writers. There is a new thrill in the Irish language – a lighter, brighter note, distinctly heard. We are, in a word, becoming broadly human, instead of insularly Celtic.⁴

He believed that a new era for Irish-language literature was at hand, and salvation lay in translation from other languages into Irish:

The habit of translation will grow and benefit the language. It will render the writer more fully alive to the special beauties and the special exigencies of Irish idiom; and the necessity of reproducing the original [...] author's thoughts and imagery will cause the translator to exercise a salutary self-restraint. Irish style needs a lot of chastening and pruning. [...] And we want more than mere translations. We want original books, written in the light of the best literature of other countries.⁵

Undoubtedly, such a statement by a figure regarded by some as the preeminent living scholar and writer of modern Irish had broad repercussions in the Irish language debate.⁶ 'A New Era in Irish Literature' anticipated the attitude of Pádraig de Brún,

¹ Gearóid Ó Nualláin, 'A New Era in Irish literature,' *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 17 (1921): 1–7.

² Gearóid Ó Nualláin, 'A New Era,' 1.

³ The '*spéirbhean*' refers to the allegorical representation of Ireland as a maiden of striking beauty, often mistaken for a classical goddess, in Irish poetry and particularly in political verse of the long eighteenth century. See Vincent Morley, 'The Irish Language,' in *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland*, eds. Richard Bourke and Ian McBride (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 333; Laurie O'Higgins, 'The Irish Classical Self: Poets and Poor Scholars in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,' *The Irish Classical Self: Poets and Poor Scholars in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 53–98; R. A. Breatnach, 'The Lady and the King: A Theme of Irish Literature,' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 42, no. 167 (Autumn 1953): 321–36; Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Aisling ghéar: Na Stiobhar-taigh agus an tAos léinn, 1603–1788* (Dublin: Clóchomhar Tta., 1996).

⁴ Gearóid Ó Nualláin, 'A New Era,' 2.

⁵ Gearóid Ó Nualláin, 'A New Era,' 7.

⁶ In the opinion of the Gaelic League newspaper in 1922, Gearóid was the natural successor to the Rev. Peter O'Leary (An tAthair Peadar Ó Laoghaire), the Munster author of the folkloric novel *Séadna: 'Má atá oighre ag an Ath. Peadar i gcúrsaí scríbhneoireachta sé an Rev. Gerald O'Nolan é'* (If Fr Peter has an heir in writing, it is the Rev. Gerald O'Nolan). *Fáinne an Lae* (16 December 1922): 7.

Professor of Mathematics at Maynooth College (1914–45) and president of University College Galway (1945–59).⁷ In 1930–31, de Brún became embroiled in a critical clash of ideas in *Humanitas* with Daniel Corkery, recently appointed Professor of English at University College Cork.⁸ While Corkery ‘rejoiced in what he saw as the Independence of the Gaelic tradition from European influence,’ de Brún, like Gearóid Ó Nualláin before him, ‘lamented the consequent insularity of Irish literature and proposed a project of translation’ from the European tradition into Irish.⁹

Indeed, not only does Gearóid’s manifesto rehearse much of what would become the defining intellectual debate in Irish-language literary discourse in the 1930s,¹⁰ but it pre-empts some of what we find in ‘*Nádúir-fhilíocht na Gaedhilge*,’ Brian Ó Nualláin’s M.A. thesis at University College Dublin (UCD) on Irish nature poetry (1934–5).¹¹ Thus, the thesis intervenes into contemporary debates concerning Irish-language literature and translation by drawing on the rich cultural inheritance which Brian Ó Nualláin inherited from his wider family. To return his work to these contexts is to understand the young Ó Nualláin as an Irish-language scholar, writer, and translator intervening into wider intellectual debates about the cultivation of Irish-language literature. Simultaneously, such a contextualisation alerts us to continuities with his uncle’s literary endeavours and stresses the importance of family in understanding his work in its widest possible scope.

⁷ De Brún’s family loom large in Brian Ó Nualláin’s life: his sister Margaret Browne taught Irish at University College Dublin (UCD) – where Brian studied from 1929–35 – and was married to the politician Seán MacEntee, under whom Brian served as Private Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government from 1941–46. De Brún himself apparently features as ‘P. de B.’ in Seán O’Sullivan/Sean Ó Súilleabháin’s map that accompanies Myles na gCopaleen’s *An Béal Bocht*.

⁸ See Liam Prút, *Athbheochan an Léinn nó Dúchas na Gaeilge? Iomparbhá idir Pádraig de Brún agus Domhnall Ó Corcora, Humanitas 1930–31* (Dublin: Coiscéim, 2005); Síle Ní Mhurchú, ‘Translating into Irish from Greek and Latin in the Early Years of the Irish State,’ in *Classics and Irish Politics, 1916–2016*, eds. Isabelle Torrance and Donncha O’Rourke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); 83–99; Síle Ní Mhurchú and Patricia Kelly, ‘Translations into Irish of Greek Drama and of Other Works Concerning Greece,’ in *Amid Our Troubles*, eds. Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton (London: Methuen, 2002): 87–100.

⁹ Máirín Nic Eoin, ‘*Idir Dhá Chomhairle*/Between Two Minds: Interculturality in Literary Criticism in Irish,’ *Field Day Review* 4 (2008): 227.

¹⁰ See Philip O’Leary, *Gaelic Prose in the Irish Free State 1922–1939* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2004); *Writing Beyond the Revival* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2011); *Irish Interior: Keeping Faith with the Past in Gaelic Prose, 1940–1951* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2010).

¹¹ See Adrian Naughton, ‘“*Nádúir-Fhilíocht na Gaedhilge*” and Flann O’Brien’s Fiction,’ in ‘*Is it about a bicycle?*’ *Flann O’Brien in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Jennika Baines (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011): 83–97; Adrian Naughton, ‘“More of your fancy kiss-my-hand”: A Further Note on Flann O’Brien’s *Nádúir fhilíocht na Gaedhilge*,’ *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O’Brien Studies* 1, no. 2 (2013): 11–23, available at: <https://doi.org/10.16995/pr.2910>; Ian Ó Caoimh, ‘“As long as the fancy stuff is kept down”: The Perils of the Personal Note for Brian O’Nolan,’ *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O’Brien Studies* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 4–13, available at: <https://doi.org/10.16995/pr.2917>; and Louis de Paor, ‘“a scholar manque”? Further Notes on Brian Ó Nualláin’s Engagement with Early Irish literature,’ in *Flann O’Brien: Problems with Authority*, eds. Ruben Borg, Paul Fagan, and John McCourt (Cork: Cork University Press, 2017): 189–203.

The remainder of Gearóid’s literary life – his duties as Professor of Irish at Maynooth consisted of three lectures a week – may be seen as an effort to realise his vision via translations from Old Irish, Welsh, Russian, and other languages into Irish.¹² Many of these texts were published by An Gúm, the Free State Irish-language press founded by Ernest Blythe in 1925 as part of the nation-building projects initiated by the post-Civil War Cumann na nGaedheal government.¹³ This connection between An Gúm and the Ó Nualláin family is not an isolated occurrence, as Brian’s other uncle, Feargus O’Nolan, also translated books which were issued by An Gúm. Indeed, An Gúm published not only two novels by Brian’s brother Ciarán Ó Nualláin – *Oidhche in nGleann na nGealt* (1939) and *Eachtraí Phartalain Mhic Mhorna* (1944) – but also *Ceathrar Cliste* (1954) by another brother, Caoimhín Ó Nualláin (aka Lughaidh Mac Feorais). Given his family’s extensive involvement in publishing with An Gúm – two brothers and two uncles – it is no surprise that Brian Ó Nualláin’s translation of Brinsley MacNamara’s 1933 play *Margaret Gillan* appeared (finally) with An Gúm in 1953. But this publication did not mark his only foray into translation,¹⁴ nor his first or only interaction with An Gúm.

Drawing on new archival material and published letters, this article details Brian Ó Nualláin’s three separate attempts to have his Irish-language writing and translations published with An Gúm in the late 1930s and early 1940s. These correspondences cast new light not only on Ó Nualláin’s interventions into debates about Irish-language

¹² In addition to the renowned four-volume *Studies in Modern Irish* (1919–22), *Introduction to Studies in Modern Irish* (1921), and *The New Era Grammar of Modern Irish* (1934), Gearóid produced *Dia, Diabhal, agus Daoine* (1922) (the first two stories in this collection are translations from the Russian: ‘*An Fiosrú*’ [‘What Men Live By,’ literally ‘The Visitation’] by Leo Tolstoy and ‘*Síon agus Sneachta*’ [‘Snowstorm’ literally ‘Bad Weather and Snow’] by Alexander Pushkin; the remainder are original stories with detailed grammatical points), *Trí Seoda ó Albain* (1922) (an Irish version of the Scots Gaelic *Na Daoine Síde is Uirsgeulan Eile* edited by Úna Inghean Fhir na Páirce), *Tiarna an Tailimh agus scéalta eile* (1923), *Sean agus Nua* (1923), *Intrusions* (1923), *Ceistiúchán* (1923), *Scéalta on Rúis* (with Maighréad Nic Mhaicín), *Iona* (1955), *Gwen Thomas*, *An Dá Theaghlach*, and *Féin-Scribhinn Mhinistéara / Rhys Lewis*.

¹³ An Gúm files refer to Gearóid’s translation of the work *The Postmaster & Put Out the Fire* as *Maighistir an Phoist & Múch an Teine*. It appears he also translated Alice M. Cashel’s *The Lights of Leaca Ban* as *An Leaca Bán* in 1935, but An Gúm rejected it in 1941.

