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Mylesean Titles: Intertextual Pleasures

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This note focuses, first, on readers' likely reactions to the original titles of the works of Brian O'Nolan (alias Flann O'Brien, alias Myles na gCopaleen) and, second, on the likely reactions of target-language readers to the titles of some fifty translations of those same works in a range of European languages.

Introduction

Before they have even had a chance to open the book they intend to read, readers are already faced with a powerful opening move on the part of the author, one that will inevitably influence their own interpretive moves deeply. Since the particular titles assigned to literary texts always implicitly challenge readers to find ways of making them as interesting a component as possible of the literary experience, readers are encouraged to identify as soon as possible what may seem to be the most appropriate approach to the text – even though the particular approach chosen may quite often turn out to be seriously inadequate or even quite wrong-headed. Translated titles may of course encourage a significantly different approach. The present note focuses, first, on readers' likely reactions to the original titles of the works of Brian O'Nolan (alias Flann O'Brien, alias Myles na gCopaleen), and, second, if admittedly more contentiously, on the arguably likely reactions of target-language readers to the titles of some fifty translations of those same works in various European languages.[1]

At Swim-Two-Birds

First-time readers of *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) are likely to have considerable difficulty in deciding what to make of the wilfully disorientating title. Only after close to a hundred pages does it emerge that 'Swim-Two-Birds' is in fact a place name – though even that discovery may not strike all readers as being particularly helpful. The name is first mentioned in the text itself with reference to Sweeny, the story of whose tormented wanderings, believing himself transformed into a bird, is being related by the former leader of the legendary Fianna of ancient Ireland, Finn Mac Cool. The narrative reports with commendable attention to detail that on one occasion the restless Sweeny 'set forth in the air again till he reached the church at Snámh-dá-én (or Swim-Two-Birds) by the side of the Shannon, arriving there on a Friday, to speak precisely.'[2]

The title of *At Swim-Two-Birds* is in fact a cryptic intertextual borrowing from the twelfth-century Middle Irish tale *Buile Shuibhne* (The Madness of Sweeny). That tale recounts the story of Suibhne Geilt (Mad Sweeny), a seventh-century king of the territory of Dál nAraide in northeastern Ulster who bitterly resents the evangelising efforts of Christian monks in his lands, kills one of them in a fit of anger as he is preparing for a battle with political opponents, and is roundly cursed for the killing by the warlike cleric St Rónán. Sweeny goes mad and subsequently spends many years

[1] A considerable number of other translations of Brian O'Nolan's novels, not discussed here, also exist, for instance in Chinese, Finnish, Hebrew, Russian, Serbian, Slovenian, and Turkish.

[2] Flann O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (London: Longmans, Green, 1939), 95.

flitting frantically from place to place, wandering naked as a wild man of the woods, roosting in trees like a bird, lacerated by briars and brambles, and composing bitter verse lamentations, before he is eventually befriended and reconciled to the Church by a less warlike ecclesiastic, St Moling. The medieval tale recounts that, at one point in his mad flight, Sweeny indeed 'fared forth until he reached the church at Snámh dá én on the Shannon.'[3]

Snámh dá én translates word-for-word as 'swim (*snámh*) two (*dá*) birds (*én*),' which O'Nolan was happy, initially at least, to accept for his cryptic and deliberately disorienting title. However, the word *snámh* also means 'ford,' and the place name in fact refers to the ancient 'ford of two birds' over the River Shannon near the sixth-century monastic foundation of Clonmacnoise, founded by St Ciarán and one of the most important ecclesiastical centres in medieval Ireland. Scholars are in agreement that Sweeny's alleged point of touchdown was on the west bank of the Shannon just south of Athlone, near the modern locality of Cloonburren.[4] Since birds and fords were both features of central interest in ancient Irish mythology,[5] the two birds in question may originally have had a mythological significance that eventually faded and was in due course completely forgotten. Medieval Irish toponymic lore, undeterred, imaginatively ascribed the name to the fate of two young men who nightly swam across the Shannon in the magical shape of two water birds so that one of them could meet with his lover while the other loyally stood guard – with both of them eventually, and predictably, being observed and killed for their pains by the lady's unamused husband.[6]

Outcast as an offender against the Church, and murderer of one of its clerics, Sweeny at Snámh dá én, bird-like himself, is not yet ripe for forgiveness. He thus fails to read the coded message of the place, interweaving as it does the onomastic birds of his own madness and excommunication, the architectural promise of salvation signalled by the modest church of Snámh dá én, and the geographical symbol of potential reconciliation implicit in the ford leading to the holy ground of Clonmacnoise. It will take many more years before Sweeny becomes such an adequate reader, achieving final reconciliation only on his deathbed. The initially opaque title *At Swim-Two-Birds* can thus be read, with the story of Sweeny in mind, as signalling a space of transition where conflicting discourses intersect. Indeed, this is precisely what we then find in the text itself, which, after offering us our choice of three different narrative beginnings, presents us with

[3] J.G. O'Keeffe, ed. and trans., *Buile Suibhne: The Frenzy of Suibhne, Being the Adventures of Suibhne Geilt: A Middle Irish Romance*, *Irish Texts Society* 12 (London: Irish Texts Society, 1913).

[4] Seamus Heaney, *Sweeney Astray* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 18.

[5] James MacKillop, *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 42, 241.

[6] Edward Gwynn, ed. and trans., *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, 5 vols, (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1903–35).

several very different stories in widely varying discursive modes, and finally, for good measure, provides a choice of three likewise very different narrative endings.

At Swim-Two-Birds – an exotic name for an exotic work, as John Garvin felicitously puts it[7] – is such a brilliant title in its provocative opacity that it comes as something of a surprise that O'Nolan himself lost confidence in it at the last moment and argued strongly for changing it. In correspondence with the publisher Longmans on 3 October 1938, he wrote:

> I have given a lot of thought to the question of a title and think Sweeney in the Trees quite suitable. Others that occurred to me were The Next Market Day (verse reference); Sweet-Scented Manuscript; Truth is an Odd Number; Task-Master's Eye; Through an Angel's Eyelid; and dozens of others.[8]

To what extent O'Nolan may have been mischievously pulling his publisher's leg with these purported alternative titles remains of course uncertain. At all events, however, and as Anthony Cronin puts it, 'we may be glad that Longmans preferred [*At Swim-Two-Birds*] to any of the alternatives he was now suggesting, though later in the same month he was expressing surprise that they did not prefer "Sweeney in the Trees" and saying that he liked *At Swim-Two-Birds* less and less.'[9]

What should, or could, a translator make of all this calibrated titular indirection? The novel has been widely translated, and translators across a wide range of languages have risen to the challenge in varied fashion and to varied effect, some engaging the obscure title head on, others attempting to explain it, still others preferring to circumvent or even replace it.

