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Mylesean Onomastics: Games Names Play (Part I)

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This note examines Brian O'Nolan's fascination with names as they appear in a selection of his major works.

Brian O'Nolan has been wittily described as 'a serial pseudonymist.'[1] Any discussion of his literary use of names certainly has to begin with his obsessive, lifelong tinkering with his own name – which, by his own account, was variously Brian Nolan, Brian O'Nolan, Brían Ó Nualláin, or Brían Ua Nualláin. He also, at other times and on other occasions, for other reasons, called himself Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen, Myles na Gopaleen, Brother Barnabas, Count O'Blather, Peter the Painter, Lir O'Connor, John James Doe, George Knowall, and Matt Duffy, to name just a selection of his better-known *noms de plume.* During much of his own lifetime, we have it on good authority that 'almost everybody, including his boon companions, called him Myles, which he did not seem to mind.'[2] In later years he even seems to have preferred to be thought of as Myles.[3] Given all of this, it does not seem unreasonable to devote a few pages to the intricacies of O'Nolan's onomastic usage in his various writings. This work builds on previous research by Flann O'Brien scholars including Ronan Crowley, Brian Doherty, Maggie Glass and Maebh Long.[4]

But to begin with, and whoever he may have claimed to be at any given point, O'Nolan's birth name provided him with no mean pedigree, at least in purely onomastic terms. The name Brian is generally accepted as deriving from a Celtic root meaning 'high, noble'[5] and was most famously borne by Brian Boru, *Brían Bóroimhe*, high king of Ireland in the early eleventh century. The names Nolan and O'Nolan, meanwhile, are both anglicized forms of the Irish Ó Nualláin (or, in its more archaic form, Ua Nualláin), which, clearly enough, means 'descendant of a man named Nuallán,' but there has been some uncertainty as to what the name Nuallán itself may mean. For MacLysaght it derives, rather oddly, from the noun *nuall* ('shout'), a conjecture that would thus associate it with *nuallán* ('a low wailing, keening') and might very well also have appealed to O'Nolan's easily ignited sense of humour.[6] Other authorities suggest, however, that the name derives from the less common but rather more likely adjectival

[1] Keith Donohue, 'Introduction,' in *Flann O'Brien, The Complete Novels: At Swim-Two-Birds, The Third Policeman, The Poor Mouth, The Hard Life, The Dalkey Archive* (New York: Knopf, 2007), ix.

[2] Anthony Cronin, *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien* (London: Grafton/Paladin, 1990), 208.

[3] J.C.C. Mays, 'Brian O'Nolan: Literalist of the Imagination,' in *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*, ed. by Timothy O'Keeffe (London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1973), 114.

[4] Ronan Crowley, 'Phwat's in a nam?: Brian O'Nolan as a Late Revivalist,' in *Flann O'Brien: Problems with Authority*, ed. by Ruben Borg, Paul Fagan, John McCourt (Cork: Cork University Press, 2017), pp. 119–135; Brian Doherty, 'Violence and the Crisis of Identity in Flann O'Brien and Myles na gCopaleen,' *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 1–14; Maggie Glass, 'Big and Learned and Far from Simple: Intellectual Narration in "The Plain People of Ireland" and *The Third Policeman*,' *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 1–14; Maebh Long, *Assembling Flann O'Brien* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

[5] Edward MacLysaght, *The Surnames of Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1980), 27; Patrick Hanks, Flavia Hodges, A.D. Mills, and Adrian Room, *The Oxford Names Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 718.

[6] MacLysaght, *Surnames of Ireland*, 237.

form *nuall*, meaning 'famous, noble.'[7] Both derivations would very likely have been known to O'Nolan, who grew up in an Irish-speaking household, studied Irish language and literature for six years at University College Dublin, eventually completed an MA in medieval Irish literature, and with *An Béal Bocht* wrote a brilliant pastiche of the Gaeltacht peasant autobiography in a variety of linguistic registers of Irish. He would also, no doubt, have been delighted with the fact that both components of his name proclaimed him to be, if not of divine, then at least of both famous and noble origins.

