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**Saving Cruiskeen Lawn: Satirical Parody in the Novels and
Journalism of Flann O'Brien (Myles na gCopaleen)**

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Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Résumé	4
List of Abbreviations	5
Acknowledgments	6
Introduction: Flann O'Brien, Criticism, and the Satirical Parody: A Look at the Past, Present, and Future of <u>Cruiskeen Lawn</u>	7
Chapter One: The O'Brien Index: Satirical Parody and the Novels of Flann O'Brien	24
Chapter Two: Beneath the Motley of the Jester: Satirical Parody and <u>Cruiskeen Lawn</u>	60
Works Cited	115

Abstract

Until recently, criticism has dismissed Flann O'Brien's journalism (written under the pseudonym "Myles na gCopaleen") as not worthy of study, and has tended to focus on the elements of satire in his novels. This thesis demonstrates the importance of O'Brien's Cruiskeen Lawn column, written for the Irish Times between 1940 and 1966, by studying the column's use of the satirical parody. After presenting a brief history of the critical reaction to the column, I discuss how satirical parody is employed in O'Brien's novels, grounding my argument in previous critical studies of O'Brien's satire. I then apply this understanding of O'Brien's fiction to his journalism, establishing the column as a significant body of writing worthy of continued critical study.

Résumé

Jusqu'à récemment les critiques n'ont pas pensé au journalisme de Flann O'Brien (écrit sous le pseudonyme Myles na gCopaleen) come ce qui mérite les recherches scolaires. Cette thèse demontre l'importance de la colonne de O'Brien Cruiskeen Lawn publiait dans les Irish Times entre 1940 et 1966 par l'étude de son emploi de la parodie satirique. Après la brève présentation d'une histoire des réactions critiques de sa colonne, je discute comment la parodie satirique est utiliser dans les romans de O'Brien. J'ai basé mes arguments sur les études critiques précédents de la satire de O'Brien. J'applique cette compréhension de la fiction de O'Brien à son journalisme et j'établie sa colonne comme une oeuvre importante qui mérite l'étude critique permanent.

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the thesis:

AS2B	<u>At Swim-Two-Birds</u>
TP	<u>The Third Policeman</u>
PM	<u>The Poor Mouth</u>
HL	<u>The Hard Life</u>
DA	<u>The Dalkey Archive</u>
BOM	<u>The Best of Myles</u>
FCCL	<u>Further Cuttings from Cruiskeen Lawn</u>
HD	<u>The Hair of the Dogma</u>
KCB	<u>The Various Lives of Keats and Chapman and The Brother</u>
MBM	<u>Myles Before Myles</u>
Intro	<u>Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings</u>
NLM	<u>No Laughing Matter</u>
CC	<u>Conjuring Complexities</u>

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Introduction

Flann O'Brien, Criticism, and the Satirical Parody:

A Look at the Past, Present, and Future of Cruiskeen Lawn

"Every jest is an earnest in the womb of time. I believe the old saying holds for O'Nolan's journalism as well as his fiction." -Steven Young

"That touch of humour, that appearance of not being quite earnest, is the real sign of sincerity." -Patrick Kavanagh

Flann O'Brien criticism has tended to focus upon his novels, notably the famous At Swim-Two-Birds and The Third Policeman, with the result that most critical studies ignore completely the massive amount of work that O'Brien published, for over a quarter of a century, under the pseudonym "Myles na gCopaleen," in an often daily column in The Irish Times, titled Cruiskeen Lawn, between 4 October 1940 and 1 April 1966.¹ *AS2B* is noted for its elements of sophisticated humour, parody, and satire, and how these elements implicitly comment upon the forms and values of art and literature, while *TP* is noted for its experimental structure and its parodical and satirical comments upon the nature of the search for truth. Despite the fact that the column contains all of these elements, that it is similarly sophisticated, and that five popular selections of the column have been re-printed, with more planned, most critics have failed to recognize the importance of this work. With a few notable exceptions, all critical articles and full-length studies only briefly mention the column, usually with a passing quotation or reference used to frame a larger argument pertaining to O'Brien's novels.

The reasons for this oversight are numerous. Many see the column as nothing

¹ "Flann O'Brien" is itself a pseudonym; the author's real name was "Brian O'Nolan." Although his use of the "O'Brien" pseudonym remained consistent throughout his career, in later years he changed the "Myles na gCopaleen" pseudonym to "Myles na Gopaleen."

more than an outrageous, humorous entertainment; such critics find it hard to understand the relations between humour, journalism, and 'serious' literature. Others feel that the huge amount of time and creativity that O'Brien spent creating the column tragically wasted a career that should have developed into more 'serious' art after the publication of his promising book, At Swim-Two-Birds. Generally, the feeling is that O'Brien's journalistic work is mere jesting, written only to put food (and drink) on the table, and is therefore not significant for the serious literary critic, a conclusion that is often left unexplained.

A closer understanding of the critical history of the column, in terms of its early detractors and its later supporters, demonstrates why the column has been ignored in the past, and why it is beginning to be studied more seriously in recent criticism. Among the more famous of the column's detractors is Hugh Kenner who, in his 1983 study of Irish literature A Colder Eye, claims, first and foremost, that all of O'Brien's post-1941 writings are sub-par, and then goes on to speculate: "Was it the drink was his ruin [sic], or was it the column? For ruin is the word. So much promise has seldom accomplished so little" (255). Kenner continues this diatribe, saying of O'Brien that "for twenty-five years the column used him up" (257), that when O'Brien started writing the column "a great future lay behind him" (257), and that O'Brien "wrote acidulous blather for the city's most respectable paper" (258).² Not satisfied with this, Kenner decides to insult O'Brien's disease, and declares dramatically: "Let the Kavanaghs rant and rage, let the Behans booze; for [O'Brien], only serious slow drinking, self-destruction decade by decade, a respectable Dublin suicide" (258). Kenner, like many other critics, believes that the column has no literary value, and that it is responsible, along with alcoholism, for what he perceives to be a marked lack of quality in O'Brien's later writings.

² This may be a more subtle gibe at O'Brien than it seems at first; after receiving his M.A., O'Brien was the founder and editor of a humorous magazine called Blather, discussed in chapter two below.

David Cohen's sustained attack on the column, in his 1987 essay revealingly titled "James Joyce and the Decline of Flann O'Brien," echoes Kenner's sentiments. The twenty-five years and thousands of pages O'Brien put into the column elicit this remark: "Cruiskeen Lawn was essentially a forum for O'Brien's cleverness" (155). Cohen also believes that "O'Brien went from being a promising intellectual and experimental novelist to a satirical hack writer with an overwhelming sense of bitterness" (156). Like Kenner, Cohen cannot keep himself from dramatising O'Brien's life; after relating Joyce's famous approval of At Swim-Two-Birds, Cohen says: "Two years later Joyce was dead, The Third Policeman rejected, and O'Brien was writing Cruiskeen Lawn" (156). If there is any doubt remaining as to Cohen's opinion of the column, he repeats his sentiments later, claiming that "when O'Brien gave up on the novel as a way to reach a large audience and began to rely on his newspaper column, he gave himself up to drink and mediocrity and 'low ambition'" (158), those last two words taken from Joyce's "The Day of the Rabblement," an attack on artists who write for a mass audience.

A more surprising attack on the column comes from O'Brien's friend, biographer, and critic, Anthony Cronin. Both Cohen and Kenner quote from his 1976 Dead as Doornails, which calls O'Brien a "licensed jester" (qtd. in Cohen 158). But Cronin goes on in his biography of O'Brien, No Laughing Matter, to mention a more serious detractor of the column: O'Brien himself. Cronin notes that

whatever creative satisfaction [O'Brien] got from his column and however brilliant it continued to be, from now on across it would fall the shadow of the novels he was apparently failing to write. This affected his own view of his achievement as well as that of those who had perhaps a prurient interest in what they termed its failure. And of course he was ambitious for a wider success than a column in an Irish newspaper could afford him, in the rather

naive hope that he might make money out of it as well as simply desiring a broader, more international fame. (165-166)

Cronin's point is essentially that "however highly some readers may rate Cruiskeen Lawn or however we may delight in it, it did not satisfy [O'Brien]" (237-238).

Sue Asbee, in her full-length study Flann O'Brien, also mentions O'Brien's dissatisfaction with the column, noting that "O'Brien referred to his work for the Irish Times as 'slavery'" (13). But O'Brien was in the habit of attacking his own works, most famously At Swim-Two-Birds (*Intro* 81), and it must be acknowledged that hating to work for the Irish Times is not the same thing as hating to write *CL*. As Cohen fairly states, "the starving artist was not a role model for O'Brien and, although he frequently complained that the Civil Service job and the Cruiskeen Lawn column were keeping him from more serious writing, he never considered dropping these responsibilities to concentrate solely on being a writer" (155).³ Of course, again, the implication is that writing *CL* does not make O'Brien a 'real' writer.

O'Brien indirectly attacks, in a particularly vicious column, the two insulting labels directed at him by Cohen ('satirical hack writer') and by Cronin ('licensed jester'). Responding to an article written against him by one Alfred O'Rahilly, whom O'Brien refers to as AOR (in Irish, O'Brien says, this means 'a curse'), O'Brien reacts to being called a 'hired humorist.' His defence is typical:

'THE HIRED HUMORIST'

The reference is to the present Excellency. The important word is 'HIRED', intended as a sneer. AOR, skilled sociologist, is horrified and disgusted at the idea of anybody working *for money*. I think that's a most unsound attitude.

Shure, me dear man, even the bishops are not above taking money. Dammit,

³ A good description of O'Brien's career as a civil servant is given by Michael Phelan, in "Watcher in the Wings: A Lingering Look at Myles na gCopaleen." Other interesting accounts of this aspect of O'Brien's professional life can be found in Cronin's Dead as Doornails, Peter Costello's and Del Ivan Janik's Flann O'Brien: An Illustrated Biography, John Ryan's Remembering How We Stood: Bohemian Dublin at the Mid-Century, and of course Cronin's biography of O'Brien, No Laughing Matter.

I'll go farther and say this - AOR himself... (I can hardly get this monstrous slander out!) ...*AOR himself takes money!* Truth to tell, he does not do too badly for himself at all, quartered on the backs of the taxpayers with a fat post in a university which virtually confines its public pronouncements to demands for more and more dough the more cosily to cock up its 'professors'. (164)

O'Brien seems to have anticipated such remarks as those of Kenner, Cohen and Cronin, and has shown beyond a doubt that, though some days he may have hated his work, he resented those who attacked it.

Despite this defense of his column, many have agreed with critics like Cohen, Kenner, and Cronin, and they all seem to be responsible for Thomas Shea's remark, in his 1992 study Flann O'Brien's Exorbitant Novels, that "the critical line, nowadays, is that O'Brien spent his talent and played himself out writing his Myles na Gopaleen column for the Irish Times" (142). There are, however, some supporters of the column who wrote prior to this date. Miles Orvell and David Powell, in their 1975 article "Myles Na Gopaleen: Mystic, Horse-Doctor, Hackney Journalist and Ideological Catalyst" claim, for instance, that *CL* ought to be valued as a "repository for 25 years of an astonishingly fertile and complex comic imagination" (45), that the column "reads as if Sinclair Lewis, Mark Twain and Groucho Marx had collaborated to write for the Irish" (46), and that their "effort" in their article "will be to broaden O'Nolan's reputation by making known to the reader outside of Ireland the nature of what will surely come to be regarded as his second accomplishment - the life and works of Myles na Gopaleen" (46). They also refer to one of O'Brien's great defenses of the column, saying that "he regarded the artist as very much a member of the social order" (70), and quote O'Brien as saying "is there any point at all in writing unless the writer is *certain* that many people will read the words, submit to their alchemy?" (qtd. in Orvell and Powell 70). Such an implicit defense against the Joycean attack in "The Day of the Rabblement,"

mentioned by Cohen above, is another good piece of evidence that O'Brien did not, in fact, feel that *CL* was a useless bit of writing, or that it was an insignificant and sub-par element of his artistic career. This conclusion is echoed by Asbee, who observes that the "Myles na gCopaleen persona is notoriously both extravagant and unreliable, but beneath the bombast there is a sense that O'Brien felt strongly about the subjects he returned to" (8) in the column again and again.

More recently, several other critics have defended the column, indicating a change in the critical climate since Shea's 1992 publication. Keith Hopper, in his 1995 full-length study Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Postmodernist, claims that "Myles's literary pontifications are by turn hilarious, insightful, celebratory, mean-spirited and absurd, but he is still O'Brien's most holistically conceived dramatic persona" (35), and that "what is most valuable in any critical reading of the Mylesian canon is Myles's observations on language and literature" (35). To even suggest that there might be significant "observations" in the column is certainly a change from the claims of critics like Kenner or Cohen, and when Hopper goes on to say that "as the modern successor to Swift, Myles's comic, epiphanic narratives are ruthlessly underpinned by his acid critiques of the established order" (35), there can be no doubt that the "Mylesian Canon" is beginning to be recognized as a significant body of work.

Steven Young's essay, in the 1997 Conjuring Complexities: Essays on Flann O'Brien, continues this trend in O'Brien criticism. He not only recognizes that the writing of the column "seems an almost superhuman task" in its sheer volume and its "sustained quality of writing" (113), but also deals with the critical dismissal of the column in the past, observing that

journalism does not raid the chaos, it expresses it, gives it its many voices, and there can be no distancing for the writer who practices that trade. The novelist may go afishing in time's river, the journalist must swim in it, and if we imagine

O’Nolan as this journalist, we can see why the lament that he didn’t distance himself from Dublin to write the great novel seems misguided. He needed to be there, fully participating in the flux of the city’s daily life in order to be the kind of writer he was. (117)

Young concludes his essay saying that “what the early critics treated as an elaborate literary joke recent commentators have begun to take very seriously” (118), thus indicating that the general critical assessment of the column has changed somewhat since Shea made his observation in 1992.

What seems to have saved the column from complete critical dismissal is not only its continuing popularity in print, but also the growing recognition of its satirical properties. While the presence of satire is universally acknowledged in the novels, and is indeed the subject of most critical studies of the works, it has not, until recently, been acknowledged as a major element of the column. The critical unwillingness to recognize satire in the column, and, by extension, the column’s importance, is led by Anthony Cronin, who wrote in his 1975 article “After At Swim” that

one thing which many of [the column’s] admirers have claimed it to be it was not. As satire the column (which in any case never struck this reader at least as having a true satirical intent) was too closely in tune with its audience, too fanciful and quirky to be more than occasionally worthy of note; and when in its later years it became sometimes querulous and bad-tempered the purposes of satire were not served either” (116).

Cronin repeats this claim in No Laughing Matter when he discusses “the fate of the licensed humorist, more especially one whose humour does not incorporate a basic critique of the society in which he lives” (239).

But Cronin merely falls prey here to the critical doubts, excellently outlined by Young, that “the column may give the reader a passing pleasure over morning coffee,

or on the bus to work, but the novels are for the ages. How can it be art one day and used to wrap fish and chips the next?" (116) Cronin dismisses the column because it is *in a newspaper*, its presentation not conforming to that of what is traditionally seen as literature. But these doubts, however convincing they may be on the surface, do not adequately deal with the true nature of the column. It is, of course, impossible to prove a negative, but it seems that critics who dismiss the column as having no satirical elements, or even more general worthwhile literary qualities, really do only read the column (if at all) 'over their morning coffee,' and do not give it the same kind of attention they give the novels, merely because of its journalistic form.

The importance of this oversight cannot be underestimated, since to claim that the column is not satirical is tantamount to claiming that it is not valuable in terms of furthering a critical understanding of O'Brien's work. The novels have been studied, as mentioned above, mostly for their satirical properties, and are seen as valuable for these properties. Quite rightly, critics have recognized that O'Brien's ability to blend satirical comments upon literature, art, social norms, and other more pedestrian subjects, is what makes him a unique author and worthy of study. To dismiss the column as having no satirical properties, as having no comment to make, is, within O'Brien studies, to dismiss the column altogether. Establishing the column as satirical would allow these critics to look past their assumptions about journalism, and to see the column's importance within O'Brien's opus.

Happily, there are a few critics who have recognized the column as being satirical in nature. Anne Clissman, in her seminal 1975 work Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings, recognizes that "as a substantial body of ephemeral, satirical writing [CL] is almost unique in Irish literature" (188), and that the column "presents an impressive number of different comic and satiric devices and an enormous number of different subjects" (189). Steven Curran's 1997 "No, This is Not

from The Bell: Brian O'Nolan's Cruiskeen Lawn Anthology" also discusses the nature of the column's satire and claims that the 1943 anthology of the column, edited by O'Brien himself, was "clearly intended not simply as a representative volume but as a means of consolidating certain features and of identifying the column as satirical" (90). Like Young, then, Curran sees the column as a satirical one, and, like Young and Clissman, it is through this understanding that he investigates the column, claiming that the column is not a work of 'mediocrity and low ambition,' and that it can stand alongside O'Brien's novels as a significant body of writing.