The earliest translation of *At Swim-Two-Birds* was that of Henri Morisset into French in 1964. Ignoring *all* the implications of the original title, and no doubt prompted by a publisher's sales department who had an eye to French readers' likely preconceptions regarding the notorious foibles and oddities of the rambunctious Irish, Morisset rendered the title as the highly reductive *Kermesse irlandaise*, suggesting something like an 'Irish fun-for-all.'[10] Since a *kermesse* is a 'village fair,' the not too far distant echo of Donnybrook Fair and its attendant Irish stew of shenanigans and shillelaghs may be detected without excessive effort. A second French translation

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[7] John Garvin, 'Sweetscented Manuscripts,' in *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*, ed. Timothy O'Keeffe (London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1973), 56.

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

[9] Anthony Cronin, *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien* (London: Grafton/Paladin, 1990), 97.

[10] Flann O'Brien, *Kermesse irlandaise*, trans. Henri Morisset (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

almost forty years later, by Patrick Hersant (2002), opted more soberly for a reduced *Swim-Two-Birds*. By dropping the preposition, Hersant's translation rendered the title, if anything, even more puzzling than the original.[11]

At Swim-Two-Birds first reached German readers in Lore Fiedler's 1966 translation, *Zwei Vögel beim Schwimmen*, whose title (literally, 'two birds at swim') inadvertently or otherwise abandons the Irish place name for the eponymous birds that may have originally inspired it.[12] Harry Rowohlt and Helmut Mennicken produced an updated version of Fiedler's translation in 1989 under the adjusted and expanded title *In Schwimmen-zwei-Vögel, oder Sweeny auf den Bäumen* (literally, 'in Swim-Two-Birds, or Sweeny in the trees'). Rowohlt and Mennicken thus translate the titular place name and supplement it, in a quasi-explanatory gesture, with one of O'Nolan's suggested alternative titles as a subtitle. An Austrian film scripted and directed by Kurt Palm followed in 1997, under the title *In Schwimmen-zwei-Vögel* (once again, literally, 'in Swim-Two-Birds'). In both cases, the preposition suggests that the action of the novel takes place *in* rather than *at* the location in question, raising potential questions as to the nature, and especially the size, of the presumptive settlement involved.

Five years later still, in 2002, a new and revised edition of the Rowohlt and Mennicken translation appeared under the also revised title *Auf Schwimmen-Zwei-Vögel, oder Sweeny auf den Bäumen*. Rowohlt, a well-known translator and Flann O'Brien enthusiast who had also played the role of Finn Mac Cool (and provided the voice of the Good Fairy) in Palm's film, explains the now preferred title *Auf Schwimmen-zwei-Vögel* (now, literally, '*on* Swim-Two-Birds') as reflecting the (alleged) fact that *Snámh-dá-én* was 'not a place *on* the Shannon but an island *in* the Shannon.'[13] Curiously, this choice ignores the unambiguous statement in O'Nolan's original English regarding Sweeny's flying visit to 'the church at Snámh-dá-én (or Swim-Two-Birds) by the side of the Shannon.'[14] Rowohlt, considerably exceeding the role of a translator, goes on to take the corresponding liberty of 'correcting' O'Nolan's text in resituating Snámh-dá-én 'im Shannon' (in the Shannon) in his translation.[15] In collaboration with Ralf Sotscheck, Rowohlt produced a book of autobiographical anecdotes the following year

[11] Flann O'Brien, *Swim-Two-Birds*, trans. Patrick Hersant (Paris: Éditions Les Belles Lettres, 2002).

[12] Flann O'Brien, *Zwei Vögel beim Schwimmen*, trans. Lore Fiedler (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1966).

[13] Flann O'Brien, *Auf Schwimmen-zwei-Vögel, oder Sweeny auf den Bäumen*, trans. Harry Rowohlt and Helmut Mennicken (Zurich: Kein & Aber, 2002; rev. edn. Munich: Heyne, 2005), 2 (my translation).

[14] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, 95.

[15] O'Brien, *Auf Schwimmen-zwei-Vögel*, 94. Rowohlt's decision was very likely prompted by P.J. Kavanagh's assertion in a literary guidebook of 1994 that Snámh-dá-én is to be identified with Devenish Island, located in the Shannon between Clonmacnoise and Shannonbridge. P.J. Kavanagh, *Voices in Ireland: A Traveller's Literary Companion* (London: John Murray Publishers, 1994), 150.

which boasts the tongue-twisting Mylesean title *In Schlucken-zwei-Spechte*, literally, 'in Swallow-Two-Woodpeckers.'[16] Readers who know English as well as German will appreciate the translingual pun on 'swallow' as a verb (*schlucken*) and as a bird (*Schwalbe*), thus serendipitously allowing the German title, but only via English, to outdo O'Nolan's title in specificity by actually containing two individually named birds, a swallow and a woodpecker.

Italian readers first encountered *At Swim-Two-Birds* in 1968, only slightly later than their French and German counterparts, in the form of Rodolfo Wilcock's *Una pinta d'inchiostro irlandese* – literally, 'a pint of Irish ink.'[17] Wilcock's title thus repeats Morisset's emphasis on the Irishness (and 'Irishness') of the work by obliquely evoking the many pints of another dark liquid conscientiously consumed by the novel's thirsty characters. Yet, the self-reflexive title also underscores the eminently self-reflexive nature of the novel, and perhaps also humorously suggests Ruskin's famous evaluation of Whistler's paintings as 'a pot of paint flung in the public's face.' All this was once again achieved, of course, only at the cost of very largely abandoning the entire range of implications suggested by O'Nolan's original title. A Spanish translation of 1989, by José Manuel Álvarez Flórez, returns to a less adventurous but more accurate *En Nadar-Dos-Pájaros*, 'in/at Swim-Two-Birds.'[18]

