

## **NATURE DENATURED IN FLANN O'BRIEN'S THE THIRD POLICEMAN**

**Keywords:** landscape; irony; Gaeltacht; infinity; theatrical; paratragic.

**Abstract:** *The Third Policeman*, the last and most complex of the major novels of 'Flann O'Brien' – the Irish satirical writer Brian O'Nolan – is a latecomer in a European movement of anti-naturalism begun by Rimbaud, Zola and Huysmans in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In it, O'Nolan subverts an age-old Irish literary tradition of observing, latterly with nostalgia, the Irish rural landscape. Here a prime irritant to him was his own, mercenary M.A. dissertation on Irish nature poetry that secured him employment in the Irish Civil Service and settled him in a powerfully urban environment.

*The presence of nature in Flann O'Brien's first and experimental novel At Swim-Two-Birds is embodied in the adventures of the two characters, no longer seriously heroic, Finn MacCool and king Sweeny; it is explicitly headed "a humorous...excursion into ancient mythology." Similarly, in the author's only extended book in his native Gaelic, englished as The Poor Mouth, the squalor of a small village in the boglands of the Gaeltacht, traditionally treated with reverence, is portrayed with comic glee.*

*In The Third Policeman itself, Flann O'Brien begins by subverting the natural world via the theme of "unnatural" buildings in the countryside. Then, as his plot – which is in fact an anti-plot – unfolds episodically, the phenomena of the natural world, described with virtuoso hyperbole, are manipulated in order to reflect the vicissitudes of the simple-minded narrator. This runs out in a superb image of nullity and a Victorian recursus. O'Nolan's strategy can fairly be compared to the use of the chorus in a Greek tragedy; it also to some degree prefigures the landscapes of Samuel Beckett.*

"Plus ces paysages!" ("no more of these landscapes!"), cried Rimbaud in May 1872. His was not a lone voice. "The rest of us," reflected Joris-Karl Huysmans – he meant the Médan Group, and above all Zola – "being occupied with a subtler, truer form of art, had to ask ourselves if Naturalism was a cul-de-sac, and whether we should not soon run up against the end wall.... Hazily I did my best to escape from a stifling impasse..." (Huysmans).<sup>1</sup> Huysmans had, in 1884, published a Decadent masterpiece – Wilde's *Dorian Gray* found it "the strangest book he had ever read" – entitled *À Rebours* ["Against the Grain", "Against Nature"]. Half a century later, the Irish satirical novelist and columnist Brian O'Nolan – "Myles na gCopaleen", "Flann O'Brien" –

---

\* Independent scholar

<sup>1</sup> Author's translation.

reaped Huysman's innovations. The Frenchman's anti-naturalist style, "packed with purple passages, intricate sentences, weird metaphors...and a vocabulary rich in slang and technical terms" (Baldick 14), gave O'Nolan, a brilliant operator with language, a model to work on; and better still, Huysman's protagonist, the languid aristocrat *scientifique* Des Esseintes, cued the Irish writer, as it had done other 20<sup>th</sup>-century writers,<sup>2</sup> pointing him towards the personality, name and activities of his own obsessive experimentalist De Selby.

The lusciousness of Erin's well-watered natural landscape (mountain, sea, lake, greensward) and its fauna (birds, seals, and anciently stags) constitute a cultural cliché and article of faith for many, these including the Irish Tourist Board,<sup>3</sup> *Fáilte Ireland* (one of numerous national bodies to come under O'Nolan's lash), and a writer from *Golf Travel Reviews* who, after praising the "magnificent, green and rugged coastal terrain of the Emerald Isle," penned a phrase that O'Nolan the columnist ("Myles na gCopaleen") would have fallen on with savage glee: "in Ireland, the best golf course designer is Nature herself." The aim of my paper is to show how this anodyne publicity image is ruthlessly subverted by O'Nolan the novelist ("Flann O'Brien"), in what has questionably been called his "postmodern dialogue with Irish tradition"; above all in his last successful novel *The Third Policeman*, completed in 1940 but until 1967 considered unsafe to publish.