It is along these lines that the column has been most profitably studied, and it is along these lines, then, that I intend to investigate the column, strengthening the column's position, and continuing the work of Clissman and other more recent critics who recognize that *CL* contains significant elements of satire. Previous studies of the column, however, have been rather perfunctory, and it is consequently my intention here to examine in greater length and detail the importance of the column's satirical properties. Surprisingly, most of the major studies of satire in O'Brien's novels spend little time defining satire, but to carry out my proposed analysis more fully, it is essential that I outline here, even if only briefly, the definition of satire which will guide the investigations of my thesis. This definition, given below, will stress the importance of how *parody* informs O'Brien's satirical style of writing, a move which will more clearly demonstrate the importance of the column than any other previous critical work, in that parody, a device used commonly in all of O'Brien's works, is most often conceived of as nothing more than a humorous style. Consequently, a recognition of parody's importance as a satirical tool will help to show how the column's satire is similar in form and significance to that of the novels.

Satire, as "the literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, indignation, or scorn," is

distinguished from comedy in that while “comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself,” satire “uses laughter as a weapon” (Abrams 167). The three major styles of satire are typically known as Horatian, Juvenalian, and Menippean. Horatian satire generally involves a character or speaker who is “an urbane, witty, and tolerant man of the world, who is moved more often to wry amusement than to indignation at the spectacle of human folly” (168). Juvenalian satire involves a character or speaker who is “a serious moralist who uses a dignified and public style of utterance to decry modes of vice and error which are no less dangerous because they are ridiculous, and who undertakes to evoke contempt, moral indignation, or an unillusioned sadness at the aberrations of men” (169).⁴ Menippean satire, which informs M. Keith Booker’s 1995 study of O’Brien’s novels Flann O’Brien, Bakhtin, and Menippean Satire, is a form of “indirect satire” that

is written in prose - though with interpolated passages of verse - and is a miscellaneous form often held together by a loosely constructed narrative. Its major feature, however, is a series of extended dialogues and debates (often conducted at a banquet or party) in which a group of immensely loquacious eccentrics, pedants, literary people, and representatives of various professions or philosophical points of view serve to make ludicrous the intellectual attitudes they typify by the arguments they urge in their support. (169)

All three of these styles can potentially inform a newspaper column, especially the style of Menippean satire, one of its main elements being “a loosely constructed narrative,” a phrase particularly appropriate to many columns of *CL*.

Gilbert Highet’s still excellent The Anatomy of Satire provides a more in-depth view of satire than the quick outline given above. Discussing the purposes of satire, he observes that

⁴ Mary Power, in her “Flann O’Brien and Classical Satire: An Exegesis of The Hard Life,” describes the novel as being “rooted” in Juvenalian satire (87).

satire is the literary equivalent of a bucket of tar and feathers. The purpose of invective and lampoon is to destroy an enemy. The purpose of comedy and farce is to cause painless undestructive laughter at human weaknesses and incongruities. The purpose of satire is, through laughter and invective, to cure folly and to punish evil; but if it does not achieve this purpose, it is content to jeer at folly and to expose evil to bitter contempt. (155-156)

This position is echoed by Dustin Griffin, in Satire: A Critical Reintroduction, when he claims that the “critics who wrote a generation ago.... are out of date,” (and I presume he means writers like Hightet), agreeing with Hightet that what distinguishes satire from comedy is that satire’s “victims come from [the] world, and it is this fact (together with a darker or sharper tone) that separates satire from pure comedy” (1). Hightet also observes that one of the motives of the satirist is “to make [people] see the truth - at least the part of the truth which they habitually ignore” because the satirist “believes that most people are purblind, insensitive, perhaps anaesthetized by custom and dulness and resignation” (19). Thus “the satirist, though he laughs, tells the truth” (234).

Knowledge of the roots of satire is essential for a good understanding of the mode. Hightet observes that “the name ‘satire’ comes from the Latin word *satira*, which means primarily ‘full,’ and then comes to mean ‘a mixture of different things’....The essence of the original name was therefore variety” (231). The “elements” of satire which Hightet claims have remained consistent throughout its history are “variety, down-to-earth unsophistication, coarseness, an improvisatory tone, humor, mimicry, echoes of the speaking voice, abusive gibing, and a general feeling, real or assumed, of devil-may-care nonchalance” (233).⁵ Stylistic variety, and a critical search for truth, are therefore two of the main hallmarks of a good satire.

⁵ Hightet here could almost be describing O’Brien’s column directly. Cruiskeen Lawn, after all, means “the full jug,” and is certainly a mixture of different things, and is also often coarse, unsophisticated, always hearty, etc. - but these things will be discussed more fully in chapter two of this thesis.

One of the main practices within satire, as opposed to these kinds of 'elements,' is parody, which is often used by satirists not only to provoke laughter, but also to more effectively attack their targets. Griffin notes that one of the difficulties "of comprehending satire within a single theoretical frame.... [is that] it can through parody invade *any* literary form: epic, pastoral, travel book, song, elegy, and so on" (3). It is certainly no stretch of the imagination to assume that this "so on" can apply also to a humorous column in a newspaper. Highet lists parody as one of the three main patterns of satire (the others are 1) monologues, and 2) narratives in which the author does not appear), and says that in parodies "the satirist takes an existing work of literature which was created with a serious purpose, or a literary form in which some reputable books and poems have been written. He then makes the work, or the form, look ridiculous, by infusing it with incongruous ideas, or exaggerating its aesthetic devices; or he makes the ideas look foolish by putting them into an inappropriate form; or both" (13). Highet also mentions that in parodies the author "wears a mask" (14), a comment which again is appropriate to Flann O'Brien, who wore masks to the extent that in later life he was referred to by his friends not as Brian O'Nolan (his real name), but rather as 'Myles,' in reference to his pseudonym 'Myles na gCopaleen.'⁶

Lizabeth Paravisini and Carlos Yorio, in "Is It Or Isn't It?: The Duality of Parodic Detective Fiction," which will be discussed further in the following chapter of this thesis in reference to O'Brien's novel The Third Policeman, provide a wider explanation of the effectiveness and function of parody and satire. They discuss the metafictional and "dialogic" nature of parody, saying that it "satirizes its target while being dependent on it for its own materials and structures" (182). Through this 'satirization,' parody can be a renovating influence on literature, "in that it leads to the development of new, if self-

⁶ An example of the success of O'Brien's masking can be found in the 1995 Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature. Despite the fact that Merriam-Webster claims to be a company that "is your assurance of quality and authority," it wrongly states that 'Brian O Nuallain,' the Irish spelling of O'Brien's real name, is in fact a "pseudonym of Flann O'Brien" (837).

conscious, literary forms" (182). It seems, then, that through parody a judgment can be made upon literature in the same way that through conventional satire a judgment can be made upon morality, and that the satirical function of parody can thus be to point out, and possibly rectify, the vices and follies of writing itself. The "laying bare of the device," then, in which metafiction and parody participate, can function to heal or destroy problems in literature (182), a function that naturally appeals to satirists, in their attempt to show up and rectify the problems of the world.

This position is echoed in Joseph A. Dane's Parody, when he defines parody as "the imitative reference of one literary text to another, often with an implied critique of the object text" (4). Like Paravisini and Yorio, he believes that parody has a satirical function, observing that "it is a meta-literary genre and thus is a form of literary criticism" (5). Such an understanding of parody implies that though a work be fictional, it can itself critique fiction; a statement which may not seem so bold, in that it is clearly a logical progression from the acceptance of the definitions of parody and satire given above, but one which is nonetheless rarely acknowledged. No anthology of literary criticism of which I am aware contains a section of parodical works presented as a valid means of analysing literature.⁷

Dane mentions Bakhtin's work on parody as "the most important and influential to appear in this century" (8), observing that "parody itself is a manifestation of what Bakhtin calls 'polyglossia' or 'heteroglossia' - the conflict of multiple languages in a single text" (8). It is from this conflict that an implied criticism of literature arises. Dane attempts to *distinguish* parody from satire by saying that parody focuses "on linguistic, rather than on plastic, targets" (11), but this does not seem to rule out the possible existence of a 'satirical parody,' a kind of satire that uses parody as a method of critically attacking linguistic or literary targets. So, like Dane, we can "assume, in

⁷ Dane notes that many literary critics are beginning to recognize the close relationship between criticism and parody, to the extent that some are proclaiming themselves parodists (9-10).

discussing parody.... that parody is a form of literary criticism" (11).

An implicit objection to this is raised by Margaret A. Rose in Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern, who, like Dane, attempts to distinguish between satire and parody. Worrying that parody may be somewhat limited by being understood only as a weapon of satire, Rose cautions that parody is "in general a much more ambivalent form than satire, in that it makes its 'target' a part of its own work" (83), and can thus sometimes serve "to renew norms by recreating them in a new context before making them the subject of a new critique and analysis" (82), instead of universally destroying norms. But Rose, again like Dane, does not hesitate to admit that parody can be an important component of satire, as well as an effective form of literary criticism (84), in that "parody may sometimes have the satiric aim of using a target text or other preformed work to attack its author or audience" (86).

Walter Nash, in his pedantic but useful The Language of Humour, defines the satirical parody in detail. He describes it as a form of humorous writing which can often be "the vehicle for hostile criticism," and "may be aimed at a pretentiously mannered style.... or, more often, it may attack a content *through* a style. Parody and satire are not the same thing, but parody becomes a satirical weapon when the parodist is angered by an author's philosophies, arguments, or recurrent attitudes" (85, author's emphasis). What is important to note here is that parody, satire, and humour are working together in the criticism, and that parody is a particularly effective tool often used by the satirist.

The definitions of satire and parody given above thus allow for the existence of a 'satirical parody,' a humorous style of writing that is, though provoking of laughter, not 'merely funny,' and that can be valuable to the satirist as a means of critically commenting upon linguistic subjects. This understanding will inform the discussion of CL below, in that it will be the basis for the claim that the column contains satire and

criticism that is as sophisticated and as worthy of study as that of O'Brien's novels. The recognition that parody, which on the surface seems to provoke only laughter, can in fact be a tool of satire, will refute the claim of critics that the column is insignificant, and also the claim that the column's humour, unlike that of the novels, is nothing more than an entertainment with little or no critical or literary value.

Because the satirical parody is most effective when used to attack linguistic targets, the main focusses of O'Brien's satirical parodying are, in all of his writings, the language, style, and content of literature, with an emphasis on Irish literature popular in his time. Curran discusses this aspect of O'Brien's writing, noting that O'Brien's ability to establish connections between categories of writing normally thought to be mutually exclusive -- here, the factual and the imaginative -- becomes the distinctive feature of his satire.... [O'Brien] succeeds in connecting the disparate elements of fact and fantasy with such command that the effect is disconcerting; the writing shocks the reader into an awareness of intellectual and moral shortcomings and lapses. (82)

Flann O'Brien's satirical parodying of literature, or rather his "comic criticism," to use a term coined by Asbee (126), informs the best parts of his novels and his column, and allows him to blend fact and fantasy with the masterful strokes that have been formerly acknowledged in his novels, but not in the column.⁸

That such an unorthodox form of satire and criticism as the satirical parody should inform all of O'Brien's writing is not surprising considering the wide-ranging styles and forms in which he wrote, the device naturally lending itself to O'Brien's wish to use humour as an intellectual weapon. His *AS2B* parodies over twenty different styles of writing, and the fact that he wrote novels, plays, short stories, television

⁸ Gerard Genette discusses a particularly *apropos* type of satirical parody in his monumental *Palimpsests*. He says that "the parodic distortion of proverbs.... is a type of joke probably as old and as popular as the proverb itself," and that "as is often the case, parody here remains close to plain punning" (33). Surely this is an almost exact description of O'Brien's Cruiskeen Lawn Keats and Chapman anecdotes, which will be discussed in chapter two below.

scripts, newspaper columns, and even some poetry, would seem to demand an original and broad understanding of the art of writing on the part of the author.⁹ It may, in fact, be O'Brien's virtuosity that has caused critics, for the most part, to ignore the column; as Steven Young has observed, the column "has not received the attention it deserves, because it runs counter to our available ways of talking about literature. It defeats conventional analysis, just as the novels force us into new ways of thinking about the novel" (118). The column is funny but serious, flippant but genuinely critical, wildly imaginative but firmly rooted in reality and the problems of conveying this reality in writing. Its format is unconventional, and is daunting for the critic used to studying more traditional forms of writing. This difficulty, however, can be overcome with a proper understanding of how similarly the modes and functions of satire and parody are implemented in all forms of literary art, whether the form be that of newspapers, novels, plays, or television shows.

Such an understanding of the relation between these forms, in terms of their ability to satirise in a similar manner, indicates that it is high time that O'Brien criticism begin to study the column, at length, as often containing valuable and satirical insights into literature. After all, journalism naturally lends itself to satire (see 10 above), and the subject of its satire can easily include literature. *CL* certainly is *satura*, in that it is 'full' of a seemingly disconnected jumble of subjects and styles, 'a mixture of different things.' Furthermore the competence with which O'Brien applies the device of the satirical parody in his column is, again, certainly a sign that the column can be rewardingly studied alongside his novels.

So far this introduction has 1) outlined the current state of Flann O'Brien criticism, in relation to the *CL* column, pointing out the importance of recognizing the column as a satirical body of work, and what the results have been of the general

⁹ Some of O'Brien's non-novelistic and non-journalistic writings have been collected in Stories and Plays and A Flann O'Brien Reader, which provide a unique look into often forgotten works of O'Brien's.

critical failing to make this recognition, and 2) defined satire and parody in order to demonstrate the important similarities between the column and the novels. This thesis will focus for the most part, then, upon the satirical use of parody in O'Brien's writings, in order to firmly establish the column within the O'Brien critical canon.

To understand fully the importance of satire in *CL* within O'Brien's opus it is important to understand the presence and functioning of satire *within his novels*, which, as has been mentioned above, has been studied in detail. The first chapter of this thesis will, then, provide an extended application of our understanding of satire and parody to passages dealing with literature found in O'Brien's novels, At Swim-
Two-Birds, The Third Policeman, The Poor Mouth, The Hard Life, and The Dalkey
Archive. This will ground my argument, which is for the presence of a valuable form of satire and criticism in the column, in previously established modes of O'Brien criticism, showing how my argument applies to previous work, and how it develops as a logical extension of that work.

The second chapter will discuss the satirical (and literary) vision developed in *CL*, based upon the foundations laid here in the introduction, and also upon those laid in the first chapter regarding O'Brien's novels. This second chapter will look at the passages in the column that satirically parody literature and other modes of discourse, and will show how this device is used, in order to define further O'Brien's use of satire and his implicit understanding of literature. I will suggest, ultimately, that while the column is almost invariably humorous, it is certainly not *merely* funny, and provides key critical insights into literature, not only valuable to the casual reader, but also to the critic interested in Flann O'Brien and in modern Irish literature in general.

Chapter One

The O'Brien Index: Satirical Parody and the Novels of Flann O'Brien

"The machinery of [O'Brien's] critical evaluation is -- in short -- laughter, or -- at more length -- a sense of the absurd as quick and sure and sharp as ever one dare hope to encounter."

-Ruth ap Roberts

Anthony Cronin, in No Laughing Matter, claims that while O'Brien is "a humorist first and foremost.... He was a humorous writer with an unusually strong, indeed very often a nothing less than fierce, sense of propriety" (x). Certainly the intention to cause laughter was one of O'Brien's reasons for writing, but it is significant that Cronin should feel the need to comment on O'Brien's sense of propriety, a sense that connotes a wish to have people act properly and that is also the driving force behind any satirist. Anne Clissman, unlike Cronin, claims that "primarily [O'Brien] was a satirist and a mocker" (*Intro* 35), and not primarily a humorist, saying that O'Brien

believed that satire could make the world better by pricking the bubbles of pomposity, hypocrisy and philistinism which were everywhere in evidence. He wanted people to see straight, but when they found the view intolerable he wanted them to be comforted with laughter and invention. He laughed because laughter was a defence against horror, and because laughter, with its side-track, its inversion, convolution and coincidence, was ultimately truthful. (37)

This evaluation seems to make more sense than Cronin's; O'Brien's intention to satirize is often *followed* by his intention to create laughter, in that laughter can ease the discomfort one might feel when the satire hits too close to home.

But what is it that offends O'Brien's sense of propriety? It has been stressed throughout O'Brien criticism that the satire in his novels focusses on linguistic targets, especially those pertaining to literature. This larger focus, however, encompasses

many others, including the inability of literature to portray reality, the inability of criticism to communicate something meaningful about literature, the nature and importance of creativity and the imagination within literature, and the pretentiousness of critics and artists alike who make grandiose claims about art that are founded more on their egos than on reality. Examples of O'Brien's continuing attack on this latter target, or of his "impatience with highbrow literary pretentiousness" (*NLM* 29), can be seen in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, which he once derided as "high-class literary pretentious slush" (Imhof 40), in *The Third Policeman*, with its outrageous and highly pedantic footnoting, and in the impractical impositions of the Gaelic revivalists on the "true" Gaels of Corkadoragha in *The Poor Mouth*. It is this continuity of satirical attack throughout O'Brien's novels that makes the study of satire within his work so important. To ignore the satire within his novels is to ignore the driving force behind these works, just as to ignore the manner in which he satirizes (i.e. through parody) is to ignore his basic style of writing. These are two of the three reasons for which O'Brien's satire within the novels has been studied so closely and consistently by critics; the other is the manner in which his return to similar topics indicates his particular artistic and philosophical obsessions.