¹⁴ We know that Ó Nualláin appeared to seriously consider translating James Stephens’s *The Crock of Gold* into Irish and, as Myles na Gopaleen, he joked about rendering James Joyce’s *Ulysses* into Irish. In December 1938, he wrote to James Montgomery about the letter controversy concerning Seán Ó Faoláin’s drama *She Had to Do Something*. In addition, he asked his friend’s father for assistance in executing a plan to translate James Stephens’ novel *A Crock of Gold*. He revealed: ‘I did in fact translate a few passages as “samples” for the Gúm + found it very difficult but it is a pleasing intellectual exercise [...]. If they agree to reconsider their attitude, perhaps you’ll bully Mr. Stephens by post for me.’ It appears that Ó Nualláin had discussed the project in some manner with An Gúm, but any such correspondence remains, as yet, undiscovered. See Flann O’Brien, *The Collected Letters of Flann O’Brien*, ed. Maebh Long (Victoria, TX: Dalkey Archive Press, 2018) [hereafter, *Letters*], 20, 22; Stan Carey, ‘Flann O’Brien on Translating *Ulysses* into Irish,’ *Sentence First* (2015): <https://stancarey.wordpress.com/2015/08/08/flann-obrien-on-translating-ulysses-into-irish/>; and Myles na Gopaleen, ‘J.J. & US,’ *Cruiskeen Lawn*, *The Irish Times* (22 August 1956): 6.

translation and publishing in this period, but also on the state publisher's attitude toward Ó Nualláin and his material, as well as the perception of Ó Nualláin within the Irish-language scholarly community and literary establishment. By tracing these three fractious encounters with An Gúm in turn, new insights will be gained into the specific ways in which Ó Nualláin the writer and civil servant found himself at odds with official State ideology.

Aistear Pheadair Dhubh agus Aistí Eile

Ó Nualláin's first interaction with An Gúm occurs in the final months of 1937, as Saorstát Éireann (the Irish Free State) prepared to become Éire/Ireland and Éamon de Valera waited to assume the office of An Taoiseach. Ó Nualláin wrote to An Gúm on 2 November (his father had died some three months earlier on 29 July 1937) from his address at 4 Árdán Abhóca, Carraig Dhubh (Blackrock).¹⁵ He enquired about their Irish-language publication programme as he considered submitting a series of his essays and short stories which had been published previously in a variety of newspapers and journals. In the note, Ó Nualláin foregrounds the material's humour and Irish *bona fides*:

*Tá iarracht ar ghreann ionnta uilig agus tá cuid acu greannmhar go leor – nó sin mo thuairm féin ar a n-athléigheadh damh. Bhí mé cúramach deagh-Ghaedhilg amháin a chur isteach ionnta.*¹⁶

(There is an attempt at humour in each piece and on re-reading them I find some of them reasonably funny, at least in my opinion. I was careful only to employ the choicest Irish in writing them.¹⁷)

His rationale in offering these articles to An Gúm, he explains, lay in the scarcity of such material in Irish:

*Cheap mé, ar ghanntanas scríbhinní de'n tsaghas so, go mbéadh an Gúm toilteannach leabhrán a dhéanamh díbh. Sílim go ndearnadh a leithéid cheana féin.*¹⁸ *Bhéinn buidheach dá ndéanfaí an scéal a mhíniú damh.*¹⁹

¹⁵ The definite article, as found in the An Charraig Dhubh, is consistently absent from the address in the correspondence.

¹⁶ National Archives of Ireland, NAI99 Ls. /52/2565.

¹⁷ All translations from Irish to English are by the author of the present article.

¹⁸ Ó Nualláin may be referring to various collections of essays previously published by An Gúm/Oifig an tSoláthair which had appeared in large or in whole in newspapers, including: Pádraig Ua Duinnín's *Aistí ar Litridheacht Ghréigise is Laidne* (1929); Pádraic Ó Domhnalláin's *Oidhre an léighinn, agus aistí eile* (1935); Seosamh Mac Grianna's *Pádraic Ó Conaire agus aistí eile* (1936).

¹⁹ National Archives of Ireland, NAI Ls. 99/52/2565.

(Based on the scarcity of such writing, I thought An Gúm might produce them as a booklet. I believe such has been done before. I would appreciate you explaining the process to me.)

If necessary, he added, he would provide the texts for review and, should An Gúm deem them worthy of republishing, he was willing to polish and edit them.

Ó Nualláin's 2 November letter arrived the following day. On 8 November, An Gúm responded and provided a memorandum of its rules and conditions. A week later, on 14 November, the Government Department received a letter, written the previous day, in which Ó Nualláin acknowledged receipt of the memorandum and offered a collection of his writing previously published between 1932–33 while he was an undergraduate at UCD, entitled *Aistear Pheadair Dhuibh agus Aistí Eile* (The Tale of Black Peter and Other Essays).²⁰ In the letter, Ó Nualláin stresses the need for special attention and consideration to be paid to the diverse forms of Irish used in the stories:

*Ba mhaith liom go ndéanfaí an dá ghiota i Meadhon-Ghaedhilg do bhreathnú go cúramach óir sílim nach bhfuil aon deacracht sa chanúint seo agus gur mhaith an rud a leitheid a chur ós comhair an phobaill choitchantigh.*²¹

(I wish the two pieces in Middle-Irish be considered carefully as I do not see any deficit in this register and believe it beneficial to place such before the general public.)

He concludes that he is providing An Gúm with the material that he has to hand, despite not having printed versions of each piece, but adds: *'Tá píosaí eile agam fosta acht fós níor éirigh liom teacht suas leo go fóill. Táim dá gcuarrtá agus má gheibhim iad cuirfidh mé chugat iad'*²² (I also have other pieces but have yet to find them. I am searching for them and should I locate them, I shall send them to you).

Ó Nualláin does not specify the manuscript's contents in the correspondence, but an examination of his Irish-language work for these dates includes the following essays, short stories, and sketches:

- 'Seán Mac hÉil – Laoch gan Eagla,' *Scéala Éireann/Irish Press* (10 November 1931);
- 'Mná Borba na Romha,' *Scéala Éireann/Irish Press* (2 January 1932);
- 'Díoghaltais ar Ghallaibh sa Bhliain 2032!,' *Scéala Éireann/Irish Press* (18 January 1932);

²⁰ While the 14 November letter states that the submitted material was originally published between 1932–33, the earlier 2 November letter gave the timespan as 1930–32.

²¹ National Archives of Ireland, NAI99/52/2565.

²² National Archives of Ireland, NAI99/52/2565.

- 'Eoghan Rua Ó Néill,' *National Student/An Mac Léighinn* (May 1932);
- 'Teacht Agus Imtheacht Sheáin Bhuidhe,' *Scéala Éireann/Irish Press* (13 June 1932);
- 'Scéal Beag gan Ghruaim,' *Evening Press* (17 June 1932);
- 'Carneraí na hÉireann,' *Evening Press* (22 June 1932);
- 'Gaedhealtacht na Lae Indiu: Breoiteacht gan Ainm,' *Evening Press* (29 June 1932);
- 'Siúbhlóid,' *Scéala Éireann/Irish Press* (4 July 1932);
- 'Ní Mhaireann an Sógh acht Seal,' *Evening Press* (7 July 1932);
- 'Amuigh i mBáid,' *Evening Press* (16 July 1932);
- 'Reidhteach na Ceiste,' *Evening Telegraph and Evening Press* (21 July 1932);
- 'Rath agus Míó-Rath,' *Evening Telegraph and Evening Press* (29 July 1932);
- 'Cuaird Lae i gConamara,' *Evening Telegraph and Evening Press* (16 August 1932);
- 'Eachtra an Fhir Ólta: CEOL!' *Scéala Éireann/Irish Press* (24 August 1932);
- 'Tús na hoibre,' *Evening Telegraph and Evening Press* (29 August 1932);
- 'Mion-Tuairimí ár Sinnsir,' *Scéala Éireann/Irish Press* (29 September 1932);
- 'Seoidín Fánach: Focal Fiúntach,' *Evening Telegraph and Evening Press* (3 October 1932);
- 'Mairg a bhíos i nGrádh,' *Evening Telegraph and Evening Press* (13 October 1932);
- 'Uaisle an Bhealaigh Mhóir,' *Scéala Éireann/Irish Press* (21 November 1932);
- 'Ceist Gan Réidhteach,' *Scéala Éireann/Irish Press* (30 December 1932);
- 'Echtri agus imtheactai na nGraduatí: 1. Sgél Ró-Dess,' *Comhthrom Féinne* 4, no. 1, (25 January 1933);
- 'Aistear Pheadair Dhuibh,' *Inisfáil* 1, no. 1 (March 1933): 63-4;
- 'Glór an tSioraíocht,' *Comhthrom Féinne* 5, no. 3 (March 1933);
- 'Imprimi Palimpset,' *Comhthrom Féinne* 6, no. 2 (October 1933).²³

Whether Ó Nualláin included all these pieces in the submission remains unclear. Ó Nualláin's reference to 'two pieces in Middle-Irish' could refer, in part, to 'Echtri agus Imtheactai na nGraduatí,' but also suggests the possible inclusion of two later pieces which fit this description, although published in 1935 rather than 1932-33:

- 'Tri Filid in Domhain Homer o Grecaip, Fergil o Latinnip agus Parnabas o Gaedelaip,' *The National Student* (June/July 1935)
- 'Pisa Bec oc Parnabas,' *The National Student* (December 1935)

²³ The last essay in *Comhthrom Féinne* is anonymous, but by all signs can almost certainly be attributed to Ó Nualláin.

We can be confident, however, of the inclusion of the title piece, ‘Aistear Pheadair Dhuibh’ (1933), which first appeared in the London publication *Inisfáil*, a magazine ‘Published to Maintain a Sympathetic Contact between Irishmen Living Abroad.’

On 2 December, Seán Mac Lellan, a senior civil servant and An Gúm’s gate keeper, instructed another civil servant, ‘DOG’ (possibly Domhnaill Mac/Ó Grianna, an editor at An Gúm) to send the manuscript to Seán Ó Cuirrín (1894–1980) and request his opinion as a reader on the following points regarding *Aistear Pheadair Dhuibh agus Aistí Eile*:

1. The quality of the language
2. The quality of the material
3. Is it worth publishing?
4. If not publishable as is, might the reader advise the author how best to improve it.