Monks in their seclusion produced Christian Ireland's earliest poetry, rapturously responding to the world around them (Kinsella 30):

The little bird      has whistled      from point of beak      bright-yellow;  
he sends a cry      over Loch an Laig      blackbird from branch      in wooded plain.

Their loving and minute perception of nature recurs throughout Irish literature, particularly in poetry. The paradigm was fixed for ever early in the nineteenth century, when Dubliners and Londoners alike were transported by Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*:<sup>4</sup>

Erin, the tear and the smile in thine eyes  
Blend like the rainbow that hangs in the skies

OR

There is not in the wide world one valley so sweet  
As the vale in whose bosom the bright waters meet.

<sup>2</sup>Most strikingly the noble Jacinto in *A Cidade e as serras* (1901) by the Portuguese novelist Eça de Queiroz.

<sup>3</sup>"From tranquil walks along startlingly beautiful coastlines," enthuses its website, "to cycling through lush countryside..."

<sup>4</sup>Typical of Moore's effect on cultured sentiment was a keepsake album, *Landscape Illustrations of Moore's Irish Melodies*, by a Cork folklorist (Croker).

Typical of Moore's effect on cultured sentiment was a keepsake album of Irish landscapes, by a Cork folklorist (Croker).

This tradition of nature and nostalgia, which lives on in Seamus Heaney and Patrick Kavanagh,<sup>5</sup> has only recently been explored in depth (Frawley), but has been standard fare for scholars for over a century. The prolific historian and educationalist P. W. Joyce, whom the polymath O'Nolan can hardly not have read,<sup>6</sup> had written of the early Irish poets (P. W. Joyce, *A Smaller Social History* 521–22):

Their poetry, their tales, and even their proper names, to this day bear testimony to their intense love of nature and their appreciation of natural beauty....many other features of nature and art, not mentioned by Keats<sup>7</sup> – the boom and dash of the waves, the cry of the sea-birds, the murmur of the wind among the trees, the howling of the storm, the sad desolation of the landscape in winter, the ever-varying beauty of Irish clouds, the cry of the hounds in full career among the glens..., all these are noticed and dwelt upon by those observant old Irish writers...

Joyce's dropping of the name Keats would not unduly have impressed "Myles na gCopaleen," one of whose memorable inventions was a subspecies of shaggy-dog story conducted between two plebeian characters "Keats' and 'Chapman'".

With the Beauties of Erin, Brian O'Nolan was familiar to the point of satiety. After graduating at University College Dublin in 1932, he embarked on an M.A. dissertation entitled *Naduirfiliocht na Gaedhilge: Trachtas maraon le Danaire* [Nature Poetry in Irish: Thesis, including the Dispossessed]. His dissertation, in accordance with good Catholic practice, was a means to an end. To cite a Tristram Shandy-like exchange from his debut novel *At Swim-Two-Birds* (O'Brien, *At Swim* 27):

"You are a University man, Mr Brinsley?"

"Oh yes."

"Ah, very good", said my uncle. "It's a grand thing, that – a thing that will stand to you... A good degree is a very nice thing to have."

O'Nolan *père* had been an excise officer and his son Brian, obsessively fearful of unemployment, was after the coveted safe job in De Valera's civil service; there were only three posts, and a thousand applicants. Getting the job on merit, he prudently

---

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Kavanagh's *On an Apple-Ripe September morning* or his *Canal Bank Walk*, with its reference to redemption. See also O'Nolan, B, 'Baudelaire and Kavanagh', *The Irish Times* [Nonplus], 1959.

<sup>6</sup> His pen name 'Flann' is perhaps due to a discussion in Joyce (P. W. Joyce, *A Short History of Ireland* 27).