However, while each novel covers most or all of O'Brien's obsessions, each novel focusses upon and satirizes a specific target. *At Swim-Two-Birds* attacks literature itself, in as many of its forms as seems possible in a single novel (or in a novel-within-a-novel-within-a-novel). *The Third Policeman* attacks intellectualism and the naive belief (for O'Brien) that through language, or reason, or any other means, humanity can achieve an understanding of "the truth." *The Poor Mouth* attacks a specific literary target -- the autobiographical tradition in Irish writing popular in O'Brien's day -- and also the entire Gaelic movement. *The Dalkey Archive* is, like *The Poor Mouth*, an attack on a specific literary target, only this time it is not a tradition, but

a single author: James Joyce. The main target of the satire in The Hard Life is somewhat more difficult to pin down than that of the other novels, as many critics have discovered, probably because the target, although it is, again, pretentious literary writing, is parodically attacked mostly through the *form* of the novel, which is consciously pedestrian in its style and in its subjects. This form, discussed below in reference to *HL*, questions the value of experimentalism within literature by paradoxically demonstrating, through the weakness of its pedestrian style, the weakness of more experimental and 'highbrow' styles.

The various targets of O'Brien's satire listed above are all attacked through similar means, that is, the satirical parody discussed in the introduction. On the subject of *AS2B*, Clissman notes the importance of parody as a satirical tool, observing that O'Brien's "parodic and fantastic turn of mind, his awareness of the relativity of reality, make him.... [a] satirist, intensely aware of the lunacies of many aspects of Irish life and literature" (*Intro* 88-89). A good example of the broad criticism lurking behind O'Brien's satirical parodying is his "parody of the language of cowboy romances" (85) in *AS2B*, one of "some thirty-six different styles" parodied in the novel (86). This parody of a particularly popular genre demonstrates not only the failings of the genre, but also the failings of similarly popular genres that are driven not by originality or imagination, but by the pedantic reworking of overused conventions. The parody of cowboy novels in *AS2B* stands as a good example not only of a subject often attacked by O'Brien, but also of the manner in which he implements his attacks.

The parody begins with what is supposedly a "*Relevant excerpt from the Press*," which announces "the passing of Mr William Tracy, the eminent novelist" (*AS2B* 53). That this fictional author is pronounced 'eminent' is a good sign in *AS2B* that this Tracy is about to be soundly mocked. It turns out, unsurprisingly, that Tracy's "best known works" are "Red Flanagan's Last Throw, Flower o' the Prairie, and Jake's Last Ride"

(53). This 'eminent' writer is in fact the author of cowboy pulp novels. He is also, however, a writer in the world of *AS2B*. This means that it is possible for Shanahan, a character 'hired' by the writer Trellis (one of the main characters in the novel), to have once worked for Mr William Tracy. Shanahan describes this aspect of his career, and introduces the reader to two other characters in *AS2B*: Shorty Andrews and Slug Willard, "the toughest pair of boyos you'd meet in a day's walk" (53). Shanahan and these two good ol' boys end up "cow-punching down by the river in Ringsend" (53), but they soon discover that they have been robbed, Shanahan lamenting that "be damned but wasn't the half of our steers rustled across the border in Irishtown by Red Kiersay's gang of thieving ruffians" (54). But these boyos don't give up so easily, and go on the warpath, with Shanahan grandly pronouncing "get yourselves fed, says I to Shorty and Slug, we're goin' ridin' tonight. Where? says Slug. Right over to them thar rustlers' roost, says I, before Tracy finds out and skins us" (54). You see, the cattle were Mr Tracy's, to be used in his next work of fiction.

Adventure ensues. Shanahan describes the action:

So when the moon had raised her lamp o'er the prairie grasses, out flies the bunch of us, Slug, Shorty and myself on a buckboard making like hell for Irishtown with our ears back and the butts of our six-guns streaming out behind us in the wind.... Shorty drew out and gave the horses an unmerciful skelp across the where-you-know and away with us like the wind and us roaring and cursing out of us like men that were lit with whisky.... Be damned to the lot of us, I roared, flaying the nags and bashing the buckboard across the prairie, passing out lorries and trams and sending poor so-and-so's on bicycles scuttling down side-lanes with nothing showing but the whites of their eyes. (55)

In a hilarious mixture of cowboy romance language ('lamp o'er the prairie grasses') and Dublin-speak ('where-you-know' and 'so-and so's'), Shanahan describes a

typical western ride-to-danger-and-justice taking place on a 'prairie' which is actually an Irish town with lorries, trams, and side roads. The ride is a *satirical* parody because the parody demonstrates the weaknesses of not only the conventions of the cowboy romance, but also of those Dubliners (and, really, all readers) who enjoy and identify with a literature that has nothing to do with their daily lives.

These problems with this popular form continue to be stressed by O'Brien in two 'press extracts.' One of them reveals the ride of the cowboys to be gratuitous, saying that "visitors can readily reach the ranch [to which Shanahan and the boys ride so valiantly] by taking the Number 3 tram" (56). The other describes the result of the battle between the cowboys and the thieves, for which Shanahan enlists the aid "of a whole detachment of the D.M.P." (57), and Slug rounds up "a crowd of Red Indians up in the Phoenix Park" (57), who are taking part in another of Tracy's books.¹⁰

Shanahan describes the battle himself, but the "*Relevant excerpt from the Press*" is more revealing of O'Brien's satire:

a number of men, stated to be labourers, were arraigned before Mr Lamphall in the District Court yesterday morning on charges of riotous assembly and malicious damage. Accused were described by Superintendent Clohessy as a gang of corner-boys whose horse-play in the streets was the curse of the Ringsend district.... On the occasion of the last escapade, two windows were broken in a tram-car the property of the Dublin United Tramway Company. Inspector Quin of the Company stated that the damage to the vehicle amounted to £2 11s. od. (59)

The point of this extract, again, is its insistence that the tired conventions of popular literature, when observed from a more realistic point of view, not only lack originality and imagination, but are also absurd. Consequently, a great battle between rustlers, cowboys, Indians, and police, turns out to be nothing more than a mob of 'corner-boys

¹⁰ The D.M.P. are the Dublin police force.

whose horse-play' (that is a delicious pun) causes a couple of pounds of damage to a tram-car. Furthermore, the hilarious and wildly imaginative aspects of the parody show that originality can improve upon convention, and is therefore more desirable than the trite repetition of conventions most often found in such popular forms as the cowboy pulp romance novel. The parodies above are satirical in that they demonstrate the weaknesses of popular fiction, possibly in an attempt to improve that fiction, and are thus informed by two of the main goals of the satirist.

While the satirical parody discussed above targets literary conventions in general, and not only cowboy romance literature, *AS2B* has still larger fish to fry. One of these other targets is the mythical figure of Finn MacCool, who is hired as a character for Trellis' novel along with the less respectable Shanahan. In what is, according to Clissman, a parody of the Song of Amergin (*Intro* 125), Finn describes himself:

I am a bark for buffeting, said Finn,

I am a hound for thomypaws....

I am a hole in a wall....

I am the breast of a young queen, said Finn....

I am a Connachtman's ear....

I am an Ulsterman, a Connachtman, a Greek, said Finn.

I am Cuchulainn, I am Patrick.

I am Carbey-Cathead, I am Goll.

I am my own father and my own son.

I am every hero from the crack of time. (*AS2B* 17-18, 19)

The student narrator himself, parodying the conventions of the description of heroic Gaelic figures, describes Finn in this manner:

Each thigh to him was to the thickness of a horse's belly, narrowing to a green-

veined calf to the thickness of a foal. Three fifties of fosterlings could engage with handball against the wideness of his backside, which was wide enough to halt the march of warriors through a mountain pass. (15)

In *AS2B*, the parody of Finn, like the parody of cowboy romance literature, reveals once more the awful distance that exists between a literary character and a real person, as well as the inability of certain forms of literature to avoid conventions and to achieve originality. In the case of Finn's description of himself, and the narrator's description of Finn, O'Brien extends his critique beyond literary language, genre, and characterization, into the larger realm of the epic, using the satirical parody to attack the conventional exaggeration of a mythical character's attributes.

Walter Nash's *The Language of Humour* explains the importance of a parody of a mythological figure. He suggests that, by alluding to such a figure, an author makes "a bid for situational power, the kind of power that interprets, comments, and directs responses and allots social roles" (76), a power particularly important for the satirist. Such humorous allusions as O'Brien's, however, not only increase the power of the author, but also bring the author and the informed reader closer together through their humour, as "the jester invites the listener/reader to rejoice in his own literary and linguistic knowledge" (77). There is also an element of criticism in the parody, it being "impudently funny, and at the same time [making] a criticism that might have been more woundingly phrased," and so "its effect is both to direct and to deflect the severity of criticism" (78). The point is, essentially, that a parody of a style may be more humorous than critical, more critical than humorous, or may indeed be less of a mockery of a particular style than a mockery of the *popularity* of a style.

An important question, then, for understanding O'Brien's parody of Finn, and the poetry surrounding Finn, is whether or not the parody is 'hostile' and satirical. Is this a parody that "appraises.... in order to ridicule and discomfit" (Nash 82), or is it a "light-

hearted exercise" and not "a satirical attack on a sage and serious poet," a parody that "aims affectionately at the comprehension of certain stylistic mannerisms" (83)? Most critics believe that the parody is not hostile, but discuss it at length, as this conclusion seems counter-intuitive when O'Brien's tendency to satirize through parody is realized. Clissman claims that the *AS2B* parody of old Gaelic poets, and their translators like O'Keeffe, O'Grady, and Meyer, is a parody that "is usually quite gentle," and that "O'Brien has restrained his parodic impulse" (*Intro* 129) when alluding to Finn. Shea holds that "the novel is not so much a parody of any particular discourse as it is a parody of the [narrator's], Finn's, the press's.... and O'Brien's own efforts to achieve lasting shape with words" (110), which implies that the main target of the parody of Finn and his language is not directed specifically at Finn-conventions, so much as at anyone who attempts to write at all. A similar, though somewhat more refined position, is that of Cathal Ó Hainle in "Fionn and Suibhne in At Swim-Two Birds." Ó Hainle claims that "Flann O'Brien's concern was not so much with folklore as with literary texts, as models, as a butt for his mockery and as a basis for his parody" (21). Ó Hainle goes on to suggest that "it is the author's intention to parody English translations of *Fiannaíocht* prose, and.... that the translations of Standish H. O'Grady in Silva Gadelica are the principal butt of his humour" (24). Finn, in this understanding, is not the target of the satirical parody (if indeed it is satirical), but rather the targets are the translators of the poetry itself. Furthermore, O'Brien may be "illustrating how ludicrous was the whole process of anglicisation of Irish personal names and place-names, especially in works of Irish scholarship," including Douglas Hyde's Literary History and O'Grady's Silva Gadelica (28). Again, the claim is made that Finn is not the target of any criticism. But this does not seem to be a satisfactory understanding of the parodies; how could O'Brien make a character and a literature look so ridiculous, and yet be merely mocking its translators, and therefore committing no real act of

irreverence? The parody of Finn and his translators is for the most part quite harmless, but that there is still a 'hostile' element to the parody, as Nash would describe it. It is this hostile element that allows for the satire in the parody, as "parody becomes a satirical weapon when the parodist is angered by an author's philosophies, arguments, or recurrent attitudes" (Nash 85). Now, while I do not suggest that O'Brien was exactly 'angered' by Finn-poetry and by its translators, it is clear that his exaggerated descriptions of Finn, his mockery of Finn's poetry, his mockery of Finn's pompous belief in himself as a hero, and, indeed, his mockery of *anyone's* belief in Finn's (or anyone's) heroic nature, clearly makes his parody satirical in nature, in its attack on the conventions of mythological literature and on the problems of translating such literature.

A broader and more contemporary target of the satirical parodying in O'Brien's novels, which is widened by his humorous allusions, is modernism. Sue Asbee, in Flann O'Brien, after admitting that *AS2B* owes much to modernism (its "interweaving of myth and contemporary events, the lack of plot," etc.), suggests that "it is equally important to recognize that one reason for this 'imitation' was to make fun of modernism" (ix). The 'imitation' is actually a parody, and, because it is critical, also something of a satire. In *AS2B* specifically, O'Brien, through parody, "sends up the idea of seeming fragments held together in a secure aesthetic framework"; for example, while "some of his references and allusions come from 'respectable' literary sources," others include "road safety rules copied from the back of an exercise book" (Asbee x). O'Brien also acknowledges, and sends up, the exclusiveness of the modernist penchant for alluding to obscure works (somewhat paradoxically when one considers his own allusions to myth in *AS2B*), thus making "a comic critique of modernist novels that have little interest for or in the common reader" (44).

Both of these criticisms are linked to O'Brien's impatience with 'intellectualism,'

with exclusive writing and thought, an impatience not surprising in a writer who is just as much a journalist as he is a novelist - and just as much a humorist as he is a critic.

Asbee, in one of the more eloquent defenses of O'Brien's importance, suggests that

O'Brien was essentially a comic writer. But this notion should not blind us to the fact that the impulse of clowning was always a result of something fundamentally serious or sinister. He might have dismissed At Swim-Two-Birds as "juvenile scribiny," but it was a response to writers who had, in his opinion, taken themselves and their art too seriously. O'Brien mocked them by taking their "experiments" to excess.... Of the many ways in which At Swim can be read, one is as a piece of corrective laughter aimed at the modernists. (112)

This 'corrective laughter' is what drives O'Brien, like all satirists, to write, and is apparent in his satirical parodies of modernism.

One of the main targets of O'Brien's attack on modernism is, then, evident in his "parody of elitist, allusive Modernist works" (54), as Asbee explains in her article "At Swim-Two-Birds: Readers and Literary Reference." But the modernist notion of the author, as Joyce put it in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, that "the artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (233), is also implicitly attacked by O'Brien in his "parody of overt novelistic self-consciousness" (Cohen CC 58). This, however, brings one of the possible reasons for O'Brien's criticism of modernism to the fore: his intense personal dislike of James Joyce. Clissman suggests that his "impulse to parody Joyce had begun as early as Comhthrom Feinne" (100), the student newspaper to which O'Brien was a famous contributor, and since this impulse runs through all of O'Brien's writings, almost every critic who writes about O'Brien feels the need to interpret O'Brien's hatred, contempt, or jealousy, for Joyce and his followers.

That O'Brien often criticizes Joyce, through parody and satire, is thus a long-established and universally accepted claim in the O'Brien critical canon. Every attack O'Brien makes on modernism can be interpreted as an attack on Joyce, as can every attack O'Brien makes on artists in general. Regarding *AS2B*, Del Ivan Janik, in "Flann O'Brien: The Novelist as Critic," describes the novel as "a perceptive and witty commentary on and criticism of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*" and *Ulysses*, a criticism "such as might be found in a scholarly article or a casual essay, integrated instead into a novel that contains other riches of its own" (64). Not surprisingly, Janik notes that "much of O'Brien's criticism of *A Portrait of the Artist* takes the form of parody" (67); for example, Orlick is a parody of Stephen Dedalus (65), the narrator's friends "are reminiscent of Stephen's," (66), and so on. The satirical parodying of Joyce in *AS2B* is an established claim of O'Brien studies,¹¹ and will be discussed further in relation to two of O'Brien's other novels that specifically attack Joyce, *The Hard Life* and *The Dalkey Archive*.