After a two-week delay, on Thursday 18 November An Gúm dispatched the manuscript to Ó Cuirrín, a native Irish speaker from Waterford who was closely associated with Coláiste na Rinne. A University College Cork graduate who had studied under Risteard De Hindeberg in 1915, Ó Cuirrín subsequently taught at Coláiste na Rinne (1915–18) before assuming a teaching post at Mount Melleray, Waterford, in 1926 where he remained until 1959. At this juncture, Ó Cuirrín had authored several books;²⁴ his paramount achievement, however, remains his translation of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, published by An Gúm in 1933 (reissued 1997) and described by Seán Ó Briain in 2014 as an ‘enthraling translation, containing a very rich lexicon, marvellous turns of phrase.’²⁵

Ó Cuirrín responded from his home on Church Street, Cappoquin, Waterford on 18 November, and a week later (25 November), An Gúm received his clear endorsement.

An Ghaedhealg. Neart agus brígh agus binneas inti. Atá líomhthacht agus aiciontacht an chainteora dúthchais le feiscin uirri, maille le snas agus órnáideachas na sean-leabhar. Maith é an cuimmeasc san. Atá cúpla aiste i nGaedhilg chian-aosta in deireadh an leabhair ‘na gcuirfidh lucht stuidéir na Sean-Ghaedhilge²⁶ spéis. Is dearbh go bhfuilid san os cionn cumais na coitchiantachta, acht dob’ fhéidir iad a mbogadh beagáinín dóibh, eadhon, gnáth-litriughadh na h-aimsire seo do chur orra. Leath a ndeachrachta agus a ndoiléire

²⁴ These include *Beirt Dhéiseach* (1922), *Uimhrigheacht* (1922), and *Psaltair na Rinne* (1935). Ó Cuirrín also edited *Scribhne Risteird de Hindeberg* (1924).

²⁵ Seán Ó Briain, ‘A Translation with Real Bite,’ *The Irish Times* (2 July 2014): <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/a-translation-with-real-bite-1.1851640>. See also Sorcha de Brún, ‘Dracula agus Seán Ó Cuirrín,’ *Bliainiris* 7 (2007): 166–203.

²⁶ Throughout these reports there occurs a constant slippage in the use of ‘sean’ (old) Irish to refer to Classical, Middle, and Early Irish.

an chulaith ársa atá orra. An t-adhbhar. [...] Atáid uile suimeamhail so-léithe agus is maith is fiú a gcur fa bhuan-chlódh. Atá an drama 'Trí Truagha na Scéalaigheachta' oireamhnach go maith agus níor mhór an chríoch do chur leis. Is fiú a chur i gcló.

([With regard to] the Irish. It has strength and vigour and sweetness. It exhibits the fluency and naturalness of a native speaker, as well as the style and ornamentation of the old books. That is a good combination. There are several essays in antiquated Irish at the end of the book which will appeal to those who study Old Irish. Those essays are certainly beyond the common reader, but they could be adapted slightly, perhaps by using contemporary spelling. Half the difficulty and obscurity stems from their ancient appearance. [With regard to] the subject matter [...], they are all interesting, easily readable, and well worth reprinting. The drama 'The Three Sorrows of Story Telling' is suitably agreeable and needs a conclusion. They are worth publishing.)

Ó Cuirrín's reference to the drama *Trí Truagha na Scéalaigheachta* (The Three Sorrows of Story Telling) is very likely to the same 'Mylesian drama' *Trí Truagha na Scéaluigheachta nó Eochair-Sciath agus Tri Bhior-Ghaoithe an Ghaedhealachais* that Breandán Ó Conaire documents, 'in which both Peadar and An Seandúine Liagh participate' and 'sections of which later appeared verbatim in *An Béal Bocht*.'²⁷ This title clearly echoes the trio of Early Modern Irish prose tales known collectively as *Trí Truagha na Scéalaigheachta: Oidhe Chlainne Lir, Oidhe Chlainne Tuireann, and Oidhe Chlainne Uisnigh*. Multiple versions – scholarly, simplified, and abridged – existed at this time;²⁸ two editions, however, hold particular significance for Ó Nualláin. Anthony Cronin describes 'a retired schoolmaster called Collins or Ó Coileáin, who read with them [the Ó Nualláin children] a version of the famous story, *The Children of Lir*, written in Ulster Irish by J.P. Craig,'²⁹ and Seán Ua Ceallaigh's (aka 'Sceilg') 1927 Modern Irish version featured prominently on the UCD undergraduate degree course Ó Nualláin attended: *Oidhe Chloinne Tuireann* (1929–1930 academic year); *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* (1930–1931 academic year); and *Oidhe Chlainne Uisnigh* (1931–1932 academic year).

²⁷ Breandán Ó Conaire, 'Review Article: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate,' *Studia Hibernica* 35 (2008–2009): 199. See also Breandán Ó Conaire, *Myles na Gaeilge: Lámhleabhar ar shaothar Gaeilge Bhrian Ó Nualláin* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar, 1986), 252. My gratitude to Paul Fagan for bringing this valuable article and much else beside to my attention.

²⁸ These include the 1863 edition *The 'Trí thruaighe na scéalaigheachta*, edited and translated by Eugene O'Curry, and R.J. O'Duffy's 1905 edition for the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language. Philip O'Leary observes that the Clann Lir tale proved 'particularly popular' and lists notable versions by Pádraic Ó Conaire (1924), Séamas Ó Súilidhubháin (1923), Micheál Ó Colmáin (c. 1925), and Pádraig Ó Bróithe (1936). O'Leary, *Gaelic Prose in the Irish Free State*, 364.

²⁹ Anthony Cronin, *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien* (New York: Fromm International, 1998), 12–13. Sealy, Bryers, and Walker published James Patrick Craig's editions of the three tales as *Clann Lir* (1901), *Clann Uisnig* (1902), and *Clann Tuireann* (1902). See Philip O'Leary, 'Unwise and Unlovable: Translation in the Early Years of the Gaelic Revival,' *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 5 (1985): 147–171.

Mac Lellan read Ó Cuirrín's report the following day, authorised payment of £1 (6 December 1937), and directed the manuscript be sent to Tadhg Ó Donnchadha (1874–1949), a founding member of the notorious Gaelic League Keating branch (along with Seán/Shán Ó Cuív, Risteard Ó Foghludha, and Seán Ua Ceallaigh) and an editor of the journals *Banba* and *Irisleabhar na Gaeilge* who wrote under the pseudonym 'Torna.' Ó Donnchadha had impeccable credentials: he studied Old Irish under Ludwig Mühlhausen at Heidelberg University, and was Professor of Irish at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin prior to assuming the same position at University College Cork in 1916 where he remained until 1944.³⁰ Receiving the manuscript on 2 December, Ó Donnchadha submitted his report on 8 December, and it was read on 10 December. On 16 December he was paid £1 for his service and an extra 3d for the cost of returning the manuscript by registered post.

Hitler and the Luftwaffe, as Ó Nualláin was wont to claim, may have put paid to any potential success for *At Swim-Two-Birds*, but it was the Corkonian Ó Donnchadha who put the kibosh on *Aistear Pheadair Dhuibh agus Aistí Eile*. Titling his report 'Aistí Éadroma' (Light/Inconsequential Essays), on 2 December 1937, he commenced with a critique of the author rather than a commentary on the text:

Duine is eadh an t-ughdar so gurb áil leis go measfaidhe 'na 'fear grinn' é. Is soilléir an méid sin ar urmhór na n-aistí seo. Acht chun greann san litridheacht do mheas i gceart ní mór dó a bheith 'coitcheann.' Is ionann san agus a rádh nach mór dó bheith sothuigseanna ag cách. Ní mar sin atá an greann annso foríor. Tá a lán de agus ní thuigfeadh aon duine é acht an té go mbeadh cúrsa 'Ceilteachais' déanta aige san Iolscoil, agus taithighe aige ar thighthibh áirithe tábhairne i mBaile Átha Cliath, agus eolas aige ar shaoghal na 'Graduaití' san chathair sin. Don tsaoghal mhór, leathsmuigh de na 'Graduaití' sin agus d'ábhdhar 'Fo-Ghraduaití' (más ceaduighthe dham san) ní bheadh san ghreann (ná 'na urmhór) acht ráiméis agus bhrille-bhreaille agus leoirínteacht. Níl feabhas ná deaighbhéasacht san aithris ar Thadhg Ó Cianáin bocht, ná ar an atheasg cumaise ar an Silva Gadelica agus ar an Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus. Déarfainn go bhfuil féith an ghrinn san ughdar acht dob fhearra dá cháil na hiarsmaí seo de laetheanta a óige do chur sa teine, nó i n-áit éigin i bhfolach, agus luighe isteach ar ghreann ná beidh díoghbháil ná damaint do dhuine ar bith dá bhárr. Ní fhéadaimse a chomhairliú don Choiste an cnuasach so d'fhoillsiú san chuma na bhfuil sé.

³⁰ Coincidentally, during this correspondence regarding *Aistear Pheadar agus Aistí Eile*, Mühlhausen was resident in the Donegal village of Teelin, ostensibly perfecting his Irish, but allegedly reconnoitring the coastline for a potential Nazi invasion. During the war's early years, he broadcast pro-Nazi radio propaganda to the Free State while also serving in an SS unit in Brittany. See David O'Donoghue, 'The Nazis in Irish Universities,' *History Ireland* 15, no 5 (September/October 2007): 12–13. Available at: <https://www.historyireland.com/the-nazis-in-irish-universities/>. Ó Nualláin had visited Cologne in late August-early September the previous year, but there is no evidence of a visit to Heidelberg.