<sup>7</sup> The reference being to Keats' aphorism "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever" (*Endymion* I.1).

muzzled his *saeva indignatio* and what he privately termed its “deliberated debased and dehumanised” ways (Mader-Lin 4).

In his (or his supervisor’s) choice of M.A. topic there was a grim irony, since few writers can have been more urbanized, more of Grub Street, than O’Nolan. He spent all his teenage and adult life in Dublin, chiefly Blackrock and Donnybrook. His career peak was as Principal Officer for town planning. From bus journeys, he knew the city, not transcendently like James Joyce, but functionally, street by street.<sup>8</sup> Three classic articles of his for the monthly *The Bell* (1940) dealt with dog-racing, with dance-halls, and with public houses, his life-blood. He was, in short, writing for Dubliners (Looby 3; Mader-Lin 1).

O’Nolan had the lowest possible opinion of a university education. He saw the lectures as:

...mawkish, obtuse mumbblings on subjects any intelligent person could master single-handed in a few months.... The exams I found childish and...the whole University I found to be a sham.

He would habitually call his M.A. thesis “a joke” (Mader-Lin 4), and the relationship between him, and his dissertation, and the outside world may well have resembled the relationship between the narrator, and John Divney, and the neighbours in *The Third Policeman* (O’Brien, *The Third Policeman* 8–9):

[The neighbours] said that human friendship was a beautiful thing and that Divney and I were the noblest example of it in the history of the world... And it is not strange that two people never came to dislike each other as bitterly as did I and Divney. And two people were never so polite to each other, so friendly in the face.

His topic cannot have been further endeared to him when his examiners rejected his original draft, and he was required to rewrite. His second, unctuous, ‘acceptable’ version was submitted on pink foolscap; comment is superfluous. He wrote the phrase “[a] superb heap of twaddle that would deceive nobody ten years of age” about his article for *Time Magazine* (1943), but it would have done just as well for his dissertation. A better yardstick of his creativity was the satirical sheet *Blather*, which he was just launching at this time.

In the earlier part of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, “Flann O’Brien” incarnates Irish nature is embodied in two of its most celebrated denizens: Fionn mac Cumhaill, anglicized as Finn MacCool (O’Brien, *At Swim* 61)<sup>9</sup> and Suibne Geilt, the mad king of Ireland,

<sup>8</sup> Cf O’Brien (*At Swim* 47) ‘Three nights later I was alone in Nassau Street, a district frequented by the prostitute class, when I perceived a ramrod in a cloth cap on the watch at the corner of Kildare Street....I accompanied him on a long walk through the environs of Irishtown, Sandymount and Sydney Parade, returning by Haddington Road and the banks of the canal.’

<sup>9</sup> Cf MacKillop (1975).

anglicized as Sweeny, who was condemned, after killing a cleric, to all the rigours of life in the wild. Introduced solely for their comic potential, they become minor characters long before the end of the book, and their quasi-heroic utterances are undercut by being sandwiched between drab slices of urban life. There are strong echoes of the ‘Cyclops’ episode of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, with its “broadshouldered deepchested” hero, the citizen discussion of the Irish language (J. Joyce 382, 441)<sup>10</sup> and its empirical parody of early lyric, “in a tone suggestive of suppressed rancour” (J. Joyce 404). *At Swim-Two-Birds* has not long started before Finn launches a long rant in praise of nature, in the style of early Irish poetry. To guy this, all that needs to be done is slightly heighten the original diction (O’Brien, *At Swim* 13–14):

I like gull-cries and the twittering together of fine cranes. I like the surf-roar at Tralee,... These also please me, man-shouts at a parting, cuckoo-call in May. I incline to like pig-grunting in Magh Eithne, the belling of the stag of Ceara, the whinging of fauns in Derrynish. The low warble of water-owls in Loch Barra also, sweeter than life that. I am fond of wing-beating in dark belfries, cow-cries in pregnancy, trout-spurt in a lake-top. Also the whining of small otters in nettle-beds at evening, the croaking of small-jays behind a wall, heart-pleasing are these.