O'Brien's parodies and criticisms, in *AS2B*, of cowboy romances, of ancient Irish poetry and its translations, of modernism, and of Joyce, all point to the novel's general parodying and criticism of 'the author,' and of literature, providing "an important clue to O'Brien's own conception of the purpose and function of literature" (*Intro* 106). Jose Lanters, in "Fiction within Fiction: The Role of the Author in Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman*," eloquently describes O'Brien's attitudes towards the author and literature, noting that *AS2B* "is directly concerned with the concepts of writing and literature, and with the artificiality of literary conventions" (267), a concept already discussed above in O'Brien's criticism of the exaggerated heroic portrayal of *Finn and the literally 'literary' Dublin cowboys-for-hire*. Lanters goes on to discuss this

¹¹ Every O'Brien critic writes on this subject, but some of the more lengthy and interesting discussions of O'Brien and Joyce can be found in Asbee's *Flann O'Brien*, and in Clissman's *Intro*. J.C.C. Mays's "Brian O'Nolan and Joyce on Art and Life" is a seminal article on the subject. An interesting look into the influence of Joyce on O'Brien, instead of O'Brien's attitude towards Joyce, can be found in Stephen Lamont's M.A. thesis, *Brian O'Nolan and the Joycean Influence*.

attitude in more detail, claiming that, for O'Brien,

the artist should write first and foremost for an audience, or else not write at all, for fiction for its own sake leads nowhere. O'Brien's belief that man never learns from experience and never attains self-knowledge leads him to the inevitable conclusion that it is a sign of foolishness and conceit in a writer to make bold statements about the world and to create the impression, through excess of imagination, that he understands more than he does. The conclusion must be that unreason prevails in the world, and that it is folly to pretend, in literature or otherwise, that this unreason does not exist. Instead, the writer of fiction should use his imagination to probe and query that irrational part of experience that cannot be grasped by reason. (281)

O'Brien cannot stand the disinterested author 'paring his fingernails,' nor can he stand the author who pretends to portray reality, believing that *literary* reality is the only kind of reality that can be communicated through literature. This is the reason for much of his satirical parodying in *AS2B*, and is what makes the novel such an important comment upon the nature of specific literary movements and upon literature as a whole. This position may seem confused, as O'Brien dislikes both realism and modernism, two notions often considered directly opposed to each other. O'Brien's satire demands of his readers, however, that they see that *both sides* of the argument between the two modes are flawed, and therefore that neither is a perfect artistic method.

O'Brien's dislike of the attempt to portray reality in literature is second only to his dislike of readers who actually believe that literature can portray reality. This is evident most powerfully in his novel The Poor Mouth, written in Irish as An Béal Bocht, which explores the consequences of a literature that turns a real people's culture, language, and poverty into a romanticized tool of political power and personal fulfilment.

Critics have often noted that The Poor Mouth is a parody and satire of the Irish writings of Seamas Ó Grianna (Ó Broilchain 9) and of Tomás Ó Criomhthain's An t-Oileanach (*NLM* 126). Cronin observes, however, that O'Brien admired Ó Criomhthain's book; he quotes O'Brien as saying that it is a "great book" and that "its impact was explosive. In one week I wrote a parody of it called An Béal Bocht" (126). This is a good example of O'Brien's ability to hold two positions at once, to be able to respect a work of literature and yet to subject that same work to a brutal parody. Booker, like Cronin, acknowledges that in *PM*, "satire is partially effected through a parody of specific Irish writers like Tomás Ó Criomhthain and Seamas Ó Grianna," but points out that "much of the force of this parody is necessarily lost in the English translation" (69). One aspect of the parody and satire of literature that does survive, however, is the repetition of the inane phrase "our likes will never be there again," which, though only used once in Ó Criomhthain's book, is repeated *ad nauseum* in *PM* (Asbee 76). But prose is not the only literary target in the novel, as O'Brien also parodies "the eighteenth century *Aisling* poetry for which [O'Brien] had little respect" (106). These attacks on Irish literature are similar to those effected in *AS2B*, but manage to survive in the translation because of O'Brien's satirical use of parody.

The Poor Mouth, however, not only parodies and criticizes specific works of literature, but also "lashes out at the sterility of Gaelic literature and at the image of the idyllic, pastoral, contented Gael which the Literary Revival had cultivated" (Farnon 89). The danger of the invented 'image' of the Gael, for O'Brien, is that it is a *literary* image, promoted by the Gaelic League, that masquerades as a reality, and therefore infringes negatively upon the existence of the Gaelic peoples stereotyped by this image. O'Brien expresses his outrage at this practice through the character of 'Sitric O'Sanasa,' a man of extreme poverty. Through O'Sanasa, O'Brien "mocks all those writers who would sentimentalize the holy poverty and sacred simplicity of the Gaelic

peasant" (Kiberd 508). When the narrator, Bonaparte O'Coonassa, is describing Sitric, he notes that, while the residents of Corkadoragha, where the novel takes place, "always regarded [Sitric] as a recipient of alms and compassion," visiting "gentlemen from Dublin who came in motors to inspect the paupers praised him for his Gaelic poverty and stated that they never saw anyone who appeared so truly Gaelic. One of the gentlemen broke a little bottle of water which Sitric had, because, said he, it spoiled the effect" (*PM* 88). O'Brien is satirizing the Gaelic revivalists, affluent and educated, who, for nationalistic reasons, create and believe in a Gaelic culture represented by Sitric. They have no intention of doing anything to help the Gaelic people and preserve the Gaelic culture, other than by visiting 'Gaelic' areas and taking part in cultural 'traditions' of their own invention.

What O'Brien is doing is criticizing those who read about what Ireland was like 'in the past,' and who wish to make that literary past a present reality for their own (nationalistic) purposes. Another example of this can be found in those "gentlemen from Dublin," who change their names from English into Irish (see 14-15 below). Douglas Hyde provides a historical example of this tendency, having "employed the pseudonym *An Craibhin Aoibhinn* (The Pleasant Little Branch) in order to hide a surname which pointed clearly back to invading English soldiery" (Kiberd 501-502). This is no less 'ludicrous' than the anglicisation of Irish names mentioned on page 31 above. These 'gentlemen' also "adopted the kilt as their public [and Gaelic] costume in blissful unawareness that it was a foreign [English and then Scottish] importation" (Kiberd 502). There is humour in this satirical parody of O'Brien's, but not much, as the issues of poverty, nationalism, and oppression are far less humorous than a reader's misreading or an author's miswriting. Satire is here meeting tragedy.

Declan Kiberd, in *Inventing Ireland*, sums up the impact of *PM* well:

The satire and the tragedy are finally one, for in mocking the official clichés of

previous Irish writers, [O'Brien] is emphasizing the plight of a peasantry which has had foisted on it a falsely romanticized ethos... from stage Irish in the nineteenth century to stage Gael in the twentieth, one mask has simply been exchanged for another. For [O'Brien] the most distressing aspect of this was the alarming number of Irishmen, in the last century and in the present, who were willing to conform to these stereotypes. (503)

O'Brien believes that literature cannot portray reality, and attacks that notion; but he also attacks the more disturbing relationship between reality and literature, when *reality* mimics literature and allows that disturbing invention to come to a gross and misshapen life of its own in the real world, where pain is not just a four letter ink-stain on a page.

The most disturbing, and therefore the most cutting, criticism in *PM* is again aimed at those 'gentlemen from Dublin' whom O'Coonassa calls the 'Gaeligores.' These visitors decide that they are going to enjoy a Gaelic feis, a large 'traditional Gaelic' party, being put on by the locals in Corkadoragha. The Old-Grey-Fellow, the narrator's grandfather, has noticed that the Gaeligores are coming less frequently, and therefore give him less opportunity to fleece them of their money. He determines that they have stopped coming because:

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 Gaelicisim of the countryside was too Gaelic.
5. The tradition of the countryside was too traditional. (50)

The Old-Grey-Fellow is aware that the Gaeligores do not want a *real* Gaelic countryside to visit; rather, they want a kind of tourist fakery that they can *pretend* is real while they enjoy the comfort they are used to. This passage highlights the

superficial nature of the Gaeligores' interest in the Gaels that so outraged O'Brien.

The people of Corkadoragha, however, are poor, and so set to work preparing the feis to attract the demeaning (but rich) Gaeligores back to their region. Their attempt to please the visitors by mimicking the literary image of the Gael is disastrous: "The night beforehand a large gang of men worked diligently in the midst of the rain erecting a platform....None of these fellows ever had good health again after the downpour and storm of that night, while one of those who did not survive was buried before the platform was dismantled on which he had laid down his life for the cause of the Gaelic language" (51). The sacrifice of the Gaels is brutal. Will it be appreciated?

When the Gaeligores arrive, the narrator notices their kilts, a garment he calls "a lady's underskirt" (51). He then feels "quite ashamed that there was not even one true Gael among us in Corkadoragha" (51-52), because none of the residents wear kilts. He believes the Gaeligores' misinterpretation of what it means to be 'Gaelic'. The narrator also notices that the Gaeligores "had yet another distinction which we [the residents of Corkadoragha] did not have since we lost true Gaelicism - they all lacked names and surnames but received honorary titles, self-granted" (52), describing "a bulky, fat, slow-moving man whose face was grey and flabby and appeared suspended between deaths from two mortal diseases; he took unto himself the title of *The Gaelic Daisy*" (52). The narrator then lists forty-one other outrageous pseudonyms, some of which include:

Connacht Cat

The Gaudy Crow

The Running Knight

Popeye the Sailor

Mary's Spinning-wheel

The Sod of Turf

Baboro

The Other Beetle

The Temperate Munsteman

Eight Men

The Dative Case

The Headache

The Sweet Little Kiss (52-53)

The residents attend the feis, despite being “ragged and hungry” (53), and after many orations by the Gaeligores, “many Gaels collapsed from hunger and the strain of listening while one fellow died most Gaelically in the midst of the assembly” (55). The satire shows, with this darkly humorous image, the consequences of a people attempting to live up to the stereotypes of others, the irony being that the others invented the stereotypes in order to preserve the very people and culture the stereotypes destroy.

More hilarious are the speeches, in Irish, given by the Gaeligores. One is an especially cutting parody:

Gaels! he said, it delights my Gaelic heart to be here today speaking Gaelic with you at this Gaelic feis in the centre of the Gaeltacht. May I state that I am a Gael. I'm Gaelic from the crown of my head to soles of my feet.... Likewise, you are all truly Gaelic. We are all Gaelic Gaels of Gaelic lineage.... I myself have spoken not a word except Gaelic since the day I was born -- just like you -- and every sentence I've ever uttered has been on the subject of Gaelic.... There is no use in having Gaelic, if we converse in it on non-Gaelic topics. (54)

He speaks in “true Gaelic Gaelic about the truly Gaelic language” (55), even as the Gaelic people around him die from hunger. Again, the satire and the parody are humorous, but the message to the Gaeligores is a serious one indeed.

As noted above, throughout the book O'Brien "satirise[s] the assumptions of the average Irish language enthusiast" (Ó Hainle 36), and also "satirises the Gaelic writers, the folklorists, the Literary Revival, and the romanticised image of the peasant" (Farnon 94). The novel, then, parodies and satirizes Gaelic literature, its authors, its readers, and those who wish to belong to a group of people whom they don't understand, and whose image is nothing more than a literary and political creation. The scope of this criticism is quite broad for a novel that is just over one hundred pages long, and which "may be one of the first parodies in modern Irish" (Kiberd 510), and is a good example of O'Brien's satirical and parodical virtuosity.

The sub-title of The Poor Mouth is "a bad story about the hard life." Kiberd notes that this phrase is significant because it "became the eventual title of [O'Brien's] next book, which was itself sub-titled 'An Exegesis of Squalor', a perfect description of what had already been achieved in An Béal Bocht" (503). The achievement in The Hard Life, however, is no less significant than that of The Poor Mouth. O'Brien's own reaction to the novel is characteristically paradoxical; while he once described it as the work of "a writer who is only, for the moment, clowning," he also claimed that it "is a very important book and very funny. Its apparently pedestrian-style is delusive" (qtd. in *NLM* 215). Consequently, the bulk of the satire in this novel is not presented as straightforwardly as that of his other works.

As a result, the critical reaction to the novel has been somewhat ambivalent. Cronin believes that "to make over-large claims for [*HL*] would be to affront the essentially modest nature of the work itself," and says that "within its limits it is, as [Brendan] Behan said, 'a gem', but the limits are there," noting that the "book is basically a sequence of jokes" (*NLM* 215). Tess Hurson, in "Conspicuous Absences: The Hard Life," does not think that the work is satirical (119-120), claiming that the work "suffers, however deliberately, from the lack of authorial interference, and the

price of the author's withdrawal is a novel with no meaning, no pattern. It refuses fictionality" (120). Hurson also notes that the schemes of Manus, a character based on "the Brother" character in Cruiskeen Lawn, and who is also the brother of the narrator, Finnbar, are, "unlike those of his predecessors.... inherently lacking in scope and imagination" (125). Hurson believes that the novel is a failure in comparison to O'Brien's previous work, especially *AS2B* and *TP*, because it is exactly what it was intended to be: a book written in a pedestrian style.

Hurson does, however, offer a counter-argument to this assessment of *HL*. She wonders if "perhaps The Hard Life asks for the recognition that the earlier novels call forth their dialectical opposite -- The Hard Life -- a novel which imitates life, not fiction," indicating that the novel may be "a self-referential parody" (131). I think that this assessment is much more reliable than that of the main (and critical) argument of Hurson's article. For instance, to say that the novel lacks authorial interference, and that it has no meaning or pattern, that it refuses fictionality, could just as well be praise in another context. *HL* is more fully understood as another satire of O'Brien's, its 'pedestrian-style' critically parodying pretentious literary styles and themes.

Clissman agrees with Hurson that the novel is a failure, claiming that it "becomes wearisome, especially since O'Brien relies on a small number of comic devices which become overworked and ineffective as the book progresses" (*Intro* 272), but recognizes that the novel contains at least two satirical attacks. The first involves the climactic scene with the pope -- in which Mr. Collopy, the narrator's guardian, attempts to convince the religious leader of the importance of establishing bathrooms for women on the streets of Dublin -- and the name of Collopy's co-conspirator, the German priest "Father Fahrt," as these are part of a "satire of certain aspects of the Church" (285) in the novel. The second involves O'Brien's skeptical reaction to pedagogy and its often overblown language:

O'Brien's art is the art of distortion. In the brother's letter [to Manus] he presents what could be a typical education manifesto, a prospectus of studies to be completed, but he has exaggerated it and put it into the mouth of a character whom we know to be unworthy. He then relies on the disparity between the reader's expectations - about education, culture and the like - and their knowledge of the brother's character to turn parody into satire. (279-280)

This letter outlines the brother's intention to begin a correspondence school that would attempt to teach such unrelated topics as "Boxing, Foreign Languages.... Journalism.... Astronomy.... A Cure for Cancer.... Prevention and Treatment of Boils....[and] Chess" (*HL* 82). These promises can never be fulfilled, and thus "[i]n this letter parody, irony and satire are interchangeable, and the extract becomes an attack on quacks and charlatans, of whom the brother is a supreme example" (*Intro* 280). These two satirical attacks are similar in form and content to those made in O'Brien's other, more highly praised novels.

But despite these satirical attacks, Clissman considers the novel a failure, assessing the novel's satire as not being as consistent, effective, or original as that of O'Brien's three previous novels. But the novel does have a defender in Mary Power's "Flann O'Brien and Classical Satire: An Exegesis of The Hard Life." Power claims that the novel is "rooted in Juvenalian satire" and that "the object of the satire is family life at the turn of the century" (87), a curious topic for O'Brien to satirize. In a novel once described by its author as "a treatise on piss and vomit" (qtd. in *Intro* 280), Power notes that "it could be said that the objectivity of the narrative is simply the result of the indigestibility of the subject matter" (88). This, then, is what makes the novel a work "that conceals its own art" (88) - its pedestrian style *is* the comment on literature, to a far greater extent than any explicit action, statement, or parody in the novel itself. Through this claim, Power saves *HL* from such attacks as those of Hurson and

Clissman, noting that the pedestrian style of the novel is satirical, and thus that the apparent weaknesses of the novel are actually satirical comments upon literature, and not weaknesses within the novel itself. This recognition of the satirical effect of the novel's overall structure justifies the novel's 'weaknesses,' ranking it alongside O'Brien's other novels as a significant piece of writing.

Power also notes that there is some explicit satire in the novel, and that the "object of O'Brien's satire is James Joyce" (89). O'Brien's look at family life in the early part of the century, in all its squalor, "demythologizes Joyce and defines Irish life against idealization of any sort" (89). In *PM*, O'Brien demythologizes the life of the 'true' Gaels, and in *HL* he demythologizes the life of the Dubliner. An example of this can be found in the discussions that take place between Collopy and Fahrt over whisky. Clissman notes that their "pedantic quibbling about distorted views of the Church and Irish history which take place in the big kitchen" (*Intro* 273) are significant, but fails to understand their true importance: they are a satirical parody of the famous dinner-table discussion at the beginning of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. This discussion of the Church and politics is quite similar to that of Collopy and Fahrt's. While Dante defends the Church and attacks Parnell for his infidelity, Mr. Dedalus remarks that "the language of the Holy Ghost," piously quoted by Mrs. Riordan, is "very bad language if you ask me" (31). Collopy himself attacks the Church, similarly irreverently, arguing against its defense of suffering. Father Fahrt asks, "well, Collopy, what are we in this world for? We are here to suffer. We must sanctify ourselves. That's what suffering is for" (29). Collopy responds with an hilarious, grotesque diatribe:

-Father, said Mr Collopy at last, you would go off your bloody head if you had the same situation in your own house. You would make a show of yourself.

You would tell Father Superior to go to hell, lep out the front door and bugger off

down to Stephen's Green. Oh, I'm up to ye saints. Well up to ye. Do you not think that women have enough suffering, as you call it, bringing babies into the world? And why do they do that? Is it because they're mad to sanctify themselves? Well faith no! It's because the husband is one great torch ablaze with the fires of lust! (29)

The parody of the famous debate in A Portrait satirizes Joyce's portrayal of Irish family life in the early part of the century, as well as Joyce's tendency to mythologize banal events, unforgivably distorting reality through literature.