Several translations of *At Swim-Two-Birds* in other languages adopt quite different titular strategies, a number of which would doubtless have considerably amused O'Nolan himself. Bob den Uyl's Dutch rendering of 1974 appeared under the baldly opaque title *Tegengif*, literally 'Antidote,' as if promising a crime thriller involving a thwarted attempt on the part of a poisoner.[19] Readers attracted by such an understanding of the title may well have been puzzled as to when the poison (Dutch *gif*) and when the antidote (*tegengif*) might be expected in either case to put in an appearance. The titular implication appears in fact to have been that the novel's extravagant textual flights of imagination were created by the unnamed student narrator to serve as antidote to the mind-numbing tedium of student existence in 1930s Dublin. When the Dutch translation was reissued in 2010, it was more approachably titled *Op Twee-Vogel-Wad* (At Two-Birds-Ford), leaving readers rather less at swim also by translating the underlying Irish *snámh* as '*wad*' (ford) rather than the *swim* of the original title.[20] Bjørn Alex Herman's

[16] Harry Rowohlt and Ralf Sotscheck, *In Schlucken-zwei-Spechte* (Berlin: Goldmann, 2003).

[17] Flann O'Brien, *Una pinta d'inchiostro irlandese*, trans. J. Rodolfo Wilcock (Turin: Einaudi, 1968).

[18] Flann O'Brien, *En Nadar-Dos-Pájaros*, trans. José Manuel Álvarez Flórez (Barcelona: Edhasa, 1989).

[19] Flann O'Brien, *Tegengif*, trans. Bob den Uyl (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1974). See José Lanters, 'Unless I am an Old Dutchman by Profession and Nationality: The Problems of Translating Flann O'Brien into Dutch,' in *Conjuring Complexities: Essays on Flann O'Brien*, ed., Anne Clune and Tess Hurson (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1997), 143–50.

[20] Flann O'Brien, *Op Twee-Vogel-Wad*, trans. Bob den Uyl (Amsterdam: Atlas, 2010).

Norwegian version of 1998, *På Svøm-to-fugler*, is a strictly literal rendering of that original title.[21] Magnus Hedlund's Swedish translation of 1995, on the other hand, opts more safely if more obliquely for *Sanning är ett udda tal*,[22] a direct translation not of O'Nolan's title but of the Pooka's maxim that 'truth is an odd number'[23] – a phrase that O'Nolan himself had eventually also come to prefer as a possible title. Krzysztof Fordoński's Polish translation of the following year returns to Mad Sweeny, opting for *Sweeny wśród drzew*[24] – literally, 'Sweeny among the trees' – and Claus Bech's Danish version of 2002, *Sweeny i traeerne*, adopts the same titular solution, perching Sweeny in the trees again.[25] Polish and Danish readers of the respective titles may not yet know who Sweeny is, or what his relationship to trees may be, but the translated titles at least make overt linguistic sense.

Among eastern European renderings, a Romanian translation of 2005 by Adrian Oţoiu humorously returns to the two birds of O'Nolan's title with *La doi lebădoi* – literally, 'at (*la*) two (*doi*) big swans (*lebădoi*)' – where the ending *-oi* of *lebădoi* is a jocular masculine augmentative plural of *lebădă* (swan), humorously repeating the *doi* (two) and suggesting something like 'two great big fat male swans.' While thus very adequately capturing the humorous nature of the text, the reference to a place name is once again abandoned. A 2008 Hungarian translation by Erika Mihálycsa and Gábor Csizmadia appeared under the highly compact agglutinative title *Úszikkétmadáron*,[26] which, despite its initial impenetrability for the non-Hungarian eye, translates as, literally, 'on (*-on*) swim (*úszik*) two (*két*) birds (*madár*).'[27] A Serbian rendering by Predrag Šaponja in 2009 carries the title *Na reci kod Dve Ptice*, which translates literally as 'On the river at Two Birds,' thus capturing the fluvial element while slightly adjusting the original place name.[28] O'Nolan would certainly have been delighted by the front

[21] Flann O'Brien, *På Svøm-to-fugler*, trans. Bjørn Alex Herman (Oslo: Bokvennen, 1998).

[22] Flann O'Brien, *Sanning är ett udda tal*, trans. Magnus Hedlund (Lund: Ellerström, 1995).

[23] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, 149.

[24] Flann O'Brien, *Sweeny wśród drzew*, trans. Krzysztof Fordoński (Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy, 1996). See Krzysztof Fordoński, 'Translating the Translated, Mistranslated, and Untranslatable: Several Remarks upon the Polish Editions of *At Swim-Two-Birds* by Flann O'Brien,' *Przekładaniec: A Journal of Literary Translation* 5 (1999): 71–9.

[25] Flann O'Brien, *Sweeny i traeerne*, trans. Claus Bech (Copenhagen: Centrum, 2002).

[26] Flann O'Brien, *Úszikkétmadáron*, trans. Erika Mihálycsa and Gábor Csizmadia (Cluj: Koinónia, 2008).

[27] See also Adrian Oţoiu, 'From *At Swim-Two-Birds* to *La Doi Lebădoi*: Translating Flann O'Brien into Romanian,' *Internationalist Review of Irish Culture* 1, no. 1 (2007): 62–82; Erika Mihálycsa, 'Négykezes variációk madárcsicsergésre, avagy Flann O'Brien regényének fordításproblémáiról,' *Látó* 19, no. 6 (2008), available at: https://epa.oszk.hu/00300/00384/00061/982.htm; Erika Mihálycsa, 'Venturing onto Licensed Premises: On the Problems of Translating Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* into Hungarian,' in *Literary and Cultural Relations: Ireland, Hungary, and Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mária Kurdi (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2009), 181–200; and Erika Mihálycsa, 'Four-handed Chirping of Birds or, The Adventure of two Hungarian Translators with Flann O'Brien's Book-Web,' *Estudios Irlandeses* 8 (2013): 65–78.