As for Sweeny, he is dragged through bush and briar by the extra-textual author Flann, much as the intra-textual author Trellis will be dragged by the characters of his own creation (O’Brien, *At Swim* 67):

...filled with a restless tottering unquiet and with a disgust for the places that he knew and a desire to be where he never was...not one inch of him that was not red-prickled and blood-gashed, the skin to his body being ragged and flapping and thorned.

When he is at his last gasp, his companions visualize for him a pick-me-up lurid as a Gauguin canvas (O’Brien, *At Swim* 129–30):

They also did not hesitate to promise him sides of hairy bacon, the mainstay and the staff of life of the country classes... They beguiled him with the mention of salads and crome custards and the grainy disorder of pulpy boiled rhubarb... And as they talked, they threaded through he twilight and the sudden sun-pools of the wild country.

All this is meant to be taken as a cod, as is made clear in advance by the subheading: *Extract from my typescript...bring a humorous or quasi-humorous excursion into ancient mythology.*

Brian O’Nolan’s *An béal bocht* (“Myles na gCopaleen”), his only novel in the Gaelic of which he was an absolute master, sends up the stereotype setting of Irish rural misery, as found in Peig Sayers’ works or in Tomás Ó Criomhthainn’s masterpiece *An*

---

<sup>10</sup> James Joyce pivoting around a discussion of the Irish language. By strange coincidence, a minor character called O’Nolan appears briefly a little later (424).

*t-Oileach*.<sup>11</sup> It is not the author, but the genre as cliché (“according to literary fate”), that is the target. The action, or inaction, takes place in an imaginary bogland village, Corkadoragha, deep in the Gaeltacht, where several things were felt to be wrong (O’Brien, *The Poor Mouth* 50):

1. The tempest of the countryside was too tempestuous.
2. The putridity of the countryside was too putrid.
3. The poverty of the countryside was too poor.
4. The Gaelicism of the countryside was too Gaelic.
5. The tradition of the countryside was too traditional.

The villagers live in awful, archetypal comic squalor. The narrator’s mother spends her life (14)

...cleaning out the house, sweeping cow-dung and pig-dung from in front of the door, churning butter and milking cows,... working the spinning-wheel, praying, cursing and setting fires to boil a houseful of potatoes to stave off the day of famine.

His grandfather sleeps with the cows, he himself with the horse, Charlie (18).

The sheep used often start fighting and many times I went without sleep from the bleating and roaring they used have.

The first ray of sunshine ever to penetrate to the village is taken as a portent of the imminent end of the world: it is “an unworldly shining a hundred times more venomous than the fire and coming with a needle’s sharpness at [the] eyes.” Hearing favourable reports of a village in Donegal, the narrator and his father make the long walk to it (65).

For the first time since birth, I saw a countryside which was not drenched by the flowing of the rain. In every direction, the variegated colours of the firmament pleased the eye. A soft sweet breeze followed at our heels... High up in the skies there was a yellow lamp known as the sun...

But this benevolent landscape flatters only to deceive. The simple-minded narrator is arrested and sentenced – in English, a language he does not understand – for a crime he never committed.

This is also in essence the plot of the most complex of O’Brien’s novels, *The Third Policeman*, the setting seems once more to be rural Ireland but turns out to be the unaccountable landscape of eternity, in which the narrator is, without realizing it, trapped. The natural environment is immediately called into question by reference to the built environment. The author subverts the vernacular Irish tradition whereby the long, low,

---

<sup>11</sup> Englished as Thomas O’Crohan, *The Islandman*.

thatched clay cottage blends harmoniously with the landscape. Instead, he introduces eugenic structures hatched in the brain of the mad planner de Selby, who thinks of houses as responsible for the degeneration of the human race, but a necessary evil. The De Selby dwelling (or ‘habitat’) is continuous with the natural world in the sense that it has walls but no roof, or roof but no walls except for one facing the prevailing wind (O’Brien, *The Third Policeman* 18).