The novel continues its attack on literature's distortion of reality, and the consequences of this distortion, through the 'lowbrow' intellectualism of the brother's (Manus's) correspondence school. O'Brien's main criticism here, as always, is that people believe what they read. In one instance, the brother, writing as "Professor Latimer Dodds," composes a "four-page book of instructions" on how to walk a tightrope. He explains to Finnarr: "Price sixpence only. It's for nothing. A packet of fags and a box of matches would cost you nearly that, and no fag would give you the thrill of thinking about the high wire" (39). Finnarr remarks that "this looks to me like a swindle," but the brother responds, "rubbish. I'm only a bookseller. The valuable instructions and explanations are given by Professor Latimer Dodds. And he has included warnings of the danger as well" (39). But despite these warnings, someone, inevitably, is injured. A boy almost drowns, falling off a tightrope strung across the Liffey (75-77). A policeman tells Collopy about the incident and its connection to the brother, but the brother denies all knowledge and responsibility, saying "I refuse to be worried about what brats from the slum say or think, or at country rozzers either" (76). The real problem with the brother, however, is not his refusal to take responsibility for his actions. The problem is that the brother is *an author*. He writes a pamphlet about tightrope walking, and assumes that people will get a thrill from only *thinking* about the

high wire. He assumes a pseudonym and creates a false personality -- Professor Latimer Dodds, "a retired trapeze and high wire artist" (39) -- and therefore lies to his readers. The parody of correspondence courses is evident in 'Dodds's' pretentious use of language, which, though it promises much with its apparently educated style, in fact only renders its meaning trite and banal.¹² Through this parody, O'Brien satirizes, as he does in *AS2B*, the pretensions of the author. He is also, however, satirizing himself, the pseudonymous author who writes about writing. The Hard Life is a warning to anyone who takes literature too seriously -- or seriously at all -- and to anyone who might be tempted to exchange a belief in the myth of the author for the myth of the pseudonymous satirist.

This general attack, waged upon the author through the satirical parody, and present in all of O'Brien's novels discussed above, is again present in The Dalkey Archive, which O'Brien described as "not meant to be a novel or anything of the kind but a study in derision, various writers with their styles, and sundry modes, and attitudes and cults being rats in the cage" (qtd. in *Intro* 293). Some of the novel is based upon The Third Policeman (discussed below), including the character of De Selby (in *TP* he is "de Selby"), and the strange "Mollycule" theory of Sergeant Fottrell, which is actually the "Atomic Theory" of Sergeant Pluck in *TP*. The difference between the two novels is that, while *TP* is for the most part a satire and parody of academia and truth-seeking, *DA* is a satire and parody of authors and, specifically, as usual with O'Brien, James Joyce.

Joseph Devlin explains O'Brien's "increasingly vituperative statements about Joyce.... as an extreme result of the anxiety of influence," but insists that this is only

¹² An example of the style of the pamphlet is worth quoting: "It were folly to asseverate that periastral peripatesis on the *aes ductile*, or wire, is destitute of profound peril not only to sundry *membra*, or limbs, but to the back and veriest life itself. Wherefore is the reader most graciously implored to abstain from *le risque majeur* by first submitting himself to the most perspicacious scrutiny by highly-qualified physician or surgeon for, in addition to anatomical verifications, evidence of Meniere's Disease, caused by haemorrhage into the equilibristic labyrinth of the ears, causing serious nystagmus and insecurity of gait" (40). This is O'Brien's parodying at its best.

"part of the story," as O'Brien's "increasing tendency to view artistic experimentation as artistic pretension causes [O'Brien] to anathematize the most visible proponent of the discredited methods, James Joyce" (97). This anathematization takes the form, in *DA*, of bringing Joyce back to life and having him serve drinks in a bar in Skerries, avoiding fame, and attempting to become a Jesuit priest.

The criticism of Joyce, other than the obvious mockery of his person, begins with O'Brien's dislike of characterization. Shea claims that in *DA*, with "subdued sport, [O'Brien] scoffingly emulates the disposition of novels to revolve around character, determining predictable paths through spent serial arrangements" (166). These 'spent serial arrangements,' according to Shea, are part of the parody, and account for O'Brien's claim that the work is 'not a novel;' by this, "O'Brien means that his book merely feigns a realistic approach" (167). The parody and satire are thus buried in the form of the text itself, just as they are in *HL*. O'Brien shows that he can create an absurd characterization of James Joyce, in much the same way as academics and biographers can create their own characterization of Joyce. Again, as in all of the novels discussed above, O'Brien is satirizing, through parody, the attempt to portray reality through literature.

There is, however, some explicit, 'unburied' satire in the novel. Booker describes the mockery of Joyce as satirical, explaining that "we find this Joyce a greatly diminished figure, rabidly pious, whose only dream is to somehow become a Jesuit despite his advanced age," and that this "portrait of Joyce given in the book is highly satiric" (113).¹³ The mockery is evident in this fictional Joyce's love of the church, which he hated in 'real life', and thus O'Brien's "ultimate point, with regard to Joyce, seems to be that Joyce's virulent and sustained attack on the church showed that he was in fact much more saturated with Catholicism than he would like to admit"

¹³ Booker, citing a letter of O'Brien's quoted from Clissman's *Intro*, notes that O'Brien, "writing of The Dalkey Archive," wrote of Joyce that "I'm going to get my own back on that bugger" (113).

(114).

This point made, O'Brien attacks the church itself, thus demonstrating his ability to hold two seemingly opposed positions at once. O'Brien's attack on the church and the Jesuits is accomplished through the character of Father Cobble, a simple-minded, ignorant and obtuse lush (much like Father Fahrt in *HL*), and also through the momentarily resurrected Augustine, who says that the "Jesuits are the williest, cutest and most mendacious ruffians who ever lay in wait for simple Christians" (34-35). Booker explains this attack, claiming "the Jesuits form ideal targets.... because their emphasis on learning allows [O'Brien] to mock both religion and pedantry in a single blow" (110), and that "this emphasis on the Jesuits also suggests an additional parallel with the work of Joyce, in which Jesuits figure prominently" (110). In portraying Joyce as a devoted Catholic who wishes to become a Jesuit, O'Brien is mocking him, an author who hated the church, and is criticizing those who criticize the church but who continue to operate, if unconsciously, within its ideology. Furthermore, since part of the joke is that Father Cobble is too dense to understand Joyce's intentions, asking him not to join the order, but to mend the Jesuits' underwear (they won't do it themselves), O'Brien is also, paradoxically, agreeing with Joyce that the order is far from perfect. This is a curious mixture of genial and hostile parody, in that at one moment O'Brien defends the church through an attack on Joyce, while at the next moment (or even simultaneously) he defends Joyce through an attack on the church.

The attack on the pedantry of the Jesuits, as Clissman notes, is only a part "of all the discussion of religious characters, incidents and problems" in the novel, and is done "to illustrate the pettiness, the casuistry of all such discussion" (*Intro* 305). This is an echo, if not even a continuation, of the low-brow religious discussions in *HL*, which have now become high-brow, especially in the conversation between Augustine and De Selby. Just like those discussions in *HL*, "most debates on religious themes [in *DA*]

descend to the completely trivial or the minute," and through them "the futility of such mental processes is satirised by O'Brien. All the characters who engage in such disputation are hair-splitting" (305). The similarity in futility between Collopy's sentiments and Augustine's are evident in Augustine's dislike for St. Paul. Here is Augustine:

Paul is in our place [heaven], often encorpified and always attended by his physician Luke, putting poultices on his patient's sore neck. When Paul shows too much consate in himself, the great blatherskite with his epistles in bad Greek, the chronic two-timer, I sometimes roar after him 'You're not on the road to Damascus now!' Puts him in his place. (HL 37, O'Brien's italics)

In this passage, Augustine, with his Dublin brogue, sounds much like Collopy, whose typical husband is 'a great torch ablaze with the fires of lust.' Augustine also echoes Mr. Dedalus' sentiment in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, in which Dedalus too expresses a dislike for the language of the Bible. Also like Collopy, it must be noted, Augustine's pronouncement is petty, wildly imaginative, and hilarious.

The Dalkey Archive is thus (for the most part) a satire of pedantry, of academicism, and especially of Joyce, in that "the parody of Joyce, which was very evident in At Swim and The Hard Life, reaches its climax in The Dalkey Archive" (*Intro* 306). Similarly, the implicit parody and satire of pretentious literary forms, evident in the pedestrian form of *HL*, is continued in *DA*'s mock-realism and characterization. As Shea notes, "the narrator's self-conscious parody.... parades the pedestrian quality of an overworked set-piece, reminding us that we have seen it all before.... exposing the shortcomings of established narrative procedures" (161). Thus, "by fatuously conforming to conventional formats" (14), *DA* satirizes, through parody, the pretensions of authors both experimental and traditional, and anyone pretending to determine truth through dialogue and debate.

This last target -- the academic and academic research -- is, not surprisingly, also a target in The Third Policeman, an earlier and at the time unpublished novel of O'Brien's from which he borrowed somewhat in the writing of *DA*. As usual, the attack on academicism may have begun with O'Brien's dislike of Joyce. Asbee notes, in a section of Flann O'Brien entitled "Scholarship and Satire," that "it is true to say that O'Brien reserved his greatest skepticism for the critical industry, particularly that which he saw growing up around Joyce's work; pseudoscholarship and pedantry are pilloried in The Third Policeman" (66). This dislike may have been caused partly by jealousy for the rival author's popularity, but the consistency and impressive style with which O'Brien attacks scholarship throughout his novels, and especially throughout *TP*, indicates that it was more than just a particularly petty obsession.

Rudiger Imhof, in "Two Meta-Novelists: Sterneque Elements in Novels by Flann O'Brien," notes that the satiric devices used by O'Brien to 'pillory' scholarship are often similar to those of Laurence Sterne. Imhof claims that Sterne, and many other authors who belong to the tradition of wit.... used.... encyclopedic knowledge to parody scientific approaches and methods of the time as well as to satirise the belief in the usefulness of pedantic thoroughness and abundance of detail, showing.... that the world of learning is often at variance with the world of human affairs and thereby pointing to the uselessness of erudition. (185)

This type of device is used by O'Brien throughout many of his novels, including *AS2B*, with its abundant use of the most-likely-fictional Conspectus of the Arts and Natural Sciences (discussed in Asbee 27-28), as well as *TP*, with its parody of the massive (and definitely fictional) works of the mad scientist 'de Selby' and his critics. One of these works, by the fictional scholar 'Hatchjaw,' is in fact entitled "Conspectus of the de Selby Dialectic" (153). A footnote in *TP* on a work by de Selby, however, bears even more similarity to the device noted above. It describes

the 'Codex' (first so-called by Bassett in his monumental De Selby Compendium) [as] a collection of some two thousand sheets of foolscap closely hand-written on both sides. The signal distinction of the manuscript is that not one word of the writing is legible. Attempts made by different commentators to decipher certain passages which look less formidable than others have been characterized by fantastic divergencies.... One passage, described by Bassett as being 'a penetrating treatise on old age' is referred to by Henderson (biographer of Bassett) as 'a not unbeautiful description of lambing operations on an unspecified farm'. Such disagreement, it must be confessed, does little to enhance the reputation of either writer. (150)

The huge text, though illegible, is still studied by the foolish scholars, whose disagreement makes a debate between a Marxist and a New Critic look like a small and easily resolvable problem.

Keith Hopper, in his full-length study Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-modernist, suggests that this description of the Codex, and the intellectual disagreement surrounding it, are part of "a mocking critique both of fiction and critical practices. Whatever the author's intentions in a text, readers will invariably insist on bringing their own experiences to bear, and interpret the text according to their own agenda" (194). This suggests that, through the device of the Codex, O'Brien is not only mocking the author, as he always does, and the academic, as he usually does, but also the reader, as he sometimes does. The parody of the academic world, through this Sterne-esque device of exaggerating weaknesses, becomes a satirical comment on that same world, and, incidentally, everything else associated with it.

Thus, in *TP*, "O'Brien suggests the futility of human epistemological inquiry largely through a down-to-earth parody of the excesses of scholarly research" (Booker 128), but, taking advantage of the imaginative setting of the novel, he suggests this

futility through another, less down-to-earth, parody of the limits of scientific observation. This takes place in the remarkable example of MacCruiskeen's horrible chinese-boxes. MacCruiskeen is one of the 'three policemen' referred to in the title of the novel, and wields terrible powers that threaten and violate the laws of physics. He begins his demonstration by showing the anonymous narrator a particularly beautiful small chest it has taken him two years to make, a chest so beautiful, in fact, that the narrator remarks "it is nearly too nice.... to talk about it" (72). MacCruiskeen then opens the chest and shows the narrator that it contains another chest inside, smaller, but otherwise exactly the same as the larger one. The narrator, not seeing what is coming, says that "the two of them are the most wonderful two things I have ever seen," and then asks, "what is in the little one?" (74). MacCruiskeen slowly reveals that a third box is contained in the second one, and a fourth in the third, and so on -- until finally he explains: "number Twenty-Two,' he said, 'I manufactured fifteen years ago and I have made another different one every year since.... Six years ago they began to get invisible, [magnifying] glass or no glass. Nobody has seen the last five I made because no glass is strong enough to make them big enough to be regarded truly as the smallest things ever made.... The one I am making now is nearly as small as nothing" (76). All of this makes the narrator "afraid. What [MacCruiskeen] was doing was no longer wonderful but terrible. I shut my eyes and prayed that he would stop while still doing things that were at least possible for a man to do" (76). But, of course, MacCruiskeen doesn't stop, just as the de Selby scholars do not stop when they attempt to do the impossible. This, along with a magnifying glass, discovered by the narrator, that magnifies to invisibility, "fulfils.... [a] function as a satirical metaphor for the reductive nature of analytical thought" (Hopper 257). Through these out-of-this-world parodies of the limits of scientific inquiry, possible only because of the hellish setting of *TP* where anything is possible, O'Brien performs a sort of *reductio ad*

absurdum, showing that scientific inquiry is flawed when given no boundary whatsoever, and allowed to observe the unobservable, its methods rendering the discovery of truth impossible.

These elements of the novel are, to a certain extent, nonsensical, but even this is part of O'Brien's project. Hopper notes that *TP* "pursues the poetics of nonsense as a means to a satirical end" (258), a satire, as noted, of various means of discovering the truth. The discomfort this causes, felt by the narrator, and indeed also by the reader, through these odd passages in the novel, can be understood through one of Walter Nash's comments in The Language of Humour, who observes that

the humour of circular logic becomes the panic of nightmare; only if there is an independent stance or an escape route can we afford to laugh. This may help to explain why some people detest logic-twisting jokes. A distorted logic is feared as a quasi-criminal act, a threat to the regency of the mind. (113)

And of course there is no 'escape route' in *TP*, a novel in which the narrator is dead and in hell (unbeknownst, on a first reading, to the reader) from page twenty-four, and locked in an inescapable, circular narrative.

Another nonsensical and discomforting element of the novel is the apparently useless guessing in which MacCruiskeen and the narrator take part. Again, this is an example of the futility of inquiry. In one example, MacCruiskeen asks the narrator "what would you say a bulbul is?" (67) The narrator then proceeds to make meaningless guesses:

'Not one of those ladies who take money?' I said.

'No.'

'Not the brass knobs on a German steam organ?'

'Not the knobs.'

'Nothing to do with the independence of America or such-like?'

'No.'

'A mechanical engine for winding clocks?'

'No.'

'A tumour, or the lather in a cow's mouth, or those elastic articles that ladies wear?'

'Not them by a long chalk.'

'Not an eastern musical instrument played by Arabs?'

[MacCruiskeen] clapped his hands.

'Not that but very near it,' he smiled, 'something next door to it. You are a cordial intelligible man. A bulbul is a Persian nightingale. What do you think of that now?'

'It is seldom I am far out,' I said dryly.

He looked at me in admiration and the two of us sat in silence for a while as if each was very pleased with himself and with the other and had good reason to be.

"You are a B.A. with little doubt?" he questioned. (68)

Much like the episode of the amazing chests, this section begins humorously but becomes unsettling after one realizes that the questions and answers are not jokes, but, at least for MacCruiskeen, serious inquiries. This becomes clear when MacCruiskeen decides that one of the narrator's guesses, in reality no closer to the truth than any other guess, is in fact 'very near' the truth. MacCruiskeen, impressed, assumes the narrator has a university education. Of course, the futile inquiry has only succeeded because of an arbitrary decision made by the policeman, the holder of the truth, and this is the core of O'Brien's criticism of those attempting to discover truth.

According to Asbee, scholars and scholarship are attacked again through the very name of the savant 'de Selby'. Observing that the name is close to the German

word *Selbst*, which means 'self', she claims that "certainly O'Brien's satire is directed at preoccupation with the self in the sense of idiosyncratic research pursued in a self-regarding manner, with little or no reference to external events or lived experience" (67). Both de Selby and the narrator are implicated in this satire, the former self-evidently, and the latter because, as a de Selby scholar, it seems that what he has in fact been obsessively studying is nothing more than his own self.