[28] Flann O'Brien, *Na reci kod Dve Ptice*, trans. Predrag Šaponja (Zrenjanin: Agora, 2009).

cover, which ascribes the novel (if only as transliterated) to a slavicized 'Flen O'Brajen.' A Slovenian version of the same year by Andrej Skubic opts rather similarly for *Pri Dveh Ptičih na Vodi*, situating the story 'At Two Birds on the Water.'[29]

The two birds in question here and elsewhere are identified quite specifically, if unexpectedly, in the flamboyant title of Filipina Filipova's Bulgarian rendering of 2008, *Plavashtite chavki*, a title that translates literally as 'Floating jackdaws.'[30] Since jackdaws and crows in general are considered birds of ill omen in parts of eastern Europe, while crows were associated with death in Old Irish literature,[31] Filipova's title refers intertextually to the tale of the two ill-omened birds that were considered to have given the ford of Snámh dá én its name, their dead bodies now floating in the water. Few if any Bulgarian readers would of course have been likely to suspect this connection merely from the title.

Only the two earliest of these translations, Morisset's French *Kermesse irlandaise* and Fiedler's German *Zwei Vögel beim Schwimmen*, appeared before O'Nolan's far too early death in 1966; had he survived to a greater age he would, no doubt, have been gleefully delighted by the tortured but cumulatively productive titular exertions of his translators across languages.

As titles offer direction (though frequently duplicitous) as to how the texts they introduce might be read, so textual epigraphs may similarly exercise a quasi-titular function. The opacity of the title *At Swim-Two-Birds*, indeed, is fully matched by that of the novel's epigraph, which is clearly all Greek to many readers – and was fully intended to be so by O'Nolan. Not in fact knowing the language himself, O'Nolan asked a friend, John Garvin, who had been shown the typescript of the novel, to provide an epigraph in Greek. Garvin chose a line from Euripides's *Hercules Furens*, as he later explained, 'in consideration of the corresponding agony of Frenzied Sweeny; and the verse itself, "For all things go out and give place one to another," in relation to the rapid succession of characters and plots right through the novel.'[32] The untranslated epigraph, 'ἐξίσταται γὰρ πάντ' ἀπ' ἀλλήλων δίχα' (*Exístatai gàr pánt' ap' allêlôn díkha*), appears without attribution or explanation and offers the reader without Greek no clue as to its origin, its meaning, or its possible relevance.[33]

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[29] Flann O'Brien, *Pri Dveh Ptičih Na Vodi*, trans. Andrej Skubic (Maribor: Litera, 2009).

[30] Flann O'Brien, *Plavashtite chavki*, trans. Filipina Filipova (Sofia: Fama, 2008).

[31] MacKillop, *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*, 113.

[32] Garvin, 'Sweetscented Manuscripts,' 58.

[33] For further discussion of the Euripides epigraph to *At Swim-Two-Birds*, see Tobias W. Harris and Joseph LaBine, 'John Garvin and Brian O'Nolan in Civil Service: Bureaucratic, Joycean Modernism,' *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 6, no.1 (Spring 2022): 5–8. Available at: https://doi.org/10.16995/pr.6569.

An Béal Bocht

O'Nolan's next book to appear, *An béal bocht, nó An milleánach: Droch-sgéal ar an droch-shaoghal*, did so in 1941, just two years after *At Swim-Two-Birds*; a revised edition was published in 1964. Written in Irish under the pseudonym Myles na gCopaleen, it was intended as a humorously satirical response to Tomás Ó Criomhthain's celebrated autobiographical work *An tOileánach* (1929), which gives an unadorned but powerful account of the daily hardships endured by the subsistence fishermen of the Blasket Islands off the Atlantic coast of County Kerry.[34] Ó Criomhthain's book was likewise written in Irish and translated some years later by Robin Flower as *The Islandman* (1934), the title page of which anglicised the author's name as Thomas O'Crohan.[35] While *An tOileánach* provided the immediate occasion for Myles's coruscatingly comic satire, the target of the satire was not by any means the genuine poverty and hardship endured by self-taught Blasket Islanders such as Ó Criomhthain and Peig Sayers (whose likewise celebrated autobiography *Peig: A scéal féin* appeared in 1936[36]) and other Gaeltacht storytellers, but rather the false pieties of the comfortably middle-class Dublin-based movement to revive the Irish language as the first language of the state. These pieties included an idealistic romanticisation of the way of life of the Irish-speaking peasantry, ostensibly close to nature, pure in heart and mind, and unshakeably in touch with universal verities, that was an irresistible challenge to O'Nolan's satirical instincts.

The implication of the title *An béal bocht*, literally 'the poor mouth,' has an exact linguistic parallel in the colloquial Hiberno-English expression *putting the poor mouth on things*, which denotes 'making a pretence of being poor or in bad circumstances in order to gain advantage for oneself from creditors or prospective creditors.'[37] The subtitle *An milleánach* (roughly, 'the moaner, the complainer') takes direct (and rhyming) aim at Ó Criomhthain's title *An tOileánach* (literally, 'the islander'). The (likewise rhyming) secondary subtitle *Droch-sgéal ar an droch-shaoghal* promises 'a woeful tale of woeful times.' The account is ostensibly 'edited' (*curtha in eagar*) by Myles na gCopaleen, who relays Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa's first-person tale of how utterly woeful things were and are and always will be in wet and woeful Corca Dorcha – this latter a fictional locality of remarkable elasticity, compactly conflating geographical features of all three of the major Irish-speaking areas along the west coast of Ireland, ignoring the hundreds of real-world miles that separate them, from County Kerry in the south to County Galway in the west and County Donegal in the north.

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[34] Tomás Ó Criomhthain, *An tOileánach* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1929).

[35] Thomas O'Crohan, *The Islandman*, trans. Robin Flower (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934).

[36] Peig Sayers, *Peig: A scéal féin* (Dublin: Talbot, 1936).

[37] Patrick C. Power, 'Translator's Preface,' in Flann O'Brien, *The Poor Mouth: A Bad Story about the Hard Life*, trans. Patrick C. Power (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1973), 5.