(This author is a person who wishes to be considered 'a humorous man.' That is evident from the majority of these essays. But to judge literary humour correctly it must be 'common.' That is to say, it must be easily understandable by all. That, unfortunately, is not the case here. Much of it is incomprehensible to anyone but those who have completed a Celtic course in university, have a familiarity with certain Dublin pubs, and knowledge of the life of that city's 'Graduaití.' For the wider public outside of the *Graduaití* and current under-*graduaití* (should I be allowed the phrase), the humour (or the majority of it) is but rubbish and nonsensical talk; vulgar gossip and harmfulness.³¹ There is neither merit nor good manners in the imitation/parody of poor Tadhg Ó Cianáin nor the composite address of *Silva Gadelica* and *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*.³² I suspect that this author has the ability to be humorous, but it will better benefit his reputation if he places these relics from his youth in the fire or hidden somewhere and focuses on humour that will neither damage nor harm anyone. I cannot recommend the Committee publish this collection in its current form.)

Mac Lellan now faced a dilemma: one positive and one negative report required a third reader. An annotation on Ó Donnchadha's report confirms that person as Risteard Ó Foghludha (pen name Fiachra Éilgeach), another co-founder of the Keating Gaelic League Branch and Ó Donnchadha's brother-in-law.³³ The material was sent on 10 November to Ó Foghludha, who also received a copy of the damning report by Ó Donnchadha,³⁴ but it is unclear if Mac Lellan provided a copy of Ó Cuirrín's positive endorsement. Known

³¹ Ó Donnchadha's references to *Graduaití* support the supposition that 'Echtri agus imtheactai na nGraduaití' was included in the manuscript, while his claim that 'a Celtic course in university' and 'a familiarity with certain Dublin pubs' is necessary to understand the stories' humour may suggest the inclusion 'Tri Filid in Domhain Homer o Grecaip, Fergil o Latin-nip ocus Parnabas o Gaedelaip' and 'Pisa Bec oc Parnabas,' as Breandán Ó Conaire describes these texts as combining 'the drinking culture of [Dublin] students in the 1930s' and 'the ancient *crossántacht* genre.' Ó Conaire 'Review Article,' 204. My thanks to Paul Fagan for discussing this point.

³² An intriguing detail regarding the manuscript's contents is Ó Donnchadha's references to *Silva Gadelica* – the 1892 two-volume set of Fenian tales by Standish Hayes O'Grady – and the three volume, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, a collection of Old-Irish glosses, scholia, prose, and verse jointly edited by Stokes, Whitley, and Strachan, and published between 1901–10. For evidence of the influence of Standish Hayes O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica* on *At Swim-Two-Birds*, see Carol Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), 248; and de Paor, "a scholar manqué?," 194–5.

³³ See Diarmuid Breathnach and Máire Ní Mhurchú, 'Ó FOGHLUDHA, Risteard (1871–1957),' *ainm.ie* (2015): <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=75>. This is the same reader that would excoriate *An Béal Bocht* in a reader's report for Browne & Nolan in 1941 and whom Feargus O'Nolan, Brian Ó Nualláin's uncle, invoked in a mock literary controversy in *Scéala Éireann/Irish Press* in late 1940 regarding Liam Dall Ó hIfeárnáin, which led to a letter from Myles declaring, amongst other things, that 'Risteard Ó Foghludha [sic] and I are brothers under the same skin.' The (mis)spelling of Ó Foghludha here as 'Ó Foghludha' may be a simple transposition of the final 'dh' for a 'gh' by Ó Nualláin or the typesetter, but given Ó Nualláin's propensity for wordplay, it may also suggest 'Fogh-ludha' the smaller/lesser attacker/plunderer? See 'The Literary Conscience,' *Irish Press/Scéala Éireann* (16 October 1940): 6; and *Letters*, 95–7.

³⁴ See Breathnach and Ní Mhurchú, 'Ó FOGHLUDHA.'

and respected as an editor of Irish poetry, particularly Munster poetry,³⁵ Ó Foghludha had translated several works for An Gúm, especially from French.³⁶ Ó Foghludha finally wrote to An Gúm on 10 March 1938, apologising for not having sent the report upon its completion. The two-month delay in issuing his report may be attributed to his involvement in translating the 1937 Irish Constitution into Irish, a project he joined on 11 November 1936. Nonetheless, the report was now available and unambiguous: ‘*Nidhte gan puinn tábhachta atá anneo. Is follus go bhfuil Torna go dian i gcoinne iad do mholadh don chló, agus táimse ar aon intinn leis-sean*’³⁷ (These are pieces of no value. Clearly Torna [Ó Donnchadha] is strongly opposed to approving them for publication and I am of one mind with him). He proceeds to transcribe and underline Torna’s damning conclusion that these youthful relics be burnt or hidden and recommendation that the author focus on humour that will neither damage nor harm anyone.

The same day the report arrived, Mac Lellan annotated it with a brief note recording the rejection, adding instructions to return it to the author. On 14 March 1938, Mac Lellan informed Ó Nualláin of the material’s unsuitability for An Gúm.³⁸

Cruiskeen Lawn

Three years later in April 1941, Ó Nualláin, now an established figure as Myles na gCopaleen, again approached An Gúm, this time regarding the publication of a selection of his *Cruiskeen Lawn* articles which had appeared in *The Irish Times* since 4 October 1940. The method was unconventional, but it reflected his changed circumstances and higher status within the Civil Service hierarchy. Rather than submit the proposal via the postal service as he had previously done, Ó Nualláin directly contacted Seosamh Ó Néill,³⁹ private secretary to Minister Tomás Ó Deirg – his opposite number in the Department of Education under whose authority An Gúm came – about publishing a selection of his ‘Irish’ columns.

³⁵ See his *Piaras Mac Gearailt* (1905), *Donnchadh Ruadh Mac Conmara* (1908, 1933), *Brian Merriman* (1912), *Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin* (1929), *Pádraig Phiarais Cúndún* (1932), and *Seán Clárach Mac Domhnaill* (1932).

³⁶ These included: *Fíoraon le fiarán* (Leo Tolstoy); *An Béar* (Anton Chekhov); *Ag Suirghe leis an mBaintreach*, 1927 (*The Courtship of the Widow Malone* by Constance P. Anderson); *Fiche gearrscéal ar na thionntódh as an bhFraingcis* (20 short stories translated from French); *Naoi ngearra-chluichí*; *Maria Chapdelaine* (Louis Hemon); *Cnósach gearr-scéal*; *An Phib fé sna bántaibh* (T.C. Murray); *Oilibhéar Dubh*, (John Guinan); *An Bheidhlín Buadha*, 1935 (François Coppée); *An Sárúchán*, 1935 (John Brandane).

³⁷ National Archives of Ireland, NAI99/52/2565.

³⁸ ‘*Is oth liom a rádh nach bhfuil feileamhnach dúinn*’ (I regret to say that it is not suitable for us). National Archives of Ireland, NAI99/52/2565.

³⁹ The Gaelic League endorsed Ó Néill’s appointment as Secretary of the Department of Education to Minister Eoin Mac Néill in April 1922 given his strong Irish language credentials and Gaelic League activism. See *Fáinne an Lae* (28 April 1923).

Ó Néill received the material, dated and signed on 15 April by 'Brian Ó Nualláin,' on 23 April 1941, with the following cover note:

A Chara,

Is mian liom a chur fá bhráid do Roinne tairisgint go ndéanfaí na h-aistí grinn a ghabhann leis seo do chur i gcló i bhfuirm leabhair. Tá na píosaí a mheasaim oiriúnach marcálta le crois deirg [X] agus líne gorm [A] taobh leis na paragraif a mheasaim gur cóir a fhágaint ar lár. Ní'l uaim go gcuirfí aon Bhéarla per se i gcló acht molaim go leigfí isteach píosaí ina bhfuil Béarla agus Gaedhilg measctha ar a chéile, e.g. na píosaí 'foclóireachta.'

Molaim go gcuirfí na píosaí i gcló taréis a chéile le deighilt éigin eatartha [i.e. réalt, asterisk, uimhir áireamhachta nó a leithéid]; agus go mbéadh dhá cholamhain ar gach leathanach i dtreo is go mbéadh socrú sásamhail ar na pictiúirí. Beidh na 'bluic' le fagháil i n-aisce. Tá i n-aighe agam freisin go mbéadh réamhrádh goirid ann le duine éigin clúach.

Má tá do Roinn sásta glacadh leis an tairiscint seo, tá sé riachtanach go ndéanfaí an leabhar d'fhoillsiú láithreach, ins an am go mbéadh an díol is mó air. Ar an ádhbhar san, is mian liom go ndéanfaí breith do Roinne do chur i n-iúl domh, má's feidir, fá chionn míosa. Is mise, le meas, Brian Ó Nualláin.⁴⁰

(Dear Sir, I wish to offer your department the opportunity to publish the enclosed humorous essays in book form. Those pieces I consider suitable, I have marked with a red cross [X] and a blue line [A] beside the paragraphs I believe should be omitted. I have no wish per se to introduce English but I suggest that those pieces in which English and Irish are intermixed, e.g. the 'dictionary' pieces be allowed.

I suggest the pieces be printed consecutively with some divider between them [i.e. a star, an asterisk, a number or some such]; and that there be two columns on each page so that the pictures will be appropriately spaced. The blocks are available free of charge. I also intend to have a short introduction written by some famous person.⁴¹

If your department is satisfied with this offer, it is imperative that the book be published immediately in order to have the greatest sale. Therefore, I wish your department's decision be conveyed to me within a month if possible. Yours respectfully, Brian Ó Nualláin.)

Ó Néill forwarded the letter and materials to Mac Lellan. The attached note confirms a prior discussion with the Minister for Education, Tomás Ó Deirg, regarding the endeavour:

⁴⁰ National Archives of Ireland Ed/An Gúm Ls 97-27.

⁴¹ The reference to an introduction by a famous person recalls Ó Nualláin's plan to invite Sean O'Casey to pen an introduction to *An Béal Bocht*.