O'Nolan became a student at UCD in 1929 and graduated with a respectable second-class honours BA in German, English, and Irish in 1932, followed by an MA in 1935 for a thesis written in Irish, 'Nádúirfhilíocht na Gaedhilge,' namely on 'Nature Poetry in Irish' from medieval to modern times.[8] The first of his proliferating pseudonyms appears to have been the alliterating 'Brother Barnabas,' under which name he published the first of a number of humorous pieces, including one or two not just in Irish but in Old Irish, in the UCD student magazine *Comhthrom Féinne* (the title translates literally as 'Fenian fairness,' loosely as 'fair play') in the early 1930s.[9] 'Barnabas' is a New Testament name deriving via Greek from an Aramaic original said to mean 'son of consolation.'[10] The alliteration (also with 'Brian'), the derivation, and the suggestion of a new apostolic mission to the Gentiles will no doubt all have appealed to him. In 1934, *Blather*, a short-lived comic magazine that survived for only five issues, was largely written by O'Nolan himself as both 'The O'Blather' – like Brother Barnabas an anticipation of Myles na gCopaleen – and his cretin son 'Blazes O'Blather.' Alliteration with the name Brian again seems to have played a role – as, of course, may Joyce's Blazes Boylan of *Ulysses*, jaunty man about town and cuckolder of Bloom. O'Nolan's delight in name games of this kind lasted a lifetime: reference is made in *The Best of Myles*, for example, edited by Kevin O'Nolan, to 'taciturn director Theoderick O'Moyle ('Silent O'Moyle'),' to 'the fons et orig O'Malley,' and to the fact that it of course 'goes without Synge' that many of his own writings are very fine indeed.[11]

O'Nolan began work in 1935, during his final year at UCD, on what would become *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and completed it in 1937, having in the meantime entered the Irish Civil Service, where he would continue to be employed until 1953. The novel appeared on 13 March 1939, published by Longmans in London, under the name Flann O'Brien.

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7 Basil Cottle, *The Penguin Dictionary of Surnames* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1978), 272; Hanks et al, *Oxford Names Companion*, 454.

8 John Cronin, *Irish Fiction 1900–1940* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1992), 171.

9 Niall Sheridan, 'Brian, Flann and Myles,' in *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*, ed. by Timothy O'Keeffe (London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1973), 37.

10 Hanks et al, *Oxford Names Companion*, 710.

11 Flann O'Brien, *The Best of Myles*, ed. by Kevin O'Nolan (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), 156, 381, 301.

O'Nolan had proposed the pseudonym to the publisher in a letter of 10 November 1938: 'I think this invention has the advantage that it contains an unusual name and one that is quite ordinary. "Flann" is an old Irish name now rarely heard.'[12] He wavered briefly, momentarily preferring the less colourful 'John Hackett,' but eventually decided on 'Flann O'Brien' – which was, as Anthony Cronin observes in retrospect, 'in itself a small masterstroke. It was unmistakeably and even rather poetically Irish and in being reminiscent of such well-known existing pseudonyms as Frank O'Connor it practically made him a member of a school or movement straight away. All this increased the originality and shock-effect of the book, once opened.'[13]

Since the name O'Brien, an anglicization of the Irish *Ó Briain*, literally means 'descendant of Brian,' the name Flann O'Brien very appropriately implies that 'Flann' is a literary descendant of 'Brian' – Brian O'Nolan, that is to say. The name also has other onomastic resonances, for like Joyce's use of a comic ballad to name *Finnegans Wake* (which appeared in May 1939, two months after the appearance of *At Swim-Two-Birds*) O'Nolan took his literary pseudonym (or at any rate just one of them) from a popular source. 'Flann O'Brien,' as John Garvin was perhaps the first to point out,[14] is in Irish phonetics a reversal of the name 'Brian O'Lynn,' which is in turn an anglicization of the Irish *Brían Ó Fhloinn*, pronounced /'bri:əno'lɪn/ and meaning 'Brian, descendant of Flann.' (The name *Ó Fhloinn* is also anglicized as 'Flynn' or 'O'Flynn.') Brian O'Lynn (or O'Linn, or O Linn) is a parodically typical Stage Irishman who figures in a popular Irish street ballad of the same name whose origins seem to lie as far back as the sixteenth century. His chief characteristic is his ability to rise irrepressibly and entirely comically above all obstacles – a classic if ludicrous example of Yeats's 'indomitable Irishry.' To take just one example: 'Brian O Linn to his house had no door, / He'd the sky for a roof, and the bog for a floor; / He'd a way to jump out, and a way to swim in, / 'Tis a fine habitation,' says Brian O Linn.' Or another: 'Brian O Linn had no shirt to his back, / He went to a neighbour's, and borrowed a sack, / Then he puckered the meal bag in under his chin, / 'Sure they'll take them for ruffles,' says Brian O Linn.'[15] In other verses, Brian has no coat, hat, shoes, or watch, but finds 'fine' (if entirely nonsensical) solutions in all cases – which is to say, in many cases purely hypothetical, imaginary solutions.