Asbee sums up O'Brien's problem with the narrator, and O'Brien's satire of academia as a whole, with this claim:

In the narrator, then, we have an example of the worst kind of scholar: obsessively single-minded about the works of a remote and woolly-minded philosopher, and eager to add yet another volume to the existing critical industry surrounding the so-called master. In his reading, the narrator has turned in on himself, taking seriously texts that should have been ridiculed; the result is sterile academic footnoting. So pedantically are the narrator's footnotes presented, however, that *O'Brien's* reader colludes not with the narrator but with the author recognizing the [narrator's study of de Selby] for what it is - a piece of comic irrelevance. (In certain circles, however, it may generate only uneasy laughter!) (67, Asbee's italics)

It is certainly a rather daunting satirical parody, with its implicit comic criticism, to encounter while writing a Master's thesis, but I think that the attack is levelled not only against scholars, but against all readers, who expect to find the truth through language, whether written, read, or spoken.

There is another criticism in the novel levelled at both readers and writers, found in the novel's implicit parody of detective fiction. Asbee notes, in a peculiar understatement, that "the challenges presented by The Third Policeman are very different.... from those of conventional murder or mystery stories" (69). She says that

"here there is no detective figure, and the denouement is not that the murderer is discovered but that he himself is dead. Unreliable narration, realism that is overdetermined, and the use of footnotes all work to distract our attention from this fact" (69). Noting these unconventional elements of the novel, however, Asbee comes to an odd conclusion:

The point of At Swim was to engender confusion; The Third Policeman encourages it only so that confusion can be conclusively resolved: the reader, eventually, recognizes ways in which the text misled, and is forced to reappraise and to admire O'Brien's virtuosity. In At Swim-Two-Birds O'Brien was content to have the private satisfaction of feeling sure that his novel would elude (and delude) most readers, with its promise of systems that in fact remains unfulfilled. From this point in his writing career onward, O'Brien becomes less innovative and more straightforward in his writing. (69-70)

Certainly the mysteries of the novel are cleared up at the end of *TP*, but this only makes the novel *different* from *AS2B*, and is not evidence of a decline in innovation; indeed, what sort of innovation would it be to repeat a past innovation? O'Brien's innovation in *TP* is to move past a comic criticism of literature to a comic criticism of truth-seeking. His use of the the satirical parody to achieve his ends is similar, but his tone in *TP* has changed from one of ironic distancing (for example, the novel-within-a-novel-within-a-novel structure of *AS2B*) to a more morbid and disturbing one, a move signalled by the morbid conclusion of *AS2B*, in which a poor German, obsessed with the number three, "went home one evening and drank three cups of tea with three lumps of sugar in each, cut his jugular with a razor three times and scrawled with a dying hand on a picture of his wife good-bye, good-bye, good-bye" (218).

There is one more incident in *TP* that deserves mentioning, as it is emblematic of the core of O'Brien's critique of literature found not only in *TP*, but throughout his

entire body of writing. This incident involves the strange and omnipotent substance, 'omnium.' At the beginning of the novel, the narrator murders a man named Mathers for a fortune Mathers has in a black box. The narrator's co-conspirator, John Divney, hides the box, and eventually tells the narrator that it is in the floor of a house. When the narrator reaches down to pick up the box, "something happen[s]" (24), and his journey through hell begins (it is later revealed that there is a bomb in the box, planted by Divney to double-cross the narrator). Near the end of the novel, the narrator finally runs across the third policeman, Fox, a character whose presence is felt throughout the novel. The narrator describes Fox as fat, but adds that "the great fat body in the uniform did not remind me of anybody that I knew *but the face at the top of it belonged to old Mathers*" (189, O'Brien's italics). Fox takes the narrator to his "own private police station," and says "I would be glad to have your opinion on [the station] because I have gone to great pains to make it spick and span" (189). The nature of these 'great pains' is soon made clear. Fox has the black box, and in it are "four point one two" ounces of omnium, a substance that can do, and is, everything. MacCruiskeen describes the substance earlier in the novel, telling the narrator that "you are omnium and I am omnium and so is the mangle and my boots here and so is the wind in the chimney" (113). With the omnium in the box, Fox has not only played pranks on the two other policemen (Pluck and MacCruiskeen), but has also stolen some to boil eggs and to wallpaper his barracks. He apologizes to the narrator for his selfish use of the substance, saying "I was ashamed of my life of the shabbiness of [the station] and I took the liberty of having it papered the same as I was doing the hard-boiled egg. It is now very neat and I hope you are not vexed or at any loss over the head of it" (198). Fox uses omnium for the most mundane of purposes, denying his potential omnipotence.

This criticism is at the heart of O'Brien's understanding of literature. The

narrator, contemplating what he will do with his four ounces of omnium, says

formless speculation crowded in upon me, fantastic fears and hopes, inexpressible fantasies, intoxicating foreshadowing of creations, changes, annihilations and god-like interferences. Sitting at home with my box of omnium I could do anything, see anything and know anything with no limit to my powers save that of my own imagination. Perhaps I could use it even to extend my imagination. I could destroy, alter and improve the universe at will. (195)

This is the power of the artist, of the author. Omnium is ink. With four point one two ounces of ink, the narrator can do anything. Fox has chosen to do what O'Brien criticizes many for: he has chosen to do almost nothing. He has chosen only to do with omnipotence what might make his life easier and a little nicer. He neither innovates nor uses his imagination, but instead boils an egg and wallpapers his office. He is the worst kind of author.

The narrator realizes the power of omnium, which is the power of the author to do anything with the pen, to create and destroy worlds at will. It is, however, unlikely that, given the chance, he would do any such thing.¹⁴ He already had that power when he wielded his pen to write the pedantic footnotes of the novel (one of them covers the best part of five pages (172-176)), and when he wrote the 'De Selby Index,' "wherein the views of all known commentators on every aspect of the savant and his work had been collated" (14), a work Asbee calls "a piece of comic irrelevance" (Asbee 67). What the narrator intended to do with his share of the contents of Mathers' box was to publish this 'Index' widely (TP 14). There is no indication that he will do anything different with omnium than with money. He, like Fox, and like all authors O'Brien criticizes, fails because of a lack of imagination.

Lizabeth Paravisini and Carlos Yorio, in "Is It Or Isn't It?: The Duality of Parodic

¹⁴ He does not get the chance. The box is waiting for him at home, but when he gets there he meets his aged friend John Divney (in the narrator's hell only days have passed, but in the real world, years) and the novel enters its circular pattern.

Detective Fiction,” conclude their article by noting “the possibilities parody opens for the revitalization of detective fiction” (192), and also that since “the genre has been able to incorporate its parody into [its] tradition [it] assures us of many more detective stories to come” (192). This statement, I believe, holds true for all genres. At some point they must all be parodied, and at some point this parody will be a weapon of satire. If they can stand up to the satirical criticism, and adapt to it, they will be improved and will survive. If they fall, they will not. O'Brien's satirical parodying in his novels, all part of his greater comic criticism of literature and life in general, performs this traditional function of satire. In At Swim-Two-Birds literary conventions are ruthlessly mocked, in The Poor Mouth a specific literary movement is mocked, in The Hard Life experimental (and Joycean) writing is mocked, in The Dalkey Archive Joyce is mocked, and in The Third Policeman the absurdities of literature and intellectualism are mocked, and all of this mockery, as a weapon of satire, is meant, I believe, to revitalize literature. Certainly O'Brien did not *hate* literature, as he continued to write himself. What he hated was what he considered to be *bad*, or irresponsible literature, and he attacked it as often as he could, in order to improve it.

This goal is eloquently described by Booker, in reference to The Third Policeman, but seems to hold true for all of O'Brien's fiction, and can serve as an excellent conclusion to this chapter:

Just as the book mocks the pretensions of scientists, philosophers, and theologians to be able to know the Truth, it also suggests that the authors of fictional texts don't have all the answers, either. As a result, critics of the epistemological tradition like Nietzsche and Rorty, as well as fiction writers like O'Brien himself are also partially implicated in the book's parody. For O'Brien there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy or science but also in our literature. (65)

Chapter Two

Beneath the Motley of the Jester: Satirical Parody and Cruiskeen Lawn

"What is most valuable in any critical reading of the Mylesian canon is Myles's observations on language and literature."

-Keith Hopper

For an artist like Flann O'Brien, journalism, as a form, had its drawbacks. Just as policeman Fox, in The Third Policeman, was the worst kind of author because he either refused, or was unable, to use his imagination when creating, so was the worst kind of journalist one whose writing ought to have ended up as wrapping for fish and chips. That O'Brien was conscious of this pitfall, and attempted to avoid it, is evident first and foremost in his creation of the 'Myles na gCopaleen' pseudonym.

Keith Hopper stresses the importance of the Myles pseudonym when discussing Cruiskeen Lawn, noting that "he is still O'Brien's most holistically conceived dramatic persona" (35). Furthermore,

as the modern successor to Swift, Myles's comic, epiphanic narratives are ruthlessly underpinned by acid critiques of the established order.... Myles became the created conscience of his race; an Irish Everyman whose very style was the epitome of pub-talk: witty, fluid, pedantically erudite; his seriousness always couched in the mellifluous tones of the clown. (35-36)

Assuming the complex and multi-faceted Myles pseudonym allowed O'Brien to continue his satire of social and literary norms in the unpromising form of journalism, and allowed him to become one of his country's most significant commentators.

But Myles was more than a pseudonym; he was something of a literary character himself. Many critics offer brief descriptions of the fictional character and career of Myles na gCopaleen, but the most succinct is Anne Clissman's:

Myles, like his predecessor Brother Barnabas [discussed below], transcended time, space and continuity -- all the human limitations. Even death could hold no sway over him. He died and revived frequently, and he enjoyed lying in state watching the millions mourn over his demise until death became tedious and he decided to live again. Myles was the greatest of all O'Brien's creations. He was omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, a 'greater man than God', a perfect example of the ability of myth to defy commonsense.... Myles inhabited a world where everything was possible.... His origins were both lowly and noble. He lived in Europe for 'seven or eight centuries' playing his part in all the great events of history, befriending the greatest men of each age, his achievements rivalled only by 'Leonard O'Davinci'. (*Intro* 193)

In the world of O'Brien's journalism, the omnium of The Third Policeman is put to great use through Myles, and so is O'Brien's understanding of the important relationship between literature and the imagination.

A good example of the extent to which O'Brien went to create a literary persona, and of his belief in the importance of doing so, is his famous Time magazine hoax. Hugh Kenner describes the incident:

Brian O'Nolan, who made misinformation into an art form, so thoroughly led astray an investigator from Time magazine that the issue 23 August 1943 presented as Time-checked fact such allegations as these:

- that O'Nolan spent his days "busy with many matters of state";
- that he had "informally beaten World Champion Alekhine" at chess;
- that on a quick visit to Germany in 1933 he had "met and married eighteen-year-old Clara Ungerland, blonde, violin-playing daughter of a Cologne basket-weaver. She died a month later. O'Nolan returned to Eire and never mentions her." (9)

Miles Orvell and David Powell, in turn, discuss the significance of the Time ruse in terms of developing an understanding of the Myles persona, saying that

doubtless there was a pleasure in deception, but the stronger pleasure must surely have been in *creating a self*. Myles observed early in his career -- in a voice whose mock-pedantry disguises his basic seriousness -- that each person is engaged on a life-long task of "modulating and mutating Ego according to subconscious aesthetic patterns" (8 April 1942); whether or not that process is indeed universal, it was enacted daily by O'Nolan in the columns of The Irish Times, to the extent that the writer was himself known locally as Myles, and is even today called Myles by those who knew him. (47)

O'Brien consistently and effectively modified the life and characteristics of his Myles persona on an almost daily basis, changing its form and significance in order to better achieve the ever-shifting goals of his journalism, whether they were humorous, satirical, or simply fantastical. The effect was so great, in fact, that the pseudonym grew beyond his column-writing, entering his everyday life.

The pseudonym of Myles, however, served various functions beyond allowing increased imaginative and satirical scope for the column. John Wyse Jackson notes that the pseudonym was necessary for a satirist who criticized the government, while at the same time working for that government as a civil servant, and that in using a pseudonym "you will be able to say all sorts of disgraceful things without being accused of believing them" (8). This gave O'Brien the breathing-room essential for an artist and a satirist, and is what allows Rudiger Imhof to claim that "it is pre-eminently on the strength of [the column], in which [O'Brien] pilloried all imaginable follies, that O'Nolan can claim a place in the illustrious ranks of the famous Irish wits" (11). A more abstract function of the Myles mask is that O'Brien's "invention of Myles na Gopaleen was the wellhead of his power, a strategy at once liberating and defensive, allowing

him to exteriorize contradictions that might otherwise have been paralyzing" (72).

These functions of the pseudonym allow O'Brien to hold two contradictory positions at the same time, a tendency noted often in the first chapter of this thesis, as well as a freedom essential for a writer whose satire knows no bounds.

Clissman allows that the Myles persona gave O'Brien "a completely free reign to his increasingly confident imagination," but notes that another "major aim in the selection of a new pseudonym was that it should reflect different aspects of O'Brien's personality to those seen in the novels" (*Intro* 190). Thus, while there are many similarities between the novels and the column, like the satirical parodying of literature, one must not confuse O'Brien with Myles simply because they come from the brain of the same writer, and one must therefore very carefully establish any connections between the two. A final caution, and an excellent summation of the problems involved in studying O'Brien's pseudonymous personality, and his column, is given by Keith Hopper, who warns that, because of O'Brien's popularity, "discussion of O'Brien's work in Ireland has always been a critical minefield, and facts are often joyfully abandoned in order to cultishly defend and propagate the rogueish Mylesian myth" (231).

O'Brien's career in journalism, and, in a sense, this Mylesian myth, began when O'Brien entered University College, Dublin, descending on the student body "like a shower of paratroopers, deploying a myriad of pseudonymous personalities in the interests of pure destruction" (Montgomery qtd. in *Intro* 9). Here he began to develop many of the characteristic elements of the satirical parody that he would use throughout his career, as well as his ability to innovate within the journalistic form.

His wish and power to sway and entertain a large (and loud) audience also began in these early years, with his position as the informal leader of 'the mob' at the college's Literary and Historical (L&H) Society debates. His comments on the mob

are significant in that they reveal his approach to writing and his attitude towards his audience:

A visitor would probably conclude that [the mob] was merely a gang of rowdies, dedicated to making a deafening uproar the *obligato* to some unfortunate member's attempts to make a speech within. It was certainly a disorderly gang but its disorders were not aimless and stupid, but often necessary and salutary. It could nearly be claimed that the mob was merely a severe judge of the speakers. (*MBM* 17)

This passage reveals O'Brien's attitude towards criticism, present throughout all of his writings. He valued criticism, especially when it was impolite, loud, and coming from a large audience, or, alternatively, being presented to a large audience.

Because these critical goals and methods in the L&H were so close to that of O'Brien's future column, it was here that he first encountered the kind of criticism that would hound him throughout his lifetime. Characteristically, he found "the affairs of the L. & H. were cluttered with too many politicisms, objectionable not because politics should have no place in student deliberations, but simply because they bored" (*MBM* 20). Characteristically, O'Brien's willingness to entertain an audience was soon attacked by a critic (and fellow student), James T. Fitzpatrick, whose comments were later echoed by far more famous O'Brien critics. Fitzpatrick, having found out that "the only way to compel [the mob's] attention, it turns out, is to speak wittily or humourously, and above all amusingly and laughingly," melodramatically announced "the deterioration of the L. and H." (*MBM* 90). Even in these early days, O'Brien was called, implicitly, a licensed jester. In fact, in No Laughing Matter, published some fifty years later, Cronin states that, while O'Brien was in the L&H, O'Brien's "stance was already that of the satirical observer.... He was a licensed satirist and jester whose aim was to deflate and amuse" (46). What is interesting about this comment is that O'Brien's

capacity as leader of the mob was anything but licensed, other than by its sheer popularity. It is curious that such critics as Cronin should go to such lengths to declare O'Brien's unique type of satire always as 'licensed,' and the odd claim is possibly an indication of the power of O'Brien's satire.

O'Brien continued to develop his satirical and journalistic skills in the student magazine Comhthrom Feinne, in which he wrote under the pseudonym "Brother Barnabas," mocking various literary practices and figures through an early form of his satirical parodying. Clissman notes that the importance of his role in this paper (and in the magazine Blather, as 'Count O'Blather', discussed below) is "obvious" (*Intro* 39), saying that "the personalities and the pronouncements of these two characters laid the groundwork for aspects of At Swim-Two-Birds and Cruiskeen Lawn, neither of which can be fully appreciated without reference to the magazines Comhthrom Feinne and Blather in which they made their appearance" (38). For instance, in an article ironically entitled "INTERVIEW WITH OUR DISTINGUISHED REPRESENTATIVE," O'Brien describes his encounter with a poet who was

tall and willowy, and groaned beneath a heavy burthen of jet-black hair long untouched by tonsorial shears.... [His glasses] were held erect on his nose by the device known as the *pince-nez* and from the edge of one of them a thick black ribbon descended flowingly to his right-hand lapel buttonhole.... It was Lionel Prune the distinguished modern poet of the younger school!" (*MBM* 29)

This clearly Yeatsian figure goes on to proudly recite a number of poems which he has written to describe the college. One, titled "APPROPINQUAT," runs like this:

Up to the College

The Flood advances,

Softly and swishingly.