O'Nolan firmly resisted undertaking any translation of *An béal bocht* during his own lifetime. In 1973, seven years after his death, a first translation appeared, an English version by Patrick C. Power published in London, entitled *The Poor Mouth: A Bad Story about the Hard Life*, and, according to the title page, 'edited by Myles na Gopaleen (Flann O'Brien).'[38] The translator's (or, perhaps more likely, the British publisher's) decisions here make for a distinctly odd combination of paratextual factors. The primary title *The Poor Mouth* strikes exactly the right Hiberno-English note; the original subtitle *An milleánach*, however, with its parodic intertextual reference to the Gaeltacht autobiography genre, is omitted altogether, no doubt considered merely confusing for the British market, for which it would of course make no sense. The secondary subtitle *Droch-sgéal ar an droch-shaoghal*, with its similarly parodic repetition of the element *droch-* (bad, woeful) and the rhyming *sgéal* (story, tale) and *saoghal* (life, times), is linguistically accurate but significantly flattened in stylistic terms. The phrase 'the hard life' echoes for English-speaking readers the title of O'Nolan's later novel *The Hard Life* (1961), which, though written two decades after *An béal bocht*, appeared a decade before *The Poor Mouth* did in English. In Power's version, the alleged 'editorship' of *The Poor Mouth* is attributed, as mentioned, not to 'Myles na gCopaleen,' as in the original, but to the doubly 'translated' combination 'Myles na Gopaleen (Flann O'Brien).' One would like to be able to attribute all of this to a spirit of post-Mylesean postmodernist parody.

While the particular implication of the title *The Poor Mouth* will be apparent to most Irish readers, for whom the phrase is a common turn of speech, even other English-speaking readers may well find it a somewhat unusual formulation. Since translations into other languages, unsurprisingly, are almost entirely from Power's English version rather than the original Irish, translators have devised a number of strategies for conveying the perceived oddity of the English-language title. The first foreign-language translation to appear was a German version by Harry Rowohlt in 1977, translated from the English. Rowohlt's chosen title was *Das Barmen: Eine arge Geschichte vom harten Leben* (roughly, 'Moaning and Groaning: A Woeful Story of the Hard Life'), employing the North German dialect expression *barmen*, which implies 'to moan, to grumble, to complain.' The translation was reissued in 1996 under the new primary title *Irischer Lebenslauf* (An Irish Life) and again in 2005 under the restored original (German) title, *Das Barmen*.[39]

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[38] Flann O'Brien, *The Poor Mouth: A Bad Story about the Hard Life*, trans. Patrick C. Power (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1973).

[39] Flann O'Brien, *Das Barmen: Eine arge Geschichte vom harten Leben*, trans. Harry Rowohlt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), republished as *Irischer Lebenslauf: Eine arge Geschichte vom harten Leben* (Frankfurt am Main am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996) and *Das Barmen: Eine arge Geschichte vom harten Leben* (Zurich: Kein & Aber, 2005).

A Hungarian translation of 1982 by Júlia Veres appeared under the more daringly idiosyncratic, and considerably more imaginative, name *A fába szorult féreg*.[40] The title, which implies something like 'a wolfworm caught in a trap,' refers to an idiomatic Hungarian phrase translatable as 'howling like a wolf in a trap' to convey the concept of being in dire straits. Humorously, this particular wolf (for which the standard Hungarian term would be *farkas*) is replaced by a worm (*féreg*) caught (*szorult* 'tight') in (*-ba*) a wooden (*fá-*) trap. The estranging effect of the title for a Hungarian reader hinges partly on the fact that *féreg* (worm) is also an obsolete term for 'wolf.' Other translations adopt a considerably more sober approach. A French translation of 1984 by André Verrier and Alain Le Berre opted for *Le pleure-misère, ou La triste histoire d'une vie de chien* (approximately, 'The Complainer, or The Sad Story of a Dog's Life'),[41] where the phrase '*une vie de chien*' intertextually echoes the French title of O'Nolan's *The Hard Life*,[42] which was translated in 1972 by Christiane Convers as *Une vie de chien*. An Italian translation of 1987 by Daniele Benati is entitled *La miseria in bocca* (roughly, 'A mouth full of misery'),[43] while a Swedish version of 1995 by Erik Andersson opts for *Klagomunnen* (literally, 'a mouth full of moans').[44] A Spanish version of 2008 by Antonio Rivero Taravillo, meanwhile, to my knowledge the only translation directly from Myles's Irish rather than Power's English, appears under the literally rendered title *La boca pobre* (the poor mouth).[45]

Cruiskeen Lawn

For more than a quarter of a century, Myles na gCopaleen (later Myles na Gopaleen) was a household name in Ireland as the pseudonymous author of the humorous newspaper column *Cruiskeen Lawn*, which appeared in *The Irish Times* from 1940 to 1966. The column was written mainly in Irish until the end of 1941, alternated between English and Irish day by day in 1942, and later appeared almost entirely in English,[46] with occasional snatches of Irish, French, German, Japanese,[47] and Latin thrown in, usually for humorous effect.

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[40] Flann O'Brien, *A fába szorult féreg*, trans. Júlia Veres (Budapest: Európa, 1982).

[41] Flann O'Brien, *Le pleure-misère, ou La triste histoire d'une vie de chien*, trans. André Verrier and Alain Le Berre (Paris: Éditions Le Tout sur le Tout, 1984).

[42] Flann O'Brien, *Une vie de chien*, trans. Christiane Convers (Paris: Gallimard, 1972).

[43] Flann O'Brien, *La miseria in bocca*, trans. Daniele Benati (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1987).

[44] Flann O'Brien, *Klagomunnen*, trans. Erik Andersson (Klagomunnen. Lund: Ellerström, 1995).

[45] Flann O'Brien, *La boca pobre*, trans. Antonio Rivero Taravillo (Madrid: Nórdica Libros, 2008). See Álvaro Marín García, 'The Strange Case of Flann O'Brien and Myles na gCopaleen: A Master of English Language Translated from Gaelic into Spanish,' *The Translator* (2018): 1–11.

[46] John Cronin, *Irish Fiction 1900–1940* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1992), 172.

[47] See Catherine Flynn, '"the half–said thing": *Cruiskeen Lawn*, Japan, and the Second World War,' in *Flann O'Brien: Problems with Authority*, eds., Ruben Borg, Paul Fagan, and John McCourt (Cork: Cork University Press, 2017), 71–86.