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[12] Flann O'Brien, *The Collected Letters of Flann O'Brien*, ed. by Maebh Long (Victoria, TX: Dalkey Archive Press, 2018), 19–20.

[13] Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 97.

[14] John Garvin, 'Sweetscented Manuscripts,' in *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*, ed. by Timothy O'Keeffe (London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1973), 60.

[15] Colm O Lochlainn, *Irish Street Ballads* (Dublin: The Three Candles, 1939), 30–31.

Another part of the linguistic joke involved in O'Nolan's adoption of the new pseudonym was that in Old Irish *flann* also meant 'ruddy' of complexion, and since *ruddy* was and is frequently used by British speakers as a more socially acceptable euphemism for *bloody*, *Flann O'Brien* is also 'Bloody O'Brien' – which, considering O'Nolan's by all accounts increasingly acerbic character and behaviour, may very well, substituting 'O'Nolan' for 'O'Brien,' have been the assessment of many of his acquaintances, especially in his later years. Despite all this onomastic artifice, however, and although *At Swim-Two-Birds* did indeed appear under the name of Flann O'Brien, the back-cover material, sloppily edited, inadvertently revealed that the author's real name was in fact Brian O'Nolan.[16]

According to the narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, 'a satisfactory novel should be a self-evident sham to which the reader could regulate at will the degree of his credulity.'[17] *At Swim-Two-Birds* is an exuberantly self-evident sham – including as far as the names of its characters are concerned. The narrative cast includes four named quasi-mythical figures: Finn Mac Cool, Sweeny, the Pooka MacPhellimey, and, for good measure, the Good Fairy. Finn is presented both as a mythological giant and as a feeble old man of apparently normal stature who endlessly relates endless tales of the heroic doings of his youth and vigour, when as Finn mac Cumhaill he was the far-famed leader of the Fianna, an indomitable band of warriors sworn to protect Ireland's shores against foreign invasion. His comic gigantism undoubtedly takes off from the parodic gigantism of the 'Cyclops' episode in *Ulysses*. Part of the linguistic humour of the work is provided by the stately recitation in Finn's discourse of the solemnly sonorous Gaelic names of ancient Fenian heroes, immediately followed by bathetically anglicized modern and bourgeois versions: 'It is Diarmuid Donn, said Conán, even Diarmuid O'Diveney of Ui bhFáilghe and Cruachna Conalath in the West of Erin, it is Brown Dermot of Galway'; 'It is Caolcrodha MacMorna from Sliabh Riabhach, said Conán, it is Caelcroe McMorney from Baltinglass'; 'It is Liagan Luaimneach O Luachair Dheaghaidh, said Conán, … Lagan Lumley O'Lowther-Day.'[18] The comically defamiliarizing effect of the anglicization here anticipates the 'Jams O'Donnell' episode in *An Béal Bocht.*

The name Sweeny or Sweeney is an anglicization of the Old Irish *Suibne*, Modern Irish *Suibhne,* where *suibhne* /ˈswɪvnə/ means 'pleasant.'[19] The medieval Irish tale of Suibhne was written down in the twelfth century; Seamus Heaney's *Sweeney Astray* (1984) is a modern translation. In *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and in humorous anachronism,

16 Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 98.

17 Flann O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (London: Longmans, Green, 1939), 33.

18 *Ibid.*, 19–20, 20, 22.