By contrast, the building that is the centrepiece and marker of the plot, the police barrack, is divorced from nature and contradicts the laws of perspective and the tangible. The narrator’s first impression of it is that it is a two-dimensional billboard (55):

it looked completely false and unconvincing... I had never seen with my eyes ever in my life before anything so unnatural and appalling.

Note the term *unnatural*, which will soon be applied to the narrator’s first, Gulliverian sighting of an inhabitant of the police station, sergeant Pluck (57):

Ordinary enough as each part of him looked by itself, they all seemed to create together, by some undetectable discrepancy in association or proportion, a very disquieting impression of unnaturalness, amounting almost to what was horrible and monstrous.

The narrator now approaches the building (56):

At first it did nothing to reconcile itself with the shape of an ordinary house but it became uncertain in outline like a thing glimpsed under ruffled water. Then it became clear again and I saw that it began to have some back to it.

And from close to (56):

It was momentous and frightening: the whole morning and the whole world seemed to have no purpose at all but to frame it and give it some magnitude and position so that I could find it....

Nature has become, not a green thought in a green shade, but merely a spy-hole.

By the third chapter the narrator finds himself inexplicably nameless, and is (with black irony) aware of being close to home yet in completely unfamiliar regions. An aesthetic rapture<sup>12</sup> tinged with Gaeligore (if it is not Platonism) comes over him (39–40):

My surroundings had a strangeness of a peculiar kind...Everything seemed almost too pleasant, too perfect, too finely made. Each thing the eye could see was unmistakable and unambiguous, incapable of merging with any other thing or being confused with it. The colour of the bogs was beautiful and the greenness of the green fields supernal. Trees

---

<sup>12</sup> For the style, compare William Carleton, ‘Ned McKeown’, *Wildgoose Chase and Other Stories*. Cork: Mercier Press, 1973, 22.

were arranged here and there with far-from-usual consideration for the fastidious eye...all the doubts and perplexities which strewed my mind could not stop me from feeling happy and heart-light...

He strides out euphorically, his sense perception of nature preternaturally heightened (43):

The sun was maturing rapidly in the east and a great heat had started to spread about the ground like a magic influence, making everything, including my own self – this is superb, for he has no name and does not know where he has come from – “very beautiful and happy in a dreamy drowsy way. The little beds of tender grass here and there by the roadside and the dry shelter ditches began to look seductive and inviting... I felt a million little influences in my nostril, hay-smells, grass-smells, odours from distant flowers, the reassuring unmistakability of the abiding earth beneath my head...

‘Unmistakability’, a characteristic O’Nolan coinage, and ‘abiding’ are blackly ironic, since eternity is being mistaken for the familiar Irish landscape, and the speaker’s relation to it is all too ‘abiding’. The picture lends itself to a baroque pastiche of early Irish lyric (44):

Birds piped without limitation and incomparable stripe-coloured bees passed above me on their missions... My eyes were shuttered and my head was buzzing with the spinning of the universe...

The narrator now enters the police barrack, where the policemen reveal themselves as custodians of a sort of cosmic equilibrium; what the ancient Greeks would have called *dike*. They make play with proportions and perspectives, and treat the narrator to a virtuoso display of different kinds of infinite regress, a motif lifted from *Point Counterpoint* (Huxley 301). The splitting up of macrocosmic pleasant experiences (scents, “the smoothness of a woman’s back”) into microcosmic disgusting experiences (sub-smells, the coarseness of skin under the microscope) is a borrowing from *Brodingnag* (Swift Bk.II Ch.V). Policeman MacCruiskeen sums up the narrator, hitting on the truth like some Greek tragic chorus, as “a sempiternal man.”