Before submitting the enclosed, Mr Nolan [sic] [‘Myles na gCopaleen’] made some preliminary inquiries from me as to the possibility of having these articles published in book form. He mentioned that it was quite a usual thing to have the columnist’s work so collected and published. I mentioned the matter to the Minister and showed him the attached cuttings when I received them. The Minister thinks that the material might be published if the Department sees no grave objection. He is anxious, however, that, should it be decided to publish, the publication should be made as attractive as possible and the price low – he mentioned about 2/- . In addition to the last paragraph of his letter, Mr Nolan [sic] also emphasised verbally the importance of having an early decision.⁴²

This interaction is noteworthy as it connects, both verbally and in writing, Ó Nualláin the civil servant with ‘Myles na gCopaleen’ the columnist; it undermines any future protestation that Ó Nualláin was not, as far as the Irish Civil Service was concerned, ‘Myles na gCopaleen’ of *The Irish Times*. It further suggests that Ó Deirg, the Fianna Fáil Government Minister, knew of Ó Nualláin’s moonlighting as a columnist. If Ó Deirg knew, it is highly probable that other Ministers, including Frank Aiken and Paddy Smith, also knew. While ‘Flann O’Brien’ had been outed as Brian O’Nolan in 1939,⁴³ this instance may be the first outing of ‘Myles na gCopaleen’ as Brian Ó Nualláin.

In approaching Ó Néill rather than Mac Lellan, Ó Nualláin may have hoped to circumvent the ordinary application process overseen by the latter. In addition, he may also have hoped that Ó Néill, as a man of literary taste, would prove more sympathetic and appreciative of a fellow novelist’s creative work.⁴⁴ Whatever the intentions, Mac Lellan would not be circumvented and again played a critical role in this application as he did in all An Gúm’s transactions. Mac Lellan saw the note on 24 April. What makes the note extraordinary, indeed perhaps unique, is that the Minister of Education apparently involved himself in the decision-making progress. Standard practice at An Gúm required manuscript submissions be sent to two, sometimes three, readers for

⁴² National Archives of Ireland Ed/An Gúm Ls 97–27.

⁴³ See W.O.G. Lofts BC Ms 1997.027 1/29. 56. 2; see also Seán Ó Faoláin, ‘Irish Gasconade,’ *John O’London’s Weekly* (24 March 1939): 970.

⁴⁴ Ó Néill, who grew up on the Aran Islands after his RIC father’s transfer from Tuam, Galway, earned a B.A. and M.A. from Queen’s University Galway, but abandoned a university position to study with John Strachan, the renowned Celtic scholar at Manchester University and, later, Freiburg University. See Diarmuid Breathnach and Máire Ní Mhurchú, ‘Ó NÉILL, Seosamh (1878–1953),’ *aimn.ie* (2015): <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=100>. Furthermore, Ó Néill had authored five novels in English: *Wind from the North* (1934), *Land under England* (1935), *Day of Wrath* (1936), *Philip* (1940) and *Chosen by the Queen* (1947). Thus, Ó Néill shared similar linguistic and academic experiences and interests (including science-fiction) with Ó Nualláin. His wife Mary Devenport, a graduate of the Dublin College of Art and a poet in her own right, hosted a Thursday ‘At Home’ in their house which Yeats and other luminaries attended. Consequently, she became his consultant when he was writing *A Vision*.

review. That does not appear to have happened here. Rather Mac Lellan reviewed the material himself, an indication, perhaps, that this case was exceptional and reflective of the author's status as a senior Civil Servant and a man of influence. Mac Lellan's report on 29 April was unambiguous: '*Ní thig liom a mholadh don Ghúm na haistí seo d'athfhoillsiughadh*' (I cannot recommend that An Gúm republish these essays). He justified his recommendation as follows:

1. *Neithe suaracha neambuana iad nárbh fhiú iad do bhuanghadh i bhfuirm leabhair.*
 2. *Aistí iad do Bhéarlóirí a mbeadh sláimín beag Gaedhilge aca. Ní dóigh liom go bhfagadh (sic) Gaedhilgeóir dúthchais aon taithneamh ionnta; ní mór an Béarla do bheith i n-aighe an duine a léigheann iad. Mar leis na 'foclóirí' atá ann, is sa Bhéarla atá an greann ar fad.*
 3. *Tá daoine ann a mheasann gur greann gach seafóid, agus dá sheafóideacht an tseafóid is mó an greann a bhaineann siad aisti. Dar liom féin de, is beag é mo dhóthain dá leitheid. Tá cuid den ghreann san aige bunuighthe ar slighthe greannmhara chun Gaedhilge do sgríobhadh, agus ní thig liom na daoine do lochtughadh a mheasann gur ag fonomhaid fán nGaedhilge a bhíonn sé. Má's greann é 'an Gallaic Léig' do thabhairt mar ainm ar Chonradh na Gaedhilge, is greann é a fhágann gan gháiridhe mé.*
 4. *Do mhaithfinn a lán dó dá mbeadh Gaedhilg mhaith aige, ach tá na haistí sin lán-suas de thuaiplisí Gaedhilge – tuaiplisí de gach uile sórd – sa leitriughadh, sa ngramadaigh, 'sna múnlaí cainnte, etc. [Tá dá thuaiplis mhóra sa leidir a sgríobh sé chun na Roinne]. Seo roinnt sampla: Tá amhras orm a bhfuilid dáiriribh; [an ceist Atáthar ag pléidhe]; Do chuir sé ceist den Gallaic léig; Bhí ceangal idir ... agus ... [They 'tied' in the contest]; Aimsear maith [sic] tabhairt isteach móna í seo; Fáthach ceoil eile [f. eile ceoil]; Slán mar a h-innstear. [slán mar a n-innstear é]; Tá mo chuid léighinn ag sciobadh leis mé; Bíonn sé costasach ag foillsiugadh na n-uimhreach na hu. d'fhoillsiughadh); 'ag leigint airgead amach'; 'bhí tagairt agam air'; 'ó'n mbuidhean' etc, etc.; trucall (trucail); éafacht (éifeacht); rial (riaghal), etc; 'ach b'fhéidir go bhfuil sé ag magadh fúm (ináit b'fhéidir gur ag m.f. atá sé); 'Ní ghlaodhann siad Cáit uirthi anois' (i náit Ní Cáit a ghlaodhann said uirthi anois).*
 5. *San áit cheart a cuireadh clódh ar na haistí seo agus measaim go bhfuilid léigte cheana féin ag na daoine a gheobhadh aon taithneamh ionnta.*
1. They are miserable transient things not worth making permanent in book form.
 2. They are essays for English-speakers with a little Irish. I doubt native Irish speakers would enjoy them. One must think in English to appreciate them. With regard to the 'dictionaries' provided, all the humour is English based.
 3. There are those who think that all nonsense is humorous, and the more nonsensical the funnier. Personally, I don't care for them. Much of the humour

is based on funny ways of writing Irish and I can't fault those who believe he is mocking Irish. If it is funny to call the Gaelic League the Gallaic Léig, it is a humour that leaves me cold.

4. I could forgive him much if it were written in good Irish, but they are full of errors of every kind: spelling, grammar, forms of speech. (Indeed, there are two major errors in the letter he wrote to the Dept). [The remainder of Mac Lellan's fourth point is an enumeration of grammatical, orthographical, and syntactical 'errors.']

Mac Lellan concludes by stating (5) that these essays were published in the appropriate venue and those who might enjoy them had already read them.

On the same day, 29 April, a handwritten note is appended on the margin: '*Ní dóigh liom gur cheart cló do chur ar an adhbhar so, go mor-mhór agus a theann atá an sparán fé láthair*' (I do not think it right to publish these especially as the purse strings are tight at present). The Departmental Secretary agreed on 30 April, and on 9 May, 'SÓN' (possibly Seosamh Ó Néill based on the initials) added an additional handwritten note: '*Aontuighim leis freisin mar gheall ar a laige atá an Ghaedhilge de réir tuairisc*' (I agree also on the ground of the weakness of the Irish). The same day, a note '*Aontuighim leis an moladh seo*' (I concur with this recommendation) was added with the initials 'TÓD' (possibly Tomás Ó Deirg). It appears, therefore, that officials, both elected and civil servants at the highest levels, reviewed and rejected Ó Nualláin's proposal. Four days later, the Departmental Secretary requested a draft response to Mac Uí Nualláin be prepared. That response was available by 20 May but an annotation, dated 19 May, by Mac Lellan notes: '*Dréacht leis seo. 'Sé a luighead a deibhmhniú i gcásanna mar sin 'seadh is fearr é*' (Draft attached. The less confirmed/established in such cases the better). The following unsigned letter, dated 29 May 1941, appears to have been sent to Ó Nualláin:

Maidir le do litir de'n 15 Aibreán, iarann an tAire Oideachais orm a rádh gurab oth leis nach mbeadh na h-aistí grinn a chuiris fé bhraghaid na Roinne feileamhnach i gcomhair foilisiúcháin fé nGúm. Ar an adhbhar so caithfidh mé iad a seoladh thar n-ais chugat leis seo. Táimid buidheach díot as ucht an t-adhbhar so do thairscint dúinn.⁴⁵

(Concerning your letter of 15 April, the Minister for Education requests me to inform you that he regrets that the humorous essays you submitted to the Department are not suitable as an An Gúm publication. Therefore, I return them to you included here. We are grateful to you for offering this material to us).⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The *Oifigeach Foilseacháin* (Publications Officer) saw this draft.

⁴⁶ The file also contains a note from Mac Lellan, dated 31 May, indicating: '*Cuirtear i dtaisce mar 233/?? [doiléir]*' (Put aside/Keep as 233/?? [unclear]).

This rejection occurred just after the London Blitz's bombs caused fires that destroyed warehouses which stored copies of *At Swim-Two-Birds*. The letter also marked almost twelve months since *The Third Policeman*'s rejection in March 1940. In hindsight, An Gúm's decision may be considered the second rejection and third cruel blow Ó Nualláin endured in a twelve-month period. Ó Nualláin had already been rejected by British and American publishing houses; now he was being rejected by the Irish-language publishing house administered by his civil servant peers and which had issued his uncles' and brothers' work to acclaim.