The title *Cruiskeen Lawn* represents an anglicisation of the Irish *crúiscín lán* (literally, 'a full little jug'), already well known to Irish audiences of the day as the title of a popular drinking song – popularised, indeed, by the singing of none other than the character Myles-na-Coppaleen in Dion Boucicault's *Colleen Bawn* (1860). The first reference in O'Nolan's works to 'the crúiskeen lawn,' however (written on this occasion with an accent), is in *At Swim-Two-Birds*,[48] not in connection with alcoholic celebrations but in a parodic list of birds whose song is declared to have pleased the ancient Fenian hero Finn Mac Cool. The list names twenty-five different birds, some of them real and some invented – 'the red-necked chough, the parsnip landrail, the pilibín móna, the bottle-tailed tit, the common marsh-coot'[49] – and in their midst, without comment, is 'the crúiskeen lawn,' noted, presumably, less for its own song than for its powers of evoking song in others. We might also note that in *An béal bocht* the narrator is told that his father, who is in jail, is '*sa chrúiscín*'[50] (literally, 'in the jug'). We may also remember that the acerbic narrator of the 'Cyclops' episode in *Ulysses* refers to the bibulous Citizen 'in his gloryhole, with his cruiskeen lawn and his load of papers, working for the cause.'[51] The column's title, with its suggestion of an endless supply of pleasures, humorously evokes an abundant cornucopia of riches, and the supply was indeed abundant, flowing eventually for more than twenty-five years.

An early bilingual paperback collection of selected columns, also entitled *Cruiskeen Lawn*, appeared in Dublin in 1943.[52] Further collections appeared after O'Nolan's death under a variety of titles chosen by their respective editors, including *The Best of Myles* (1968), *Further Cuttings from Cruiskeen Lawn* (1976), *The Various Lives of Keats and Chapman and The Brother* (1976), *The Hair of the Dogma* (1977) and *Flann O'Brien at War: Myles na gCopaleen 1940–1945* (1999).[53] Selections from the newspaper columns have appeared in other languages under a quite different r ange of titles and titular implications to date. A French collection appeared in 1983 under the title

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[48] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, 17.

[49] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, 16.

[50] Myles na gCopaleen, *An béal bocht, nó An milleánach: Droch-sgéal ar an droch-shaoghal curtha in eagar le Myles na gCopaleen* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1964), 10.

[51] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (London: Bodley Head, 1993), 12.122–3.

[52] Myles na gCopaleen, *Cruiskeen Lawn* (Dublin: Cahill, 1943).

[53] Myles na Gopaleen (Flann O'Brien), *The Best of Myles*, ed. Kevin O'Nolan (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968); *Further Cuttings from Cruiskeen Lawn*, ed. Kevin O'Nolan (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1976); *The Various Lives of Keats and Chapman and The Brother*, ed. Benedict Kiely (London: Grafton, 1976); *The Hair of the Dogma*, ed. Kevin O'Nolan (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1977); *Flann O'Brien at War: Myles na gCopaleen 1940–1945*, ed. John Wyse Jackson (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1999). Two further collections of miscellaneous writings are *Myles Away from Dublin*, ed. Martin Green (London: Grafton, 1985) and *Myles before Myles: A Selection of the Earlier Writings of Brian O'Nolan*, ed. John Wyse Jackson (London: Grafton, 1988).

Dublinoiseries,[54] implying something like 'Dublin shenanigans,' but also playing, for French readers of Irish writers, on *Dublinois*, the title of a new French translation of James Joyce's *Dubliners* published just the previous year.[55] A German translation of *The Best of Myles* appeared under the title *Trost und Rat* (1985), promising, literally, 'comfort and counsel.'[56] Selections from *The Best of Myles* appeared in Italian, translated by Daniele Benati, under two different titles: *I l boccale traboccante* (literally, 'the overflowing tankard,' thus 'cruiskeen lawn') in 2005 and *Cronache dublinesi* (Dublin chronicles) in 2008.[57] A 1998 Swedish collection bore the thoroughly Mylesean title *Det elektriska ångloket* (literally, 'the electric steam engine').[58] A German translation of *Flann O'Brien at War* appeared under the intertextually allusive English-language title *Golden Hours* (2001),[59] which is also the title of the first of de Selby's books read by the narrator of *The Third Policeman* and thus humorously equates the mad philosopher de Selby and his creator.

The Hard Life

The title of O'Nolan's later novel *The Hard Life: An Exegesis of Squalor* (1961) has been seen by some as referring back to the subtitle of *An béal bocht,* with its promise of a woeful story about '*an droch-shaoghal,'* a phrase that Power, as we have seen, translated in 1973 as 'the hard life.' The subtitle of *The Hard Life* ponderously advertises 'an exegesis of squalor' and might initially seem to be inviting readers to see the novel as an exercise in social analysis à la Zola. The flaunted ineptitude of the subtitle may certainly also be read as inviting readers' suspicion, however. Since a central armature of the novel is a sustained exercise in clergy-baiting, it seems in fact reasonable to assume that the 'exegesis' of the subtitle was also intended to suggest a taunting misuse, completely scandalous in the Ireland of the early 1960s, of the Holy Name of Jesus, taken decidedly in vain. Neither the censors nor the clergy, however, seem to have noticed – or, if they did, could bring themselves to believe – any such implication; at any rate, neither target group rose to the bait, if bait it was.[60]

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[54] Flann O'Brien, *Dublinoiseries*, trans. Bernard Genies and Patrick Reumaux (Paris: Éditions Jean-Cyrille Godefroy, 1983).

[55] James Joyce, *Dublinois*, trans. Jacques Aubert (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

[56] Flann O'Brien, *Trost und Rat*, trans. Harry Rowohlt (Zurich: Haffmans, 1985).

[57] Flann O'Brien, *Il boccale traboccante*, trans. Daniele Benati (Varese: Giano, 2005); Flann O'Brien, *Cronache dublinesi*, trans. Daniele Benati (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2008).

[58] Flann O'Brien, *Det elektriska ångloket*, trans. Erik Andersson and Magnus Hedlund (Lund: Ellerström, 1998).

[59] Flann O'Brien, *Golden Hours: Die Goldenen Stunden des Myles na gCopaleen*, trans. Harry Rowohlt (Zurich: Haffmans, 2001).

[60] For further analysis of the title of *The Hard Life*, see John McCourt, 'More "gravid" than Gravitas: Collopy, Fahrt, and the Pope in Rome,' in *Flann O'Brien: Problems with Authority*, eds., Ruben Borg, Paul Fagan, and John McCourt (Cork: Cork University Press, 2017), 172–4.