Nature is in an appropriate fretfulness as narrator and policemen go hunting for clues (84):

It was a queer country we were in. There was a number of blue mountains around us at what you might call a respectful distance with a glint of white water coming down the shoulders of one or two of them and they kept hemming us in and meddling oppressively with our minds... A company of crows came out of a tree when I was watching and flew sadly down to a field where there was a quantity of sheep attired in fine overcoats.

Evidence previously ‘planted’ is discovered along the way: the bicycle pump in “a small modest whin-bush, a lady member of the tribe as you might say,” the bicycle bell in a thorn bush (85):

Gillhaney lay down on his stomach in the grass at the butt of a blackthorn and was inquiring into its private parts with his strong hands.

(So much for the sanctity of Nature!). The coda to this passage, when the narrator is literally lulled into a false sense of security, has echoes of Lewis Carroll (O'Brien, *The Third Policeman* 87–88):

We were now going through a country full of fine enduring trees where it was always five o'clock in the afternoon. It was a soft corner of the world, free from inquisitions and disputations and very soothing and sleepening on the mind... To every side of us was a green growth of ferny carpeting...and coarse bushes putting their heads out here and there and interrupting the urbanity of the presentation not unpleasingly.

Eventually the narrator, the perfect nameless scapegoat, finds himself sentenced to hanging for a murder he did not commit. Weary in body, numb in brain, he lies down to rest, every inch of his person gaining weight until, he says, “the total burden on the bed was approximately five hundred thousand tons,” evenly distributed, with his eyelids each weighing “no less than four tons.” In his complete exhaustion, passively merging with the infinite and limitless (129–30):

United with the bed I became momentous and planetary. Far away from the bed I could see the outside night framed neatly in the window as if it were a picture on the wall. There was a bright star in one corner with other smaller stars elsewhere littered about in sublime profusion. Lying quietly and dead-eyed, I reflected on how new the night was, how distinctive and unaccustomed its individuality...it was disintegrating my bodily personality into a flux of colour, smell, recollection, desire. I was deprived of definition, position and magnitude and my significance was considerably diminished. Lying there, I felt the weariness ebbing from me slowly, like a tide retiring over limitless sands. The feeling was so pleasurable and profound that I sighed again a long sound of happiness...

The final episode of the book constructs yet one more space merging the natural and unnatural. Having escaped execution, and comforted by the only friend he has left in the world, his bicycle, the narrator flits effortlessly through the gloom, Samuel Beckett's “landscape of extinction,” hoping against hope to find *terra firma* and the house where he was born. He arrives, with an enormous sense of power, at the door of Divney, his former partner in crime, the evil genius of the murder at the outset of the book. Divney has a fatal seizure (223):

He told me to keep away. He said I was not there. He said I was dead. He screamed to me to keep away. He said I was dead for sixteen years.

His wife begins keening, and the narrator comments, with sublime understatement, “I thought it was time to go away.” A superb image of nullity captures his nervelessness of body and the void of his mind (224):

The night had passed away and the dawn had come with a bitter searing wind. The sky was livid and burdened with ill omen. Black angry clouds were piling in the west, bulging and glutted, ready to vomit down their corruption and drown the dreary world in it. I felt sad, empty, and without a thought. The trees by the road were rank and stunted and moved their stark leafless branches very dismally in the wind. The grasses at hand were coarse and foul. Waterlogged bog and healthless marsh stretched endlessly to left and right. The pallor of the sky was terrible to look upon.

He reaches “an extraordinary spectacle,” a building “momentous and frightening” (O’Brien 225, 226; 55, 56), and the *recursus* is complete.