Up he prances,

His locks
 Are combed
 With excessive care
 To hide a spot
 That
 is bare
 of hair. (30)

Prune describes his poem thusly: "How simple, but how impressive! In a perfect picture without a word wasted it exposes the hollowness of modern thought!" (30). Here O'Brien is not only attacking Yeats's poetry, but also the poet's pretension, and indeed the pretension of all critics, to impart deep and significant meaning where there is none. This parody is satirical and humorous because of its silly subject, and because both the poem and the criticism, though worthless and meaningless, are held up as significant. The intention here, then, is to provoke laughter, but also to criticize, in a hostile manner, the literature of the day, as well as "the languid romantic poet," who is, for O'Brien, "epitomised" by Yeats (*Intro 44*).

In a later article, supposedly worried that Prune might steal his poetry, Barnabas publishes his own poem, "THE COBBLER'S SON":

 'The Cobbler's Son
 Was a bookish fool
 foul
 full
 of trix.
 He went to church
 And stole
 a stole

Twere better had he plied

Atome

Atome, or like his pa

Soled soles

And not

Sold his soul

For a stole.' (*MBM* 37)

Barnabas follows this with a Prune-ish criticism: "Note the exquisite dominance of the 'o', the breath-taking transition from 'fool to full' by the celebrated U-STEP METHOD, the internal sense-metamorphosis, without in any way impairing the phonological beauty of the word. This is a poem that must be pondered upon. We [Brother Barnabas often referred to himself by the royal 'we'] earnestly recommend Prune to put it in his pipe and smoke it" (37). Here again the pretensions of poetry are being attacked, as is the ability of literary critics to find important form and meaning in anything (like student newspapers!).

But Barnabas, like Myles years later, did not use the satirical parody to attack only poetry and literary criticism. He also also used this device to attack Synge and the Abbey Theatre, and, along with the above criticisms of Yeats, the entire Celtic Twilight.¹⁵ In an article called "The bog of Allen," Barnabas presents a play supposedly written by a "Mr. Samuel Hall," and "the result was the first of O'Nolan's many attacks on John Millington Synge and on his literary heirs who dominated Dublin's Abbey Theatre during the first third of the century" (*MBM* 39-40). Barnabas claims that "Mr Bernard Shaw, on being shown the play, made his usual witty remark, 'It bears the Hallmark of genius.' [Shaw] cryptically added, 'The grave - it is waiting for me. I am old.' He evidently recognised that a new star had risen in the firmament,

¹⁵ Steven Curran's essay, "No, This Is Not From The Bell": Brian O'Nolan's 1943 Cruiskeen Lawn Anthology," discusses, in detail, the column's persistent attacks on Sean O'Faolain, The Bell, The Abbey Theatre, and the Gaelic League.

greater than his own" (40). It is impossible here to quote the play in full (it covers two-and-a-half pages), but an abridged version should sufficiently emphasize the play's general tendencies and importance:

Dramatic personification

Allen Bogg	A farmer
His Wife	A woman
A Bog-trotter	A man

Scene: The Kitchen in Allen Bogg's hovel in the middle of the Bog of Allen, miles from dry land. The house was built by Gregory B. Bogg, Allen's grandfather. As he could not find sand to build it on, he built it on the Bog. It is a typically Irish household. The floor is flagged with green moss between the cracks.... In a corner is a bed with a white sow in it.... Below on the floor is a primitive rack, made of bog-oak, for torturing leprechauns who will not divulge where the Crock of Gold is hidden....

Maggie (to cow): Whisht! Whisht! (Cow goes away. Enter Allen with his plough on his shoulder.)

Allen: 'Tis a hard life now, surely....

Maggie: Shure, wisha, musha, anish now, for goodness sake, what would you be wantin'? For goodness sake!....

Allen: Aye. (Suddenly, by a mutual instinct, both rise. Allen lights his pipe. Both tip-toe over to half-door. Slowly the rich purple of the Celtic Twilight falls over the Bog. The house sinks a quarter of an inch.)....

Maggie: Musha.

Allen: Surely.

Maggie: Wisha.

Allen: Begorrah. (41-43)

This conversation continues, in a similar vein, for another eleven lines, until six cows enter the house and it sinks six feet into the bog. The parody of Abbey plays, like those of Synge, is evident in the exaggerated squalor of the house and the repetitive 'peasant' dialogue of its occupants. Much like Corkadoragha and its inhabitants, described in The Poor Mouth, these stage-Irishpeople live in excessive poverty, believe in leprechauns, wonder (in a characteristic literalism) at the Celtic Twilight, live with animals, and speak in clichéd and unrealistic terms. O'Brien is parodying the plays of the Abbey Theatre and the tendencies of 'Gaeligoric' literature to stereotype 'the Gaels', and, through this parody, satirizing the theatre and the literature as well, implying that the plays degrade and patronize, thereby turning supposedly 'real' characters and situations into nightmarish literary conventions.

In Comhthrom Feinne, such satirical parodies as those discussed above run alongside parodies of editorials (37-39) and other literary forms, prefiguring much of what O'Brien was to do later in his career. Thomas Shea remarks on the significance of these tendencies in the college paper and in O'Brien's other writings:

In many of these early pieces, O'Brien looks into the activities of writing as willful events. The continuing concern which animates his writing is a skepticism of an author's ability to beget. He seems to seek out obstacles and occasions to test the degree to which either tangible textual dictates or covert rules of discourse may usurp the authority of the writer. O'Brien energetically explores, as Michel Foucault has more recently, the extent to which an author employs language and the extent to which he is the employee of language. (27)

Nowhere are these interests more evident in O'Brien's writing than in his satirical parodying of literature and its rigid conventions, when he observes that these literary norms constantly undermine the power of the author to control his or her writing, and to represent reality. It is in this sense that "many of [O'Brien's] university publications

present witty, humorous, and thoughtful probings of the vital theoretical interactions negotiated between an author and modes of discourse" (49).

In much the same sense as *CF* prefigures *CL*, so does the 'Brother Barnabas' pseudonym prefigure the 'Myles' pseudonym. Shea remarks that throughout O'Brien's career, "the only significant 'events' are those which occur in and through a style; [O'Brien] demonstrates little concern for consistently developing a personality for his pseudonym. As a construct, Brother Barnabas provides occasions for trying out types of talk, testing their resiliency through parody" (30). The Barnabas pseudonym, then, allowed O'Brien to experiment with the devices he would use in *CL* and in his novels. A good example of this is "Scenes in a Novel," written by Barnabas after his death, and an early version of what was to happen later in The Third Policeman and in At Swim-
Two-Birds. The article begins with a characteristically pompous Barnabian phrase, "I am penning these lines, dear reader, under conditions of great emotional stress, being engaged, as I am, in the composition of a posthumous article" (*MBM* 77). As the story unfolds, Barnabas reveals that he has (possibly) been killed by a character whom he created called "Carruthers McDaid." Barnabas explains that "Carruthers McDaid is a man I created one night when I had swallowed nine stouts and felt vaguely blasphemous. I gave him a good but worn-out mother and an industrious father, and coolly negating fifty years of eugenics, made him a worthless scoundrel, a betrayer of women and a secret drinker" (78). This 'McDaid' is created in order to be a character in a unique sort of novel. Barnabas explains that

some writers have started with a good and noble hero and traced his weakening, his degradation and his eventual downfall; others have introduced a degenerate villain to be ennobled and uplifted to the tune of twenty-two chapters, usually at the hands of a woman -- 'She was not beautiful, but a shortened nose, a slightly crooked mouth and eyes that seemed brimful of a

simple complexity seemed to spell a curious attraction, an inexplicable charm.' In my own case, McDaid, starting off as a rank waster and rotter, was meant to sink slowly to absolutely the last extremities of human degradation. Nothing, absolutely nothing, was to be too low for him, the wheaten-headed hound...

(78, O'Brien's ellipsis)

McDaid, however, refuses to sink so low. Barnabas threatens to give him anthrax unless McDaid robs a poor box, and, when McDaid responds, "but, I say, old chap, that's a bit thick," Barnabas only replies: "You think so? Well, I'm old fashioned enough to believe that your opinions don't matter" (79). McDaid plots to kill Barnabas, and the writer ends his career despairing for his life. This piece anticipates the hiring of characters in At Swim-Two-Birds, and the eventual murderous revolt of these characters against their employer-creator, Trellis. Through these and other devices in the Barnabas opus, "the rigidity of conventional structures is.... satirized by comically literalizing cliches" (Shea 47) (i.e. the 'Celtic Twilight' in "The bog of Allen") and also through parody.¹⁶ Barnabas writes like a self-important nineteenth-century author ('dear reader') with 'old-fashioned' values, and is murdered by McDaid for his views, and also by O'Brien, who, having graduated from the university and his first foray into pseudonymous journalism, entered the larger world, completing his first attempt at the destruction of literary norms and conventions, the 'rigidity' of which, in his opinion, negated the imaginative potential of literature.

O'Brien's second foray into journalism began almost immediately after he left the university and Comhthrom Feinne, when he helped to establish and edit the short-lived satirical and humorous magazine, Blather. The importance of the writing in the magazine has experienced some critical disagreement. Steven Curran claims that "in

¹⁶ Clissman notes another example of this type of writing: Barnabas "predicted in his almanac that on 23 January 1932 'America declares war on Japan; Brother Barnabas pares his corns.' Like Joyce's artist, who was 'like God of creation, indifferent, paring his fingernails', Brother Barnabas was far above the general concerns of the world, though he was unfortunately afflicted by the agony of corns" (*Intro* 42).

the first few years of [CL's] life, the column constantly ran the risk of being seen as little more than a humorous diversion, an exercise in comic journalism that retained kinship with his earlier antics in Comhthrom Feinne and Blather" (90), and that as a result the satirical nature of the 1943 *CL* anthology was an attempt by O'Brien to differentiate between the various periods of his work. Clissman, however, notes that just as *AS2B* was an anti-novel, so was Blather an anti-magazine, and that "everything in the magazine was to be a parody, a satire or an exaggeration" (*Intro* 57), and that both *CF*s and Blather's "self-consciousness expressed itself in parody, satire, fantasy and exaggeration - those very modes which O'Nolan was to develop in his later work" (66). Blather itself makes a comment on its own purposes (possibly tongue-in-cheek), "that beneath the motley of the jester lies a true appreciation of the arts. The rapier-thrusts of the cold steel of criticism" (*MBM* 99). It is clear that while the public may have thought the magazine to be as sophomoric as *CF*, O'Brien was already aware of the way in which humorous criticism can work, through the satirical parody and 'the motley of the jester', to criticise the arts and other subjects.

A good example of this type of criticism is evident in an article from Blather entitled "Hash." The article begins:

A novel - even a very bad one - can cost you a good sevenansixpence. Eleven or twelve novels can cost you £4 2s. 6d.... Blather, ever jealous for your honour and eager that you shall not let our grand old paper down by displays of ignorance or illiteracy when In Company, has pleasure in presenting the pith and the cream of eleven or twelve novels in the grand Non-stop Hash-up below. You are even saved the bother of wading through pages of muck in order to get at the good bits.

You must admit that we are a handy crowd of boys to have about the house.

Write to us and thank us. (*MBM* 125)

This is followed by two pages of parodies of miscellaneous styles, some of which must be quoted here in order to show their scope and their significance:

Solitaire sat thoughtfully on a bunk in one of the cells of the jail that had been built in the back part of the sheriff's office. He realised that he was in a very difficult position. He was a prisoner in a town where he was an utter stranger. *I was a white man* - the last product in the slow upward rise of mankind through the ages. I had to stop this thing if it cost me my life!

There was one way to do it -- and the idea came to me so suddenly that I almost thought -- well, never mind what I thought. I'm not ordinarily a religious man... I could have done it before, if I had only stopped to think instead of running. But now was another chance.

With a shriek that almost tore my lungs out, I leaped up on the stone.

A feature of Moscow broadcasting is the regular relaying of ballets and operas from the Bolshoi Theatre, or Grand Opera House, Theatre Square. As the home of the famous Imperial Russian Ballet, Moscow has always been a prominent artistic centre, and the performances at the Grand Opera House and the other theatres are of the highest standard.

The little dancing lights began to flicker in the black eyes. (125)

Each paragraph represents a satirical parody of a different style. Placed in such an order, the styles are satirized, through a demonstration of their individual meaninglessness, as well as the conventions of plot, in that while the structure and form of the collection is such as is normally seen in novels, the actual meaning of the whole is non-existent. "Hash" suggests an early maturity in O'Brien's use of the satirical parody that would allow him to mock Finn-poetry and the cowboy romance in *AS2B* so effectively, and that would also allow him to continue writing this kind of criticism in *CL*. This passage not only displays O'Brien's virtuosity, talent, and ability to

satirize literature, but also demonstrates that Blather, as funny as it may have been, had its own point to make, and that it made this point through satire.

Shea mentions a similar article in which Count O'Blather (O'Brien's pseudonym in Blather) recounted his history, and relates it to the "Hash" article. He says of the history that

the accent here is on parody through discontinuity. Each unit of language, whether it be word, phrase, or sentence, misleads us by implying an extension which will give it an "acceptable" coherence and closure. Its genealogical proclivity is deliberately aborted, however, by playful disruption. The nostalgic history of The O'Blather's exploits is a head-faking romp through multiple conventions of sports reporting. Juxtaposing idiom, sentence structure, and scores from various athletic events, O'Brien concocts a fascinating mixture, imaginatively "coherent" in the dizzying manner of *At Swim's* Circle N cowboy roundup. (39)

The "Hash" article is informed by a similar understanding of 'parody through discontinuity', as it "obtrusively and extravagantly flouts the notions of 'beginning' and 'end' as it resists our urge to construct form based on linear, sequential fabrications. Familiar, paternal narrative structures are exposed as phony -- no more valid than the white man's conception of evolution" (42). Through this discontinuous presentation of parodies, the satire becomes multi-layered. Each style is individually attacked for the ease with which it can be copied, and for its abundant and unimaginative use of conventional literary elements. Each style is further attacked through the juxtaposition of one against the other; is there really such a difference between the way in which *Solitaire's* problems are expressed, and between the description of the theatre in *Moscow*, when one takes into account that one author can create both of these styles for the intention of either selling them to a similar public, or mocking them *for that very*

same public? The final layer of the satire is the criticism of the form of plot-making, and the fact that it is similar in almost every piece of fiction -- with the notable exceptions, that is, of *AS2B* and *TP*.

Blather published only a few issues before it folded, but stands as a good indication of the directions O'Brien was interested in taking in his writing career. Often it is assumed that he meant to write novels -- which he did -- and *only* novels -- which he did not. His interest in Blather, and its anticipation of what O'Brien was to accomplish in both his novels and in *CL*, is a sign that he was always interested in journalism, and did not think of it as a form either below art or below himself.

In Blather, as in *CF*, O'Brien wrote under a pseudonym. Terence Dewsnap claims that the magazine, and O'Brien's pseudonymous participation in it, "identifies O'Brien with the Dublin bohemians and pub frequenters; it absolves him of responsibility. Later, his participation in serial newspaper controversies, a send-up of literary blather, represents a safe form of highbrow Punch and Judy" (28). These 'serial newspaper controversies' also show O'Brien's interest in the possibilities of the pseudonymous journalist, and were responsible for his receiving a request from the editor of the Irish Times, R. M. Smyllie, to write a regular column for the newspaper.

This 'letter controversy' stands as a curious and revealing aspect of O'Brien's career, in its unique form and its tendencies towards satirizing and parodying literature through a plurality of pseudonyms. Jackson claims that the 'letter controversy,' invented by O'Brien and his friends, was "a new art form," and that "the conventions of this new creative vehicle were simple: (a) that letters should be written under spurious names to the editor of a newspaper, and (b) that they should have only the most tenuous connection with reality" (*MBM* 186). The letters also tended to focus on literature, and indeed began with a discussion of the Gate Theatre's production of Tchekov's *The Three Sisters*. A first letter, rather seriously, blamed poor attendance at

the theatre “on the Irish love for American films, and on pro-Gaelic xenophobia among the few intellectuals” (187). This was followed by a curious letter by one “F. O’Brien,” who wrote that, in Manchester,

we had Chekhov twice nightly in the music-halls; the welkin rang all day long from non-stop open-air Hamlets in the city parks, and the suicide rate reached an all-time high from the amount of Ibsen and Strindberg that was going on night and day in a thousand backstreet repertory dives.... Nowhere in the world outside Sheffield could the mind glut itself on so much buckshee literary tuck. (187)

This “F. O’Brien” also claimed to have met one of these writers:

As a lad I knew Ibsen. He was a morose man, bovine of head at all times, and formidable of stature when he was not sitting down. He was objectionable in many ways, and only his great genius and heart of gold saved him from being excluded from decent society. Once I noticed at the table that there was dandruff in his tea. 188

This type of acquaintance with literary characters ran throughout the letter controversy; later, one “Lir O’Connor” claimed that Joseph Conrad was actually a woman, and wrote of the author: “Cool, slim and unhurried, this lissom slip of a girl had the sea in her blood, and willingly, nay eagerly, she answered to its call” (193). This seems to uphold Jackson’s assessment of what “must surely be one of the few instances in history when letters to the editor by the same party became a literary genre” (Orvell and Powell 51). The letters’ continuing return to literary topics, however absurd, indicate that a third convention of the genre was that one must proceed “to carry on furious arguments on many topics, satirizing *en passant* almost every established literary figure” (Sheridan 49), contributing to a newspaper what amounts to “comically pretentious literary criticism” (NLM 108).