Three translators of *The Hard Life* chose three entirely different options for the primary title – and, understandably, ignored the subtitle altogether. Annemarie and Heinrich Böll's German version of 1966 opts for a straightforwardly literal *Das harte Leben* ('the hard life'), taking the word of the original title that the novel was to be concerned with a hard life of some sort.[61] M. Marshall-van Wieringen's 1970 Dutch translation opts instead, tongue firmly in cheek, for *De Whiskeywezen* (literally, 'the spirit of whiskey'), once again overtly evoking for continental readers the incorrigible Irishness of the hard-drinking Irish – and the amniotic pleasures of alcohol are indeed much in evidence in *The Hard Life*, as they were also in *At Swim-Two-Birds*.[62] Christiane Convers's French version of 1972, as mentioned, prefers *Une vie de chien* (literally, 'a dog's life') – interestingly (and possibly coincidentally), this name would have been already familiar to some French readers as the translated title of Charlie Chaplin's 1918 film *A Dog's Life*. While the Dutch version of *The Hard Life* thus focuses on the all-too-Irish (and all-too-transient) pleasures of whiskey, the French, in very different vein – and echoing the titular implications of Morisset's earlier translation of *At Swim-Two-Birds* as *Kermesse irlandaise* – chooses to evoke instead an atmosphere of slapstick buffoonery, also well known, after all, to be another characteristic of the all-too-Irish. It is striking that neither O'Nolan's own original title nor any one of these three translated titles seems particularly appropriate for the novel. A fourth translation, an Italian version by Daniele Benati, appeared in 2002, echoing the Bölls' titular choice in German, as *L'ardua vita* and in 2009 as *Vita dura*, each of these a literal rendering of the original title.[63]

The Dalkey Archive

Published in 1964, *The Dalkey Archive* is set in the titular Dalkey, a coastal suburb a dozen miles or so south of Dublin. The carefully opaque title can be read as referring to an archive relating to Dalkey, to an archive situated in Dalkey, or to an archive combining both of these characteristics. Readers are also immediately presented with a teasing invitation to explain why Dalkey, though long a fashionable seaside suburb, and the central location of the action of the story, should be singled out for this titular attention rather than any other of greater Dublin's various suburban communities. The narrative offers little immediate help towards that explanation.

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[61] Flann O'Brien, *Das harte Leben*, trans. Annemarie Böll and Heinrich Böll (Hamburg: Nannen, 1966).

[62] Flann O'Brien, *De Whiskeywezen*, trans. M. Marshall-van Wieringen (Amsterdam: Meulenhof, 1970).

[63] Flann O'Brien, *L'ardua vita*, trans. Daniele Benati (Varese: Giano, 2002); Flann O'Brien, *Vita dura*, trans. Daniele Benati (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2009).

Approximately at the midpoint of the tale, however, readers discover with some bemusement that the tired elderly barman in a rather grubby hotel in Skerries, a seaside resort on the less fashionable north side of Dublin, is none other than James Joyce. On a first reading, the novel's introduction of a dowdy and defeated Joyce, now presumably in his early eighties (at least by real-world standards), seems peculiarly unmotivated and previously unprepared in the narrative. Readers familiar with Joyce's biography, however, may retrospectively notice the presence in the novel of three cryptic clues that humorously foreshadow his unexpected appearance. First, Dalkey was the location of the school in which, in 1904, Joyce as a young man briefly exercised his talents as a teacher – as did Stephen Dedalus, following in his creator's footsteps. Second, Dalkey is reached from Dublin by the well-known Vico Road, and since the appearance of *Finnegans Wake* and the work of its various commentators, the name Vico would for many Dublin readers have immediately also evoked the name of Joyce. Third, Dalkey, indeed the Vico Road itself, it emerges, is also the Irish residence of the quasi-philosopher De Selby, imported from the at-that-stage still unpublished manuscript of *The Third Policeman*. One of De Selby's numerous extraordinary feats is to engage in underwater colloquy with none other than St Augustine – and readers might well wonder if the choice of the particular saintly interlocutor is at all related to the fact that Joyce's middle name was none other than Augustine. Dalkey, in short, we are invited to infer, marks the beginning of Joyce's singularly undistinguished career: first as an undistinguished teacher, then as an undistinguished minor writer (for, by his own avowal, he is *not* the author of either of the 'filthy books' commonly attributed to him), and finally as an undistinguished barman in an undistinguished pub in an undistinguished country town.

Both the title and the narrative setting, however, may very well also owe something to the whimsical eighteenth-century fiction of the so-called Kingdom of Dalkey, an institution that one would expect to have had considerable appeal for the author of *Cruiskeen Lawn* and the inventor of the redoubtable De Selby. For several years during the 1790s, a society of Dublin wits and satirists styling themselves the 'Kingdom of Dalkey' (and at one point including Thomas Moore as a member) met annually on Dalkey Island and elected or confirmed the election of a president jocosely and grandiosely styled 'King of Dalkey, Emperor of the Muglins, Prince of the Holy Island of Magee, and Elector of Lambay and Ireland's Eye.' Had the role continued to exist into the 1960s, it is one that the author of *Cruiskeen Lawn* would undoubtedly have adorned – son and heir as he was, at least by his own account, of 'Sir Myles na gCopaleen (the

da),'[64] and selflessly already prepared, if called upon, 'to be King. His Most Gracious Majesty, Myles the First.'[65]

Translators have had little challenge in rendering the title, though their respective decisions still manage to suggest implications that differ to some extent from those of the original. Harry Rowohlt's German version of 1979, *Aus Dalkeys Archiven*, literally means 'from the archives of Dalkey' and thus seems to promise (without of course producing) a collection of historical anecdotes from Dalkey's past.[66] A 2007 Spanish translation by María José Chuliá García, *Crónica de Dalkey*,[67] seems to make a similar promise, though ostensibly in the form of a more coherent historical 'chronicle' rather than by means of the suggested series of anecdotes implied by Rowohlt's German title. A Portuguese version of 1987 by Maurício Reinaldo Gonçalves, *O arquivo Dalkey*, provides a strictly literal translation that nonetheless more obviously stresses, once again, the historical rather than the locational implications of the English title.[68]

The title of a French translation of 1995 by Patrick Reumaux, *L'archiviste de Dublin* (literally, 'the archivist of Dublin'), deviates furthest and most intriguingly from the original.[69] It does so first by substituting Dublin for Dalkey, thus largely demystifying what for most non-Irish readers is likely to be an initial enigma, namely, the geographical allusion: all French readers likely to be reading such a text in the first place can confidently be expected to have some knowledge, however vague, of Dublin, while very few (as in the case of many English-language readers also, of course) will have any knowledge at all, vague or otherwise, of the village of Dalkey. The French title also shifts potential readers' focus from an archive to an archivist, thus implicitly suggesting that establishing that character's identity will be an important element of their readerly endeavours. Readers intent on carrying out that programme of research will thus arguably be more interested than their English-language fellow readers in the role of the narrator, who could surely be the only entity in the narrative who might warrant such a description. Reumaux's title also leaves open the ambiguity as to whether the archivist in question more importantly devotes his scholarly endeavours to Dublin or is merely resident there.