What is happening to Nature in this novel? Anthony Cronin is unhappy with the observations of nature in *The Third Policeman* and *The Poor Mouth* because he finds them “limited and generalized.” With respect, I do not think this is accurate, nor does it do justice to the author’s subtlety. O’Nolan is artfully bending the Irish terrain to the needs of a plot that is, in the sense of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, episodic. He deftly prepares his reader to accept nature denatured, a process rather like the “de-moralizing” of the narrator (O’Brien, *The Third Policeman* 125): nature not as material background but as subjective state of response to the switchback of the plot, its *peripeteiai*, reversals of fortune, to borrow Aristotle’s term. After, and sometimes also before, the narration of an event, he tailors landscape, weather, and sense of place to reflect the narrator’s emotions and deepen the gallows-humour. (Indeed ‘humour’ here almost takes on its elemental Elizabethan sense.) To put it another way: nature in *The Third Policeman* is functioning not unlike the chorus in Greek tragedy. It – one can hardly say ‘she’ – is sympathetically responsive. It is impotent to affect the action, but can slightly adjust the tension so as to give itself room for lyrical comment, or even to fool the audience into expecting the impossible happy ending instead of the prescribed horrific one.<sup>13</sup>

In his paratragic manipulation of nature in *The Third Policeman*, Brian O’Nolan stands perhaps not quite alone; if there is another Irish author who works with a similar landscape of the mind, yet bleaker and more ironic, it is Samuel Beckett. But that takes us beyond the scope of the present article.

## Works Cited

- Baldick, Robert. Trans. Huysmans, J.-K. *Against Nature*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959. Print.
- Croker, Thomas Crofton. *Landscape Illustrations of Moore’s Irish Melodies, with Comments for the Curious*. London: Power, 1835. Print.
- Cronin, Anthony. *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O’Brien*. Dublin: New Island Books, 2003. Print.
- Frawley, Oona. *Irish Pastoral: Nature and Nostalgia in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Irish Literature*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2001. Print.

---

<sup>13</sup> For example the joyous third *stasimon* of Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (1086–1109), just before the denouement, and the tragic irony of its opening words “If I am any prophet...”

- Huxley, Aldous. *Point Counterpoint*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. Print.
- Huysmans, J.-K. Preface. *À Rebours*. Paris: G. Charpentier, [1884], 1903. Print.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. London: Bodley Head 1960. Print.
- Joyce, P.W. *A Short History of Ireland*. London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1893. Print.
- . *A Smaller Social History of Ancient Ireland*. London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1903. Print.
- Kinsella, Thomas, ed. *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986. Print.
- Looby, Robert. "Flann O'Brien: A Postmodernist When It Was Neither Profitable Nor Popular." *The Scriptorium*. Web. 28 July 2004.  
<<http://www.themodernword.com/scriptorium/obrien.html>>.
- Mader-Lin, Eric. "Flann O'Brien: A Biographical Introduction." *Flann O'Brien: A Biographical Introduction*. July 2001. Web. 21 Aug. 2012.  
<http://www.necessaryprose.com/obrien.html>>.
- MacKillop, James. *The Figure of Finn MacCool: A Study of Celtic Archetypes in the Works of James Macpherson, Flann O'Brien, James Joyce, and Others*. Ph.D. dissertation (unpublished). Syracuse University, New York, 1975.
- "Myles na gCopaleen." *An Béal Bocht*. [Dublin]: An Press Náisiúnta, 1941. Print.
- Naughton, Adrian. "Nádúirfilíocht na Gaedhilge and Flann O'Brien's fiction." *Is it about a bicycle?: Flann O'Brien in the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Jennika Baines. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011. Print.
- "O'Brien, Flann" [i.e. O'Nolan, Brien]. *The Poor Mouth*. Trans. Patrick C. Power. London: Hart Davis 1964. Print.
- . *At Swim-Two-Birds*. London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1939. Print.
- . *The Third Policeman*. London: McGibbon & Kee, 1967. Print.
- Swift, Jonathan. *Travels into several remote Nations of the World, by Lemuel Gulliver*. London: Benjamin Motte, 1726. Print.
- Ó Nualláin, Brian. *Nádúir-filíocht na Gaedhilge: Tráchtas maraon le Duanaire* [Nature Poetry in Irish: Thesis, including the Dispossessed]. M.A. dissertation (unpublished). Dublin: University College, August 1934. Print.