Mac Lellan's stark critique of Ó Nualláin's Irish reflects prevalent attitudes of the time toward literary licence. Any deviation from the standard range of vernacular language was met with disapproval, and the western and Munster dialects held a privileged status over the Ulster-inflected urban dialect uniquely cultivated within the Ó Nualláin household.⁴⁷ Mac Lellan's view also reflects many cultural nationalists' inability to find any humour in Ó Nualláin's columns, particularly in his commentary on Conradh na Gaeilge/The Gaelic League or the Irish language. Had Ó Nualláin subsequently become aware of Mac Lellan's contempt, it might explain his attacks on An Gúm in 1957.⁴⁸

Mairéad Gillan

Given the preceding communications and negotiations, Ó Nualláin's 1946 claim that he 'was asked to translate a play into Irish for the Gúm, which [he] did'⁴⁹ appears somewhat curious. Presumably, the play in question is John Weldon (Brinsley MacNamara)'s controversial *Margaret Gillan*,⁵⁰ which enjoyed several productions after its July 1933 Abbey premiere, and which Ó Nualláin's friend Liam Mac Réamoinn (Liam Redmond)⁵¹ directed at the UCD Dramatic Society in December 1934 and again at the Peacock in 1935 and in the Abbey in 1937.⁵² In 1934, Niall Sheridan reviewed the published play in UCD's

⁴⁷ On this point, see Noel Ó Murchadha, *An Ghaeilge sa Nua-Aoiseacht Dhéanach* (An Spidéal, Conamara: Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2018).

⁴⁸ See Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 135.

⁴⁹ Seán MacEntee Archive P67/281; *Letters*, 151.

⁵⁰ It was Weldon (MacNamara) who initially suggested Ó Nualláin contact A.M. Heath about *At Swim-Two-Birds*. See *Irish Independent* (25 September 1950): 8.

⁵¹ Redmond – in addition to marrying his fellow UCD student, Barbara MacDonagh, Donagh MacDonagh's sister – was among the founders of WAAMA (Writers', Artists', Actors', and Musicians' Association), which featured in *Cruiskeen Lawn*.

⁵² An anonymous reviewer of the present article notes that the play underwent five productions in this period. 1) 17–22 July 1933, directed by Arthur Shields (at the Abbey); 2) 11–16 September 1933, directed by Lennox Robinson (at the Abbey); 3) December 1934, directed by Liam Mac Réamoinn (Liam Redmond) (at the University College Dublin Dramatic Society); 4) The UCD production ran at the Peacock for a week in February 1935, directed by Liam Mac Réamoinn (Liam Redmond); 5) 15–20 February 1937, directed by Liam Mac Réamoinn (Liam Redmond) (at the Abbey).

Comhthrom Féinne.⁵³ In addition, Donagh MacDonagh had directed a University College Dublin student production of the same play in May 1935.⁵⁴

Archival sources confirm that An Gúm acknowledged receipt of Ó Nualláin's manuscript, via a postcard dated 30 April 1943, and the original printed text which had been posted the previous day.⁵⁵ An Gúm issued a standard contract, dated 23 January 1943, in which Ireland's Minister for Education and Brian Ó Nualláin, who resided at Carraig Dhubh, entered into an agreement to publish his translation of *Margaret Gillan* no later than 30 April 1943 unless subsequently amended. Payment was at the rate of 15/- to 20/- per 1000 words in the original text.⁵⁶ A postcard, dated 28 January 1943 and initialled by 'Ní L,' acknowledges receipt of a letter and the signed contract, posted by Ó Nualláin on 27 January. Both this postcard and the subsequent postcard in the archive alert the addressee to the fact that An Gúm no longer operated from its premises at Marlborough Street but was now located at Hume Street. The card also notes An Gúm's address but the phrase 'Saorstát Éireann' is crossed out and replaced with 'Éire.' In the course of this year, both the Abbey Theatre (*Faustus Kelly*, premiered 25 January 1943) and the Gaiety Theatre (*Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*, premiered 22 March 1943) staged plays by Ó Nualláin, while his *Thirst* had run for a record number of weeks as part of a Christmas show in the Gate Theatre during the Christmas–New Year season of 1942 (premiered 26 December 1942). The offer of a stage translation by such a dramatist was not inconsequential and represented a considerable opportunity for An Gúm.

Mac Lellan forwarded a reader's report to Ó Nualláin on 8 May 1943 and enquired if he preferred the Gaelic or Roman font – a matter of no little aesthetic, political, or cultural importance at the time.⁵⁷ The unknown reader suggested '*cuid mhaith*' (several/numerous) changes to render the Irish more natural and, in addition, proffered several examples of inconsistencies, dialect switching, and spelling mistakes.⁵⁸ The manuscript, in the reviewer's opinion, required:

⁵³ 'Review,' *Comhthrom Féinne: The College Magazine* 9, no. 2 (November 1934): 6.

⁵⁴ I am grateful to the same anonymous reviewer who pointed out that the December 1934 UCD Dramatic Society production ran at the Peacock in February 1935 and who also noted that *The Irish Times* lists Liam Mac Réamoinn (Liam Redmond) as the director. 'University College Notes,' *The Irish Times* (10 December 1934): 9. Donagh Mac Donagh, however, claims that he (Mac Donagh) was the director with Mac Réamoinn as producer. Donagh MacDonagh, 'Club Sans Club,' *University Review* 2, no. 3/4, Jubilee Issue (Autumn–Winter, 1960): 94.

⁵⁵ National Archives of Ireland Ed/An Gúm Ls 97–27. Among the Flann O'Brien archive at the Burns Library, Boston College, is an annotated and corrected carbon copy of the play dated March 29 1943. See Box 4, folder 9.

⁵⁶ National Archives of Ireland, Ed/ An Gúm Ls 97–27. The reason for the apparent absence of any correspondence regarding how, and when this play was selected, agreed on, or when the proposal was approved, is unclear.

⁵⁷ National Archives of Ireland, Ed/ An Gúm Ls 97–27; *Letters*, 136.

⁵⁸ National Archives of Ireland, Ed/ An Gúm Ls 97–27; *Letters*, 136.

cuid mhaith deisighthe ag teastáil ó'n aistriúchán so ó thaobh nadúracht' na Gaedhilge. Cuirim i gcás nithe mar 'Nach iongantach mar bhíonn fear uaireannta dílis go dtí lá a bháis' mar aistriúchán ar 'A man can be faithful sometimes his life long. 'Tis wonderful.' Cibé mar atá an Béarla, tá 'uaireannta' agus 'go dtí lá a bháis' codarsnach ag a chéile sa Ghaedhilg.

Scríobh an t-aistrightheóir 'ag an Mhaighistir,' 'ar an tséala,' leis an tsiopa; 7c., agus 'ó'n bhfuinneog,' 'ar an mbord,' 'ar an saoghal' 7c. Níor mhisde dó féachaint le módh éigin cinnte do leanamhaint i dtaobh a léitheidi sin. Ba cheart dó, freisin, ceartú do dhéanamh ar leithéidí 'aon thagairt,' 'cé'n bhealach,' 'an aibhleog a fhadú ath-uair 'na theinidh,' 'nár bh méanar' 'b'fhéidir go mbeidh' 'táim cinnte go ndéanaidh 7c.

(a good amount of alteration as regards the naturalness of the Irish language. I mention items such as 'Nach iongantach mar bhíonn fear uaireannta dílis go dtí lá a bháis' as a translation of 'A man can be faithful sometimes his life long. 'Tis wonderful.' Whatever about the English, 'uaireannta (sometimes)' and 'go dtí lá a bháis (until his day of death)' are contradictory in Irish.

The translator wrote 'ag an Mhaighistir,' 'ar an tséala,' 'leis an tsiopa,' etc., agus 'ó'n bhfuinneog,' 'ar an mbord,' 'ar an saoghal' etc. He must identify some consistency in this matter. He should also correct such things as 'aon thagairt,' 'cé'n bhealach,' 'an aibhleog a fhadú ath-uair 'na theinidh,' 'nár bh méanar' 'b'fhéidir go mbeidh' 'táim cinnte go ndéanaidh etc., etc.)

In conclusion, the reader doubted that the characters' names needed to be 'exactly translated' but felt 'go mb'fharr "Maighréad Ní Ghilleáin," cuir i gcás ná "Maighréad Gilion"⁵⁹ (that 'Maighréad Ní Ghilleáin' was preferable to 'Maighréad Gilion').

Annotations in English on the letter, presumably by Ó Nualláin, read: 'This is quite wrong. If anything, it would be Maighréad Bean Uí Ghilion.' In response, Ó Nualláin questioned the matter on 10 May in a letter to Mac Lellan.

A Chara, Admháil í seo go bhfuair eas do litir den 8adh Bealtaine agus a raibh ag gabháil leithi, maidir le "Margaret Gillan"; féachfad chuig a bhfuil luaite innti. Deir do léitheoir: "Maidir leis na leaganacha Gaedhilge de na hainmneacha ... mheasfainn go mb'fharr 'Maighréad Ní Ghilleáin' ná 'Mairghéad Gilon'" De réir ciall agus úsáid an fhocail, is mar a chéile 'ní' agus 'inghean' agus is léir go mbeadh sé cearr ar fad 'Ní Ghilleáin' a chur mar shloinneadh na mná so. Má déantar úsáid den ainm '(O) Gilleáin,' ní fheictear domh go bhfuil dul as acht 'Mairghreád Bean Uí Ghiollain' do thabhairt ar an mhnaoi agus gan amhras ní dhéanfadh sin cúis mar teideal. Ní fheicim go bhfuil aon léigheas ar an scéal

⁵⁹ National Archives of Ireland, Ed/ An Gúm Ls 97-27; Letters, 136.

ach leagan éigin ‘nea-ghaelach’ mar ‘Gilion’ a úsáid. Tá tábhacht sa phoinnte seo de bhrígh go bhfuil teideal an dráma fighte ann agus chuirfinn spéis i n-aon rud eile atá le rádh ag do léitheor ‘na thaobh.’⁶⁰

(Dear Sir, I acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 8 May and its contents regarding ‘Margaret Gillan’ and I will attend to the matters raised therein. Your reader states ‘Regarding the Irish versions of the names [...] I consider “Maighréad Ní Ghilleáin” preferable to “Mairghéad Gilon”.’ ‘Ní’ and ‘inghean,’ according to meaning and usage are the same, and the use of ‘Ní Ghilleáin’ as this woman’s surname would be clearly bizarre. If the name ‘(O) Gilleáin’ is to be used, I see no alternative to calling this woman ‘Mairghréad Bean Uí Ghiollain’ and this is entirely unsatisfactory as a title. I see no alternative but to employ some ‘non-Irish’ version such as ‘Gilion.’ This point is critical as it concerns the title of the play, and I would be interested in hearing anything your reader has to say on this matter.)