19 MacLysaght, *Surnames of Ireland*, 281.

if one can speak of anachronism with characters who are mythical rather than historical, the tale of Sweeny's frantic and tormented wanderings is told by Finn Mac Cool, traditionally regarded as having lived and died in the third century, while Suibhne is generally regarded as having lived four centuries later. The Pooka Fergus MacPhellimey is 'a member of the devil class' (9): a pooka (Irish *púca*) is a hobgoblin or sprite characterized primarily by being a shape-changer – a figure of popular mythology whose presence is entirely appropriate in the continually shape-changing narrative of *At Swim-Two-Birds.* Pookas (who are not limited to the Irish imagination) can appear as anything from a rabbit or a dog to a black horse with blazing yellow eyes and are usually benevolent though frequently, in their more humanoid forms, surly. The Pooka MacPhellimey, if only by virtue of possessing a surname and being joined in holy matrimony to a Mrs Pooka MacPhellimey, parodies the interest of the Celtic Twilight in 'fairy and folk tales of the Irish peasantry,' to quote one of Yeats's early titles. The Pooka's surname is accordingly borrowed from a traditional Donegal boat song, 'Báidín Fheilimidhí' ('Phelim's little boat'), humorously relating the sad fate in rough seas of a small boat and its incautious inhabitant. As for the Good Fairy: 'My correct name is Good Fairy, said the Good Fairy. I am a good fairy.'[20] Myles's good fairy was possibly inspired by an American film released in February 1935, *The Good Fairy*, directed by William Wyler and starring Margaret Sullavan as the youthful Lu Ginglebusher (a name that would undoubtedly have appealed to Myles), who finds that naively trying to be a 'good fairy' to strangers can make for a very complicated life. The romantic comedy is based on a translation of the Hungarian play *A jó tündér* (literally, 'the good fairy'; 1878) by Ferenc Molnár.

Then there is Dermot Trellis, proprietor of the Red Swan Hotel, who has spent most of the past twenty years in bed, thus mirroring the Oblomovian leanings of his fictional creator, the unnamed student narrator. A trellis is a latticework frame frequently used as a support for climbing plants; etymologically, the word appears to derive from the Latin *trilicius*, 'woven with triple thread (*licium*).' The name is thus entirely appropriate in a text with multiple interwoven threads of narrative. A happily complementary biographical explanation offered, however, is that a large wooden trellis that once stood in the O'Nolan back garden was used to make the legs for a work table[21] – on which *At Swim-Two-Birds* was eventually written, raising the question how much of the table and the trellis had found their way into the book in accordance with the Atomic Theory that would later be propounded in *The Third Policeman.* J.C.C. Mays has pointed out that there may also be an oblique reference to Joyce, who observed with regard to *Finnegans*

20 O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, 146.
21 Peter Costello and Peter van de Kamp, *Flann O'Brien: An Illustrated Biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), 61.

Wake that he did not of course take Vico's speculations on historical cycles literally, but used them as a 'trellis.'[22]

There is Furriskey, invented by Trellis as a ravisher of innocent maidens, whose name appears to be a jocular variant of the Irish *Fergus*, composed of the elements *fear* ('man') and *gus* ('vigour'),[23] but who finds that such predatory activities are not in his nature, falls in love with one of his intended victims instead, and settles down to a life of sober Christian virtue. There is Orlick, whom Trellis, in a moment of madness, metaleptically fathered on one of his own fictional characters, the lovely Sheila Lamont. Orlick's name is borrowed from Dickens's *Great Expectations*, in which the villainous Orlick, a sadist who delights in gloating over his hapless victims, murders Mrs Joe Gargery and almost succeeds in murdering the hero, Pip.[24] Our Orlick, however, like Furriskey, is made of finer stuff and will have nothing at all to do with any such socially unacceptable behaviour.

With its numerous structural parallels and correspondences, *At Swim-Two-Birds* constitutes what John Cronin has aptly called 'a cat's-cradle of cross-references'[25]: the narrator echoes Stephen Dedalus, Trellis echoes the narrator, Trellis's torments echo those of Sweeny, and the heroic exploits of the Fianna contrast with the squalid lifestyle of the student narrator and his habitually intoxicated cronies. The parodic use of names plays a central part in holding this cat's-cradle structure together.

O'Nolan's second novel to appear (though written after *The Third Policeman*) did so in Irish in 1941 under the title *An Béal Bocht.* It was translated into English by Patrick Power in 1973 as *The Poor Mouth* – O'Nolan himself having adamantly resisted during his lifetime all attempts to persuade him to translate it. The author's effervescent humour is apparent as early as the dedication. Declan Kiberd has suggested that 'the greatest single irony of *An Béal Bocht* lies in its dedication to R.M. Smyllie, the magisterial editor of the *Irish Times* and official mouthpiece of the ascendancy.'[26] Currently the most authoritative Irish newspaper, the *Irish Times* was founded in 1859 as the voice of southern Unionism and came to terms with the realities of the new Irish state of the 1920s only with some considerable difficulty. The dedication of *An Béal Bocht* reads: 'do mo chara ['to my friend'] / R.M. Smyllie / R.M. Ó Smaoille / An Smaolach,' where Smyllie is first given an invented Irish form *(Ó Smaoille)* of his Scottish surname, which is then even more factitiously rendered in the ceremonial form *An Smaolach*,

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[22] Mays, 'Brian O'Nolan,' 106.