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[64] O'Brien, *The Best of Myles*, 154.

[65] O'Brien, *The Best of Myles*, 382.

[66] Flann O'Brien, *Aus Dalkeys Archiven*, trans. Harry Rowohlt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979).

[67] Flann O'Brien, *Crónica de Dalkey*, trans. María José Chuliá García (Madrid: Nórdica Libros, 2007).

[68] Flann O'Brien, *O arquivo Dalkey*, trans. Maurício Reinaldo Gonçalves (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987).

[69] Flann O'Brien, *L'archiviste de Dublin*, trans. Patrick Reumaux (Paris: Éditions Granit, 1995).

The Third Policeman

The Third Policeman, finally, though completed in early 1940, remained unpublished until 1967. The lapidary title, which gives no inkling of the kind of narrative to follow other than that it will presumably feature at least three policemen, was not its author's first choice. A working title at one point was *Hell Goes Round and Round*,[70] derived from a cut passage in which Joe explains the hellish nature of the policemen's jurisdiction, which was eventually printed by the publisher following the novel's final lines: 'Hell goes round and round. In shape it is circular and by nature it is interminable, repetitive and very nearly unbearable.'[71] O'Nolan's decision to employ the much less tendentious title *The Third Policeman* instead of *Hell Goes Round and Round* has been respected by translators in ten or a dozen languages, almost all of whom have chosen equally simple and straightforward renditions – thus, for example, the Italian *Il terzo poliziotto* (1971),[72] the Dutch *De derde politieman* (1971),[73] the German *Der dritte Polizist* (1975),[74] the Swedish *Den tredje polisen* (1977),[75] the French *Le troisième policier* (1980),[76] the Polish *Trzeci policjant* (1996),[77] the Czech *Třetí strážnik* (1999),[78] the Norwegian *Den tredje politimannen* (2001),[79] the Hungarian *A harmadik rendőr* (2003),[80] and the Spanish *El tercer policía* (2006).[81]

Only in one case does there seem to be some slight room – and that debatable at best – for detecting or suspecting supplementary titular implications. The title of a Brazilian Portuguese version, *O terceiro tira*,[82] translates literally as 'the third cop,' where the colloquial Brazilian term *tira* (cop) – which is, at first sight, quite inappropriate for the stylistic register of the original title – is substituted for the standard terms *policial* or *polícia* (policeman) employed in Brazil and Portugal respectively. Some readers, especially those attuned to the translingual games of *Cruiskeen Lawn*, might well be tempted to wonder if it is really no more than coincidence here that the colloquial

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[70] Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 289.

[71] Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1967), 200.

[72] Flann O'Brien, *Il terzo poliziotto*, trans. Bruno Fonzi (Torino: Einaudi, 1971).

[73] Flann O'Brien, *De derde politieman*, trans. Caspar Hendriks (Utrecht: Bruna, 1971).

[74] Flann O'Brien, *Der dritte Polizist*, trans. Harry Rowohlt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975); rev. edn. (Zurich: Kein & Aber, 2006).

[75] Flann O'Brien, *Den tredje polisen*, trans. Magnus Hedlund (Göteborg: Stegeland, 1977).

[76] Flann O'Brien, *Le troisième policier*, trans. Patrick Reumaux (Paris: Éditions Hachette, 1980).

[77] Flann O'Brien, *Trzeci policjant*, trans. Andrzej Grabowski and Małgorzata Grabowska (Poznán: Zysk i S-ka, 1996).

[78] Flann O'Brien, *Třetí strážnik*, trans. Ondřej Pilný (Prague: Argo, 1999).

[79] Flann O'Brien, *Den tredje politimannen*, trans. Grethe Fosse (Oslo: Solum, 2001).

[80] Flann O'Brien, *A harmadik rendőr*, trans. Gábor Török (Budapest: Geopen, 2003).

[81] Flann O'Brien, *El tercer policía*, trans. Héctor Arnau (Madrid: Nórdica Libros, 2006).

[82] Flann O'Brien, *O terceiro tira*, trans. Luís Fernando Brandão (Pôrto Alegre: L & PM Editores, 1987).

Portuguese noun *tira* (cop) is identical to the Spanish verb *tira* (shoots), itself a close linguistic relation of the Portuguese verb *atira* (shoots). Our Mylesean detectives, indeed, might find themselves wondering if the alliterating Portuguese title *O terceiro tira* should in fact be read as including a cryptic Spanish warning, cunningly encoded as one would expect of the author of *The Third Policeman*, that '*el tercero tira*' (the third one shoots). As it turns out, of course, the third policeman will not in fact be using or even carrying or very likely even having any access to a firearm – but he is certainly the one to watch out for, and not just on matters pertaining to unlicensed bicycles and their accoutrements, as the increasingly hapless narrator will discover, as far as we can tell, to his cost.

Conclusion

The translated titles of *The Third Policeman*, with this one (entirely hypothetical) exception, do not suggest any very obvious ways in which the approach of a target-language reader might be expected to be significantly different from that of an English-language reader. The same is essentially true, again with minor exceptions, of the translated titles of both *The Hard Life* and *The Dalkey Archive*. The translated English title of *An béal bocht*, namely *The Poor Mouth*, and the titles in turn of translations of that translation, offer a considerably wider range of translational options, and thus provide readers in the various relevant target languages with an initial encounter with the text that is unquestionably very different from that of readers in the original Irish. Not at all surprisingly, however, it is *At Swim-Two-Birds* that provides its translators with the greatest and most intriguing challenges, and their cumulative response to that titular challenge fascinatingly extends the macrotextual range and resonance of that already eminently resonant and heterotextual text.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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