The reader, whose response Mac Lellan provided on 13 May, retorted that they could not understand what Ó Nualláin meant by the title of the play; that the translator should be asked to explain himself more clearly; and that the translation and original be returned to them so they may examine the text.⁶¹

‘Ní thuigim ó n-a leitir (‘Flann’) cad é an smaoineamh atá ina aigne mar gheall ar theideal an dráma féin, agus ar an adhbhar sin, measaim go mba cheart iarraidh air an smaoineamh sin do mhíniú níos soiléire agus an t-aistriúchán mar aon leis an mbunleabhar Béarla do chur arais chun go bhfeadfaí an scéal do scrúdú.’

(I fail to understand from his letter (‘Flann’) what he has in mind regarding the play’s title and therefore, I believe he should be requested to articulate that idea more clearly, and the translation, as well as the original English text, be returned in order for the matter to be examined.)

Two days later, making little effort to hide his displeasure, Ó Nualláin responded:

Is iongantach liom ar fad a n-abarann do léitheóir agus is léir go gcaithfidh mé brígh má litre a chuireas chugat cheana do mhíniú athuair. 1) (Mrs) Margaret Gillion iseadh ainm na mná, baintreach atá innti. 2) Thug mise ‘Maighréad Gilion’ uirthi; deir do léitheóir gur bhfearr leis ‘Maighréad Ní Ghilleáin.’ 3) Ní chiallaíonn ‘Maighréad Ní Ghilleáin’ Mrs Margaret Gillan; ciallaíonn sé ‘Miss Margaret Gillan.’ 4) Dá bhrígh sin tá do léitheóir ar seachrán ar fad nuair

⁶⁰ National Archives of Ireland, Ed/ An Gúm Ls 97-27; *Letters*, 136.

⁶¹ National Archives of Ireland, Ed/An Gúm Ls 97-27; *Letters*, 137.

a deir sé gur bhfearr ‘Maighréad Ní Ghilleáin’ mar ainm na mná. 5) Cheana, má shíltear go bhfuil sé riachtanach úsáid do sheasamh de shloinneadh ‘ghaelach’ mar ‘Gilleán,’ níl dul as acht ‘Maighréad Bean Uí Ghilleáin’ do thabhairt ar an mhnaoi. 6) D’fhágfadh sin gur ‘Maighréad Bean Uí Ghilleáin’ a bheadh mar theideal ar an dráma, rud dar ndóigh nach ndéanfadh cúis. 7. Ní foláir, dá bhrígh sin, sloinneadh éigin ‘neamh-ghaelach’ d’úsáid. Sin go beacht a bhfuil i gceist agam. Má’s féidir le do léitheoir an cruadhchas atá luaite agam d’fhuascailt, ní féidir liomsa. Ní ceaduithe teideal an dráma a athrú.⁶²

(I am amazed by what your reader says, and it appears I have to explain again the letter I have already sent. 1) The woman’s name is (Mrs) Margaret Gillion and she is a widow. 2) I named her ‘Maighréad Gilion,’ your reader would prefer ‘Maighréad Ní Ghilleáin.’ 3) ‘Maighréad Ní Ghilleáin’ does not mean ‘Mrs Margaret Gillan’; it means ‘Miss Margaret Gillan.’ 4) Therefore your reader is entirely lost in saying he would prefer ‘Maighréad Ní Ghilleáin’ as her name. 5) Similarly, if it is considered vital to use an Irish name such as ‘Gilleán,’ there is no other option than ‘Maighréad Bean Uí Ghilleáin.’ 6) That means the play’s title will be ‘Maighréad Bean Uí Ghilleáin’ and that will not do at all. 7) Another surname, a non-Irish surname therefore, must be used. That is precisely what I mean. If your reader can solve the difficulty I have mentioned, I cannot. Altering the play’s title is not permitted.)

No further correspondence exists in the file and the reader presumably conceded the point. But just in case, Ó Nualláin played his ace card on 22 May. He sent a letter to Mac Lellan, enclosing the manuscript, the original play, and a note that read ‘Níl an t-ughdar sásta go ndéanfaí teideal an dráma a athrú’⁶³ (The author is not willing to have the title altered). It appears that Ó Nualláin had contacted MacNamara and secured his agreement that Ó Nualláin was correct in matter of interpretation. An Gúm conceded on the final day of the month: ‘Táimid sásta “Maighréad Gillan” beith mar theideal ar an dráma so, ós rud é go ndeireann tú nach bhfuil “an t-ughdar sásta go ndéanfaí teideal an dráma a athrú”⁶⁴ (We are satisfied with ‘Maighréad Gillan’ as a title as the author is unwilling to change the title).⁶⁵

The letter, however, observed that the translation as submitted lacked most of page 9. Ó Nualláin subsequently supplied the complete text on 10 August:

⁶² National Archives of Ireland, Ed/An Gúm Ls 97–27; *Letters*, 137–8.

⁶³ National Archives of Ireland, Ed/An Gúm Ls 97–27; *Letters*, 140.

⁶⁴ National Archives of Ireland, Ed/An Gúm Ls 97–27; *Letters*, 140.

⁶⁵ For a longer discussion of this disagreement between Ó Nualláin and An Gúm’s reader concerning the translation of the protagonist’s name, see Richard T. Murphy, ‘Cad é atá in ainm? Maighréad Gilion by Brian O’Nolan and Mairéad Gillan by “Brian Ó Nualláin”’, in *Flann O’Brien: Acting Out*, eds. Paul Fagan and Dieter Fuchs (Cork: Cork University Press, 2022), 247–59.

A Chara, Cuirim arais chugat leis seo an t-aistriú, taréis dom an litriú do shimpliú agus earráidí cló agus eile thall agus abhus do cheartú. Einní atá fágtha gan ceartú, is féidir teacht suas leis ar an bprobhtha. Maidir le'd litir dheireannaigh, is oth liom a rádh go deachaidh sí amú; má chuireann tú cóip chugam, déanfad an pasáiste a fágadh ar lár d'aistriú.

Maidir le cló, sé mo thuairim gur fearr a d'oirfeadh an cló gaelach colmcille de bhrigh go bhfuil an fuirm iodáileach le fail ann; 'na éamuis sin, bheadh sé riachtanach feidhm a bhaint as an gcló rómhánach. Bheinn buidheach díot dá bhféadfai íocaíocht do dhéanamh anois, agus de réir an ráta maximum, má's féidir é. Mise le meas, P.S. Cuirfeadh chugat fresin an tuairisc stáitse ar Mír 1.⁶⁶

(Dear Sir, I return enclosed the translation having simplified the spelling and correcting other typos here and there. Anything left uncorrected may be addressed in the proofs. Regarding your last letter, I regret to say it went astray; if you send me a copy, I shall translate the missing passage.

In the matter of typeface, I am of the opinion that the Colmcille Gaelic font is best as it contains italics, absent that, it would be necessary to use the Roman font. I would be grateful to you for payment now and at the maximum rate if possible. Yours. P.S. I shall also send you the stage direction for the first Act.)

The typeface referenced here is the 1936 typeface, named for the sixth-century Irish saint, designed by Colm Ó Lochlainn (founder of the Three Candles Press) and Karl Uhlemann. As Ó Nualláin had requested immediate payment, 'M. Ní L.' responded on the 12 June, on behalf of Mac Lellan, informing him that payment was not possible as Mac Lellan was on vacation. Presumably, Ó Nualláin subsequently received payment because on 16 September Mac Lellan wrote asking him to return the original English text.⁶⁷ Thus An Gúm finally accepted a work by Brian Ó Nualláin.

Maireád Gillan, printed in black with light green wrappers, appeared in 1953 with Brian Ó Nualláin identified as its translator on the front cover. That cover contains no mention of Brinsley McNamara, the original author, a departure for an An Gúm publication. While the book appears to have had only one issue, images of it appear not only in green covers, but also blue covers.⁶⁸ Fonsie Mealy's Auctioneers, nonetheless, described the play in 2017 as follows: 8vo D. [Oifig an tSoláthair] 1953. First Edn., hf. title, 97pp., orig. blue green ptd. wrappers.⁶⁹ Myles na Gopaleen marked the translation's

⁶⁶ National Archives of Ireland, Ed/An Gúm Ls 97-27; *Letters*, 142-3.

⁶⁷ National Archives of Ireland, Ed/An Gúm Ls 97-27; *Letters*, 142-3.

⁶⁸ See, for example, the images at Dublin Bookbrowsers <https://www.abebooks.com/first-edition/Mairead-Gillan-Nuallain-Brian-Myles-gCopaleen.Flann/30384694533/bd#&gid=1&pid=1> and Ulysses Rare Books <https://www.rarebooks.ie/books/literature/mairead-gillan-1953/>

⁶⁹ Fonsie Mealy Auctioneers Summer Rare Book & Collectors' Sale, 7-15 July 2020.

publication in his 31 October *Cruiskeen Lawn* column, in which he describes receiving a parcel containing six copies of a book:

I opened one of the copies, rather idly, in the middle and forthwith found some locutions of which I took a poor enough view. I made some notes, I did not like the stuff at all and had a vague intention of publicly denouncing it. After a while I went back to page 1, to find who the unskilled author was.