[23] Hanks et al, *Oxford Names Companion*, 213.

[24] Cronin, *Irish Fiction*, 177.

[25] *Ibid.*, 178

[26] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 499.

simultaneously promoting Smyllie to the status of chief of the name ('The Ó Smaoille') and assigning him a whimsical literary *nom de plume* of the kind almost *de rigueur* among certain literary Irish Revivalists of the day. One of the latter, for example, was the writer Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, whose comic Gaeltacht tale *Jimín Mháire Thaidhg* (1922; literally, 'Jimmy Mary Tim') was published under the pseudonym *An Seabhach* ('the hawk'). The similarly avian pen-name assigned by Myles to Smyllie – who spoke no word of Irish – was considerably less warlike, *smaolach* being a variant of *smólach*, meaning 'thrush.'

According to the title page of *An Béal Bocht*, the doleful story is not written but 'edited' ('curtha in eagar') by one Myles na gCopaleen; the title page of Patrick Power's translation, without explanation for the altered spelling of Myles's chosen sobriquet, has the text 'edited by Myles na Gopaleen (Flann O'Brien).' In the Irish text, the first-person narrator tells us that his name in Irish is Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa; in Power's translation, 'O'Coonassa is my surname in Gaelic, my first name is Bonaparte.'[27] 'O'Coonassa' is of course not a Gaelic name but an anglicization of what purports to be one, while 'Bonaparte' restores the standard French form in use in English of an originally Italian name. The invented name Ó Cúnasa, for its part, might arguably mean 'descendant of a man called Cúnasa,' with the personal name likewise arguably formed on *cú* ('hound, hero') and the archaic *nasach* ('noble, famous'), a vainglorious appellation already anticipated by the given name Bónapárt. Alternatively, 'Ó Cúnasa' might be based on the adjective *cuanna* ('noble, elegant, handsome'), as are the more common Irish names anglicized as Coonan, Cooney, and Counihan.[28] In either event, Ó Cúnasa's ostensibly noble family name echoes the onomastic implications of the name Brian O'Nolan.

The narrator's name is one of a series in *An Béal Bocht*, all of them ending with the element *nasa* and thus arguably likewise asserting their shared ancient nobility and fame: Ó Cúnasa, Ó Lúnasa, Ó Rúnasa, Ó Bánasa, Ó Sánasa, Ó Bíonasa, Ó Píonasa, and Ó Pónasa. (In *The Poor Mouth* the series is quasi-anglicized as O'Coonassa, O'Loonassa, O'Roonassa, O'Bannassa, O'Sanassa, O'Beenassa, O'Penisa, and O'Poenassa.) O'Nolan's reader is of course implicitly challenged to discover hidden meanings in the series of generically similar names. Power's version gleefully discovers the penis in *Ó Píonasa* and the chamber pot in *Ó Pónasa*. On a more elevated level, the given name of Maoldún Ó Pónasa (Power's Maeldoon O'Poenassa) is borrowed from the medieval

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[27] Myles na gCopaleen, *An Béal Bocht, nó An milleánach: Droch-sgéal ar an droch-shaoghal* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1964), 7; Myles na Gopaleen, *The Poor Mouth: A Bad Story about the Hard Life*, trans. by Patrick C. Power (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1973), 11.

[28] MacLysaght, *Surnames of Ireland*, 57, 61; Hanks et al, *Oxford Names Companion*, 140.