I found myself looking at my own name.

Then yesteryear re-dawned.⁷⁰

In an off-set italicised sentence, Myles na Gopaleen reveals himself to be Brian Ó Nualláin, the translator of *Margaret Gillan*. More intriguing still, the column reveals that the whole process with An Gúm was, for the author, akin to an ‘experience of slavery.’⁷¹ Myles reviews his ‘preposterous correspondence [...] with some native-speaking Gael in the Department of Education, who took great exception to [his] translation of the title to “Maireád Gillan,”’ asserting that he ‘stated the situation in one-syllable words, but it took [him] about three months to win [his] simple point.’⁷² In closing, Myles returns to his mature assessment of the translation, playing on the uncertainty regarding his identity to claim an objective perspective on its merits: ‘I think I will review this book. Not this me, but the other me, wrote it. Was it James Joyce who pointed out that all human tissue completely renews itself every 7 years?’⁷³

Ironically, just as Brian Ó Nualláin published a work under his own name with one branch of the Civil Service, he parted ways with the Customs House and another branch of the Civil Service in the most acrimonious circumstances. On 5 February 1953, Ó Nualláin ‘resigned’ from the Civil Service. He may have won the battle over the title with An Gúm and the Department of Education, but he lost the war, his official title, and his higher pension with the Department of Local Government.

Conclusion

The correspondence between Ó Nualláin and An Gúm’s officials in the Department of Education – in which his younger brother Micheál Ó Nualláin later worked as a highly regarded art inspector – reveals previously unknown efforts by Ó Nualláin to publish material from his pre-*Irish Times* period as well as material from *Cruiskeen Lawn* in Irish. These unsuccessful efforts add further context to letters regarding *Maireád*

⁷⁰ Myles na Gopaleen, ‘Gael Warning,’ *Cruiskeen Lawn*, *The Irish Times* (31 October 1953): 6.

⁷¹ na Gopaleen, ‘Gael Warning,’ 6.

⁷² na Gopaleen, ‘Gael Warning,’ 6.

⁷³ na Gopaleen, ‘Gael Warning,’ 6.

Gillan published in *The Collected Letters*; more importantly, they offer an insight into the attitude of fellow Civil Servants and language activists toward Ó Nualláin and his writings. The criticism that he wrote primarily for English speakers, rather than native Irish speakers, reveals the prevailing attitude toward Irish, its unquestioning acceptance of ‘hard primitivism’ and the idolisation of the imagined rural, devoutly Catholic, native Irish speaker. Bilingual, urban intellectuals, such as the Ó Nualláin family, did not feature in linguistic debates or language planning. Such thinking failed to realise that in writing ‘essays for English speakers with a little Irish,’ Ó Nualláin, in actuality, wrote for the majority. However, official state policy found the fact that ‘one must think in English to appreciate them’ unacceptable and ran counter to the central tenet that Irish political independence rested on linguistic and cultural distinctiveness. The indictment that English-language based thought is a prerequisite to appreciate the work speaks to fears of linguistic contamination, linguistic intermingling, and the dreaded *Béarlachas*.⁷⁴ Equally frustrating to Ó Nualláin’s opponents, perhaps, was the realisation that his columns’ popular success indicated the revival project’s failure to reach the impossible targets set for it – a total language reversal shift – as the first generation raised and educated in the Free State read and enjoyed such a hybrid linguistic form in the State’s least nationalist and most liberal daily publication. At the time under discussion, the Irish State was highly sensitive to linguistic criticism regarding the ‘national’ language. Issues of font choice, standard orthography, and settled pronunciation – complicated by three main dialects – remained contentious and, on occasion, functioned as a proxy for covert Civil War resentments. Were An Gúm to publish such a text – whether in the form of Ó Nualláin’s early experimental works or his diglossic *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns – the organisation’s many critics would seize on it as further proof of the State’s incompetence, disregard for native speakers, and desire to corrupt and pervert the local dialects in favour of a central, state-sanctioned Dublin-Irish.

Risteard Ó Foghludha (Fiachra Éilgeach)’s role in Ó Nualláin’s trajectory as a bilingual writer merits closer scrutiny as he also advised the rejection of *An Béal Bocht* in a reader’s report for Browne & Nolan in 1941.⁷⁵ Given the close relationship between ‘Aistear Pheadair Dhuibh,’ published under the name Brian Ó Nualláin, and *An Béal Bocht*, published by Myles na gCopaleen, it begs the question if the two rebuffs are

⁷⁴ These sentiments also rehearse the public attack on Seán Ó Riordáin when he published *Eireaball Spideoige* in 1952. In this instance, it was Máire Mhac an tSaoi – Pádraig de Brún’s niece and Sean McEntee’s daughter – who objected. See Seán Ó Coileán, *Seán Ó Riordáin – Beatha Agus Saothar* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar Tta, 1985), 234–66.

⁷⁵ See Ó Conaire, *Myles na Gaeilge*, 103; and Frank McNally, ‘An Irishman’s Diary: Margins of Terror,’ *The Irish Times* (25 January 2022): <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/margins-of-terror-frank-mcnally-on-the-irish-language-editor-and-arch-pedant-risteard-o-foghludha-1.4785563>.

connected?⁷⁶ On reading *An Béal Bocht*, did Ó Foghludha connect it to the earlier piece and connect Brian Ó Nualláin with Myles na gCopaleen?⁷⁷ We may speculate what might have happened had An Gúm sided with Seán Ó Cuirrín and published *Aistear Pheadair Dhuibh agus Aistí Eile* at a time when Michael Victor's family were in reduced financial circumstances and in need of extra income to offset the loss of his father's salary as a Revenue Commissioner. Furthermore, had An Gúm published the proposed columns from *Cruiskeen Lawn* might Myles have continued to write in Irish? An Gúm, the major publisher of Irish-language material in the State and arguably the only option available to him, twice rejected Brian Ó Nualláin in the period 1937–41 and only reluctantly accepted a translation in 1943 that remained unpublished until 1953. Coupled with the rejection of *The Third Policeman* in 1940, and the failure of *At Swim-Two-Birds* to attain critical and popular acclaim, the years following his father's death proved a series of disappointments and rejections. T.S. Eliot famously rejected James Joyce, George Orwell, and W.H. Auden among others from Faber and Faber,⁷⁸ but these authors had other options and opportunities. Ó Nualláin, as an Irish-language writer, did not.

Gearóid Ó Nualláin had cautioned that 'we want more than mere translations. We want original books, written in the light of the best literature of other countries.'⁷⁹ An Gúm, established to promote and encourage new writing in Irish rejected the most creative and imaginative writer in Irish to emerge at that point, not once, but twice. The righteous resentment of any satire or humour focused on the Gaelic League is revealing here. Ó Nualláin's critique of the organisation – in which his father, mother, uncles, and aunts participated – was unacceptable in official quarters. The League was an august body: its alumni occupied positions of power and influence throughout the Free State. P.H. Pearse may have called for literary work that considered 'the stress and poetry and comedy of the language movement,'⁸⁰ but in the Irish Free State and early Republic, neither the League nor the Language Movement could be mocked.

⁷⁶ As Radvan Markus observes, in so far as it is 'crammed with all the familiar "Gaelic" clichés, [Aistear Pheadair Dhuibh] reads as a condensed version of *An Béal Bocht*. [...] [T]he text lists a number of props and situations well-known from *An Béal Bocht* and its Donegal literary sources – such as the encounter with a seanchaí, the five-naggin bottle or a night courting scene – and culminates in the description of drownings at sea and wakes of the dead.' Radvan Markus, 'The Prison of Language: Brian O'Nolan, *An Béal Bocht*, and Language Determinism,' *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 4, no. 1 (2018): 41, available at: <https://doi.org/10.16995/pr.3229>.

⁷⁷ Additionally, a chapter of *An Béal Bocht* (as yet unpublished) under the name Brian Ó Nualláin appeared in *Éire: Bliainiris Ghaedheal: Rogha Saothair Ghaedheal mBeo 1940*, edited by Ciarán Ó Nualláin. This may be the text referred to as 'a carbon copy, chapter eight only, before 1941' (Box 5, folder 17) in the Boston College archive at the Burns Library, box 5, folder 17.

⁷⁸ See Tony Faber, 'A Legendary Publishing House's Most Infamous Rejection Letters: When Faber & Faber's T.S. Eliot Passed on George Orwell (and More),' *Literary Hub* (12 September 2019): <https://lithub.com/a-legendary-publishing-houses-most-infamous-rejection-letters/>.

⁷⁹ Gearóid Ó Nualláin, 'A New Era,' 7.

⁸⁰ Pádraig Pearse, 'About Literature,' *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 26 May, 1906. Available at: <https://cartlann.org/authors/padraig-pearse/about-literature/>.

The Irish language issue was a serious matter, a national concern, as the 1937 constitution made clear. As an urban, intellectual, upper-middle-class, native-speaker of Irish who mocked a founding institution of the State, Ó Nualláin found himself at odds with official ideology – linguistically, grammatically, and syntactically. Neither a western peasant nor an urban cultural nationalist, this product of a renowned family, esteemed for its commitment to the Irish language, its culture and its promotion, did not suit official needs or expectations. There was no space for him in the State’s official cultural imagination. Thus, in response to Risteard Ó Foghludha (Fiachra Éilgeach), Tadhg Ó Donnchadha (‘Torna’), Seán Mac Lellan and An Gúm, he ceased to serve that which no longer accepted him – the language of his home, the language of his father – and sought to express himself using for his defence the only arms he allowed himself to use: silence, internal exile, and cunning. He turned to silence, as regards Irish, and, for many years, remained exiled from Irish-language literature.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