Irish tale *Immram curaig Maíle Dúin* (*The Voyage of Máel Dúin's Boat*), in which the titular character has many marvellous adventures at sea – and, like Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa and his fellows, suffers unremitting pangs of hunger. The given name of Sitric Ó Sánasa (Power's Sitric O'Sanassa) is that of an eleventh-century Norse king of Dublin in the time of Brian Boru. As for Sitric's family name, *sánas* (or *sámhnas*), according to Dinneen, has among its meanings 'a break in bad weather,' a meteorological phenomenon almost completely unheard of in the world of *An Béal Bocht*, while the similarly pronounced *samhnas* includes 'nausea' and 'displeasure' as well as 'lack of appetite,' the latter once again an extremely rare phenomenon for Bónapárt and his fellows. Finally, the sadistic local schoolteacher Osborn Ó Lúnasa probably owes his unusual given name as well as his pedagogical profession to Osborn Bergin (1873–1950), a highly esteemed scholar and professor of Old and Middle Irish at UCD, also memorialized by O'Nolan in a piece of celebrated *Cruiskeen Lawn* doggerel celebrating the work of 'Binchy and Bergin and Best,' all three celebrated scholars of early Irish language and literature: 'My song is concernin' / Three sons of great learnin' / Binchy and Bergin and Best, / They worked out that riddle / Old Irish and Middle, / Binchy and Bergin and Best, / They studied far higher / Than ould Kuno Meyer / And fanned up the glimmer / Bequeathed by Zimmer, / Binchy and Bergin and Best.'[29] *Lúnasa*, meanwhile, the Irish name for the month of August, includes the name of the Celtic god known in Irish as Lugh /lu:/, but it also, on a rather less elevated level, suggests the colloquial English *looney.*

O'Nolan's Irish has the story take place in the fictional locality of *Corca Dorcha*, the first element of which, *corca*, is regularly found in place names in the sense of 'race, people.' The Dingle Peninsula in Kerry, for example, is called *Corca Dhuibhne* in Irish, meaning the place of 'the people of Duibhne,' and early editions of Peig Sayers's then recently appeared and much praised peasant autobiography *Peig* (1936) were introduced by sketch maps of the area under that name. *Duibhne* literally means 'surly' and contains the element *dubh* ('black'), for which O'Nolan substitutes *dorcha*, whose meanings include 'dark' – but also, for good measure, 'blind' and 'malignant.' And *corcach* means 'marsh, bog,' so *Corca Dorcha*, likewise introduced in *An Béal Bocht* by a sketch map of the (fictional) area, suggests a place named both for the descendants of a man unpromisingly called Dorcha and for being a dark, gloomy, malignant bog. For the Irish-speaking reader the name is thus at once richly intertextual and maliciously comic. In Power's English, and consequently in almost all subsequent translations, the action takes place in an anglicized *Corkadoragha,*

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[29] O'Brien, *Best of Myles*, 266.

which accurately captures the pronunciation /ˈkʌrkəˈdʌrəxə/, but whose meaning is of course likely to escape most readers.[30] The particular townland of Corca Dorcha in which the narrator grows up, meanwhile, is called Lios na bPráiscín (Power's Lisnabrawshkeen), literally, 'the fort of the potato sacks,' but containing both *práiscín* ('potato sack') and, given the prevailing climate, an abundance of *práisc* ('muck').

The protagonist of *An Béal Bocht* is a version of Brian O'Lynn in the misfortunes by which he is constantly assailed, but entirely unlike him in lacking the ability to find even imaginary solutions to his life of woe – for where Brian O'Lynn is irrepressibly optimistic, Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa is irrepressibly pessimistic, albeit with good reason. On his first (which is also his last) day at school, asked his name, he responds that he is 'Bónapárt Mhicheálangaló Pheadair Eoghain Shorcha Thomáis Mháire Sheáin Shéamais Dhiarmada,' only to be felled by a heavy blow from the teacher and be told 'Yer nam … is Jams O'Donnell.'[31] The sonorous Irish litany covering nine generations and some three centuries – 'Bonaparte, son of Michelangelo, son of Peter, son of Owen, son of Thomas's Sarah, daughter of John's Mary, grand-daughter of James, son of Dermot' – is reduced to a single mispronounced name in bad English, which turns out moreover to be the same name assigned, for administrative convenience, to *every* child attending school in Corca Dorcha.[32]

O'Nolan's onomastic games serve a clearly satiric purpose, for if the miserably disadvantaged peasants of Corca Dorcha indulge ridiculous visions of grandeur in assigning their offspring given names of illustrious foreigners of renown – Bonaparte, Michelangelo, Leonardo – the Irish Revivalists of the day, as reported in *An Béal Bocht*, adopt ridiculously fanciful Gaelic sobriquets such as *An Nóinín Gaelach* ('the Gaelic daisy') and *An Tuiseal Tabharthach* ('the dative case'). O'Nolan, as Kiberd observes, replaces the Stage Irishman with the Stage Gael as an object of satire, those Irish Revivalists who 'could idealize the saintly simplicity of western life only by ignoring the awful poverty on which it was based.'[33] One of the real-world Irish Revivalists of the day, and one well known to O'Nolan, was his former professor of Irish at UCD, Douglas Hyde, who not only went on to become the first President of Ireland but had long been writing in Irish under the whimsical pseudonym *An Craoibhín Aoibhinn* (literally 'the

[30] Myles himself rendered the name as 'Corkadorky,' primeval home of Corkadorky Man (O'Brien, *Best of Myles*, 318–19). Declan Kiberd, evidently lulled by the apparent rhyme, uncharacteristically nods in writing 'Corcha Dorcha' for Corca Dorcha throughout his chapter on Myles in *Inventing Ireland* (497–512).
[31] na gCopaleen, *An Béal Bocht*, 23.
[32] na Gopaleen, *The Poor Mouth*, 30.
[33] Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, 498.

lovely little branch' and idiomatically 'the lovely young lass'), an onomastic challenge to which the irrepressible O'Nolan could not reasonably have been expected to turn a blind eye.

While *An Béal Bocht* made the name of its alleged editor, Myles na gCopaleen, a byword among Irish-speaking readers, the name achieved far wider recognition as that of the author of the humorous newspaper column 'Cruiskeen Lawn,' which appeared in *The Irish Times* for more than a quarter of a century, from 1940 to 1966. (The title is a jocular recasting of the Irish *crúiscín lán*, literally a 'full little jug,' as of alcoholic comfort and joy.) An early bilingual paperback collection of the columns, also entitled *Cruiskeen Lawn*, appeared in 1943, also under the name of Myles na gCopaleen, a name, however, that O'Nolan later chose to simplify to 'Myles na Gopaleen' – and thereby hangs an onomastic tale.

O'Nolan's sobriquet put in a first appearance, in a slightly different form, in Gerald Griffin's 1829 novel *The Collegians: A Tale of Garryowen*, in which Myles Murphy, a good-hearted rustic from Killarney, is known as 'Myles-na-Coppaleen' or 'Myles of the Ponies' because he makes his living by breeding and selling ponies. Griffin's Myles is a giant of a man, majestic in appearance and strikingly handsome. He is also a figure of condescending fun for the local gentry, whom he amuses with his Stage-Irishman chop logic and irrepressible verbosity. John Cronin suggests that O'Nolan may have been attracted to the character 'because, when he first appears in the novel, he is depicted as a honey-tongued cajoler who succeeds in humouring a group of gentry into granting him a favour. The original Myles is a fast and skilful talker who puts his particular brand of blarney to excellent practical use.'[34] Myles-na-Coppaleen reappears some thirty years later as the comic hero in Dion Boucicault's melodramatic adaptation of Griffin's novel, entitled *The Colleen Bawn, or The Brides of Garryowen* (1860). The new Myles is now, as far at least as the local people are concerned, a universally popular anti-establishment figure, a busy smuggler, poacher, horse-thief, and poteen maker. Played on stage by Boucicault himself, Myles-na-Coppaleen also has a number of songs, including both 'Cruiskeen Lawn,' a title later put to good use by O'Nolan, and 'Brian O'Linn.'

As Costello and van de Kamp observe, Boucicault's play and the character Myles-na-Coppaleen 'represented the Stage Irishman in his worst form,' and in adopting the name, O'Nolan 'intended it not so much as a *nom de plume* but as a *nom de guerre*.'[35] For J.C.C. Mays, in similar vein, 'the *persona* of Myles na gCopaleen is an opportunistic

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34 Cronin, *Irish Fiction*, 170.

35 Costello and van de Kamp, *Flann O'Brien*, 71.

adoption prompted by the Ascendancy affiliations of the *Irish Times.*'[36] In *An Béal Bocht*, as Kiberd puts it, O'Nolan, in the character of Myles na gCopaleen, rescues the Stage Irish buffoon from the Victorian stage and makes him articulate, gives him a voice in his own language with which to mock his mockers.[37] While the shift is signalled onomastically by the change from Boucicault's 'Myles-na-Coppaleen' to the linguistically rather more accurate 'Myles na gCopaleen,' O'Nolan deliberately avoids the even more accurate 'Myles na gCapaillín' in order to retain the ironic tone of the interlingual version, humorously straddling two cultures.

[36] Mays, 'Brian O'Nolan,' 95.
[37] Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, 497–98.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.