Eventually, these letters “exploded into a giant display of fireworks, a mixture of satire, polemics, criticism, savage invective and sheer nonsense” (49), and increased the circulation of the Irish Times. The controversy was supported by the editor, Smyllie, not only because of this popularity, but also because it was material he could obtain free of charge (*MBM* 186). Eventually, Smyllie called an end to the controversy, but, “after O’Brien’s voluminous and witty epistolary campaign, [Smyllie] was impressed enough by the writer’s versatility to offer him a job as a columnist with that paper” (Hopper 29). The letters, which O’Brien had written and submitted voluntarily to the newspaper, landed him a column in that same newspaper, and indicate not only O’Brien’s continuing obsession with attacking writers by any means possible, but also his willingness to write within an experimental journalistic form.

The first column of Cruiskeen Lawn was written in both English and Irish, and was a characteristically satirical attack on the Gaelic league, characteristic not only in the nature of its target, but also in the nature of its partially parodic form. It was a response to a leading article in the Irish Times, which had appeared a few days earlier, on the subject of the Gaelic language and the inadequacies of the Irish language, to wit: “Parents who confine the family meal-time discussions to conversations in Irish must find it very difficult to explain such words as air-raid warden, incendiary bomb, non-aggression pact, decontamination, and Molotoff bread-basket. Has Gaelic ingenuity, for that matter, stretched so far as to provide a really expressive and indigenous equivalent for the well-known ‘Axis’?” (*FCCL* 13). O’Brien’s response wonders at “the stormy philological breakfasts that obtain in the households of the Gael” (13), and continues with a discussion between a mother and son in Irish. A note in the text explains that “in the dialogue the mother uses pleas and threats to get her son to eat his porridge. The son refuses and counters with a demand to know the Irish for Molotoff bread-basket, if indeed Irish can cope with such terms.

Finally the mother gives him a box: 'I'll give you a Molotoff bread-basket, my precious, my learned little angel" (14). Following this parody of the article, O'Brien proceeds to attack the article's condemnation of the Irish language, and at the same time mocks those attempting to revive the language. He writes:

The task of reviving Irish, we are told, would be hard 'unless conversations could be limited to requests for food and drink'. And who wants conversations on any other subject? Why not admit that hardly anybody ever thinks of anything else? If on and after tomorrow the entire Irish Times should be printed in Irish, there would not be a word about anything but food and drink. Those who find that they cannot do without 'incendiary bombs', 'decontamination', and the like, would have to get some other paper to accompany their ghouls' breakfast. (14)

In this first *CL* column, O'Brien satirizes those who think the Irish language useless, through a parody and literalization of their criticisms, but also treats the problem lightly and condescendingly, thus obliquely attacking (by annoying) those 'Gaeligores' who wished the language to be defended severely on all fronts. For them, a sincere defender of the Gaelic language would be more likely to show a serious conversation between two Gaelic people on the subject of Gaelic spoken only in Gaelic, much like the type of conversation mocked by O'Brien later in The Poor Mouth, rather than treat the topic so irreverently.

The type of satire evident in the first column continued for some time in the early days of *CL*. Orvell and Powell explain that "during its first months, Cruiskeen Lawn was written entirely in Irish, with those who argued to revive the Irish language (frequently using nationalism as a basis for their arguments) becoming consistent targets of Myles' satire" (51). However, though the column was written almost exclusively in English by February 1944 (51), its attack on the Gaelic League would

remain present throughout its history. What annoyed O'Brien so much was that the "Gaelic League kind of interest in [the] Irish language and culture.... [was] an interest that could be seen as patronizing" (Asbee 73), in that it often manifested itself as a "blind support of everything Gaelic, which meant, for instance, that, in the 40's, only those who spoke Irish had any hope of finding a job in the teaching profession or in the Administration" (Gallagher 15). The Gaelic Leaguers, from O'Brien's point of view, were turning the Irish language and its speakers into people who supposedly needed special help to succeed, and who could not speak over breakfast without someone infusing their discussion with political significance, merely because of the language being spoken. What the Gaelic Leaguers did, O'Brien felt, was diminish Irish-speakers' freedom to express themselves as they wished on the subjects they wished to discuss. It is this disgust with these 'Gaeligores' that accounts for O'Brien's satire in The Poor Mouth, and for his column's labelling of the Gaelic League "the Garlic Leak" (HD 78), and the Celtic Twilight "our celtic toilet" (166). Hopper even goes so far as to suggest that since "Myles/Flann was [so] bitterly antagonistic towards [the Gaelic Leaguers'] bland brand of post-colonial cosiness.... [that] these fictional personas emerged out of his violent contempt for it" (29). It is thus that "though Myles loved the [Irish] language he abhorred the purist protectionists, and this particular satiric vein is amongst the most corrosive in the Mylesian canon" (35). The parody and satire in the first column are good evidence that O'Brien felt this to be one of his most important subjects, and one in which he took particular joy, as a satirist, in attempting to mock and correct.

The writers who propounded the ideals of the Gaelic League were thus understandably those whom O'Brien attacked most soundly. In one particularly vituperative column, he suggests that an "isolated phase" of the spread of these ideals "was that of Synge-George Moore-Gregory-Martyn, with Yeats in the background.

They persisted in the belief that poverty and savage existence on remote rocks was a most poetical way for people to be, provided they were other people" (*HD* 102). In this passage he puts faces to the attacks registered in the first column and in The Poor Mouth, and these faces are of course those of some of Ireland's most famous writers. O'Brien even goes so far as to attack "the Irish lexicographer Dineen" (*BOM* 276) in what may or may not be a parody, given O'Brien's tendency to present fact and fiction in an often dizzying blur. Speaking of Dineen's Irish dictionary, he says that Dineen just keeps standing on his head, denying stoutly that *pilear* means bullet and asserting that it means 'an inert thing or person'. Nothing stumps him. He will promise the sun moon and stars to anybody who will catch him out. And well he may. Just *take* the sun, moon and stars for a moment. Sun, you say, is *grian*. Not at all. Dineen shouts that *grian* means 'the bottom (of a lake, well)'. You are a bit nettled and mutter that, anyway, *gealach* means moon. Wrong again. *Gealach* means 'the white circle in a slice of a half-boiled potato, turnip, etc.' (*BOM* 276-277)

The presentation is such that it seems these are indeed the definitions supplied by Dineen, but the definition involving 'potatoes' and 'turnips', two words often used to hilarious and satirical ends in The Poor Mouth, suggests that this is most likely a parody, and, if not, that O'Brien for once found a text so absurd that no parody was necessary to criticize it.

He continues to criticise this dictionary by following the passage above with the following:

That, of course, is why I no longer write in Irish. No damn fear. I didn't come down in the last shower. Call me a bit fastidious if you like but I like to have some idea of what I'm writing. Libel, you know. One must be careful. If I write in Irish what I conceive to be 'Last Tuesday was very wet,' I like to feel reasonably

sure that what I've written does not in fact mean 'Mr So-and-So is a thief and a drunkard.' (277)

This may indeed be his reason for refusing to write much in Irish after the first few years of the column, but it is more likely that he switched to English because he wished to widen his audience.¹⁷ Regardless of whether or not the above is a parody, the satire is clear; the publication of an Irish dictionary, intended to promote the Irish language for political purposes, does nothing but render unintelligible a language the 'Gaeligores' know little about.

A later satirical parody of Dineen supports this conclusion. In an article entitled "THE GAELIC," O'Brien writes:

Here is an example copied from Dineen and from more authentic sources known only to my little self:

Cur, g. *curtha* and *cuirhte*, m. - act of putting, sending, sowing, raining, discussing, burying, vomiting, hammering into the ground, throwing through the air, rejecting, shooting, the setting or clamp in a rick or turf, selling, addressing, the crown of cast-iron buttons which have been made bright by contact with cliff faces. (278)

This is only about a third of the list of definitions purportedly given by Dineen to define the word 'cur', a list followed by O'Brien's observation that "the plights of the English speaker with his wretched box of 400 vocal beads may be imagined when I say that a really good Irish speaker would blurt out the whole 400 in one cosmic grunt. In Donegal there are native speakers who know so many million words that it is a matter of pride with them never to use the same word twice in one life-time" (279). The nonsensical list of definitions above is very similar to the question-and-answer

¹⁷ Jack White describes a curious incident regarding O'Brien's writing in Irish. Writing as Myles for another paper, O'Brien's feature was dropped because he kept on sending copy written in Irish, and "not surprisingly, the Northern Editor refused to take a chance on publishing copy that nobody in the office could understand. There is a strange perversity, in this context, about his stubborn refusal to go back to writing Irish for the Irish Times" (72-73).

discussions between the narrator and the policemen in The Third Policeman, a clear example of O'Brien's using a form of the satirical parody in his novels, and in his column, to humorously mock and criticize a particular target.

O'Brien's humorous but fundamentally serious attack upon those attempting to revive the Irish language did not please its all-too-human targets. Clissman notes that "members of the Gaelic League, especially those whose command of the language was not great and who saw the revival of Irish in a purely nationalistic light, objected to the playfulness with which Myles discussed what were to them serious, almost holy, subjects. The Irish language was a noble tongue; it was not a subject for comedy" (*Intro*184). The satirical parody worked so effectively as a method of satire not only in that it made its target look foolish through its implicit attacks, but also in that its form was irreverent and condescending, as if the holes it punched in its targets were poked only for amusement, as the targets themselves were of such unimportance as to deserve no greater attention. This latter prong of the attack of the satirical parody -- its humour and its irreverence -- has been said by many to have been a device used by O'Brien to soften the force of his satire, as "a defence against horror," and, paradoxically, to strengthen his satire, as "laughter, with its side-track, its inversion, convolution and coincidence, was ultimately truthful" (37). However, the device of humour may have not so much lessened the 'horror' for O'Brien, who saw humour as a legitimate critical tool, but was rather used by him to charitably provide an escape route for those whom the satire attacked. They could rationalize O'Brien's attacks away as 'merely humorous,' or as 'schoolboy' or 'sophomoric' humour that itself held no value and was simply offensive. Virginia Woolf, "perhaps sensing that Joyce might have surpassed her own portrayals of quotidian consciousness," once displayed this kind of rationalization, denouncing "Ulysses as the work of 'a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples'" (Kiberd *Introduction* xviii). Such an understanding of the

function of O'Brien's satirical parodying suggests an interesting paradox: those readers who understood his criticism as a useless diversion would most often dismiss him, rather than seriously criticize him and defend themselves. What allowed the column to survive may be the very reason for which many critics find the column a mere diversion and not worthy of study.

The common critical decision to ignore the column and focus on the novels is thus ill-advised, in that the novels and the column often attack the same subjects in a similar and significant manner. Clissman makes this clear when she notes that the column "emphasised and reflected themes and concerns which afterwards appeared as central aspects of his novels. Often the genesis of a novel can be traced to a Cruiskeen Lawn article written many years previously. The column is, in fact, a sort of notebook for the novels" (*Intro* 188-189). Although the column is more than a mere 'notebook,' a good example of this relationship between the novels and O'Brien's journalism can be found in The Poor Mouth and its attacks on the 'Gaeligores.' The novel attacks the same topics and persons through means similar to those used in the column, and its relationship to the column is most obvious when it is considered that the novel was originally published by O'Brien under the pseudonym 'Myles na gCopaleen.' Furthermore, an example of a novel finding its genesis in O'Brien's journalism has already been provided; the satirical parody of Synge's playwriting (on 8 - 9 above) not only displays a strong relationship with *PM*, but also, with its use of the phrase "'tis a hard life now, surely," indicates that at least the title of The Hard Life was a phrase known to O'Brien in his college days.

J.C.C. Mays notes further connections between the novels and the column, especially between *AS2B*, *TP*, and The Best of Myles, a collection of *CL* articles. He says that

each of the three books in its own way preserves the peculiar impersonal

balance between ordinariness and vertiginous extravagance that is [O'Brien's] inspiration as a writer. Each of them locates its art firmly in a moral context, which yet only serves to prevent the norm of fantasy from degenerating into self-congratulation and to preserve its extraordinary purity. (81)

The novels and the column, then, contain the same obsessions and methods of the humorist and the satirist. Their art is thus uniformly moral, in its attempt to correct the faults of various writers, thinkers, politicians, and indeed all people, through satire, parody and fantasy.

These similarities are rather broad in scope, but there are numerous others, of finer distinction, noted by various critics. Booker claims that "O'Brien's work.... frequently violates the normal rules and conventions of fiction (148); Shea, that O'Brien's works "jar us into recognizing that we are running our eyes over black marks on a page" (157); Cronin, in "An Extraordinary Achievement," that the column, much like the novels, constantly attacks Joyce; Hopper, that O'Brien's masks allow "the satirist room to condemn absolute dogmatism without appearing sanctimonious himself" (35), and that the column's attacks on modernism, realism, and the author are some "of the key metafictional concerns explored in [the] early novels" (40). These and other similarities between the novels and the column, with an emphasis on the satirical parody, will be discussed below in reference to *AS2B*, *TP*, *HL*, and *DA*, just as this has already been done with *PM*, in order to show that in all of O'Brien's writing "the objects of satire and the methods of humour are essentially similar" (Mays 99), and that he "fashioned his distinctive satire by assimilating into Cruiskeen Lawn many of the procedures first developed in his fiction" (Curran 81).

AS2B, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, questions the manner in which novels are written. One instance of this is its opening, "CHAPTER ONE," which implies that the novel is, like most novels, divided into chapters. *AS2B*, however, is

divided into only *one* chapter. This move of O'Brien's questions the manner in which novels are conventionally divided and printed, implying that such divisions, as they are not needed in *AS2B*, may not be needed in other novels, and may in fact be merely arbitrary. A similar questioning goes on in *CL*, using similar tactics. Shea notes that in the column "O'Brien comically calls attentions to the ways the construct of a page and our left-to-right, top-to-bottom procedures of reading inform what can be written. Throughout his novelistic career.... he exhibits an amplified awareness of how textual properties influence the ways words (or any other signs) might mean" (24). In one example, a picture of fifteen balls, arranged in a triangle, appears at the top of an article. The 'Plain People of Ireland,' who often appear in the column, ask "what do you mean? What's all this about?" (*BOM* 86). The article continues:

Myself: A game of snooker. We'll make it a foursome if you like. And I'll give you twenty-five.

The Plain People of Ireland (doubtfully) : Where are the cues?

Myself: I'm afraid I forgot about them.

The Plain People of Ireland: And the colours?

Myself: Well what a head I have on me. Smart boy wanted.

The Plain People of Ireland: Anyway, how could we play a game with them things? Maybe this is a joke. Those aren't real balls.

Myself: I swear I'm serious.

The Plain People of Ireland: And they're not red.

Myself: Lend me a red pencil.

The Plain People of Ireland: This is some class of a fancy joke. If you're serious come down to Tommie's some night and we'll see who'll give twenty-five, there's a lad there called Rooney that'll show you something.

Myself: Fair enough. (86)

In this article, the ever-practical 'Plain People' tell the writer, in no uncertain terms, that what he does on paper is not real. The joke is of course obvious, but its implications are serious enough. If the snooker balls are not real, then is Myles real? Are the 'Plain People' real? Are even the articles and editorials surrounding the column real? The questions this article raises are a good example of O'Brien's ability to crack a simple joke, and to have the joke's implications reach far further than expected, touching on the nature of journalism, writing, and even language itself.

Another example of O'Brien's questioning of the conventions of writing occurs in a unique piece:

[This is the first time a newspaper article was started in brackets. Innovation, you see. The homeric tasks of creation. Bringing into being a thing hitherto not here, much more exhausting than building pyramids in Egypt. Please remind me to close the bracket at the end of the article. We must be neat, have some system. Otherwise we will merit the doubtful epithet of 'slovenly' and the finger of scorn will be pointed at us. Only last night it occurred to me that a good name for a skin-specialist's motor vehicle would be 'acne-car'. And to-day that impeccable little lumpeen of wit is on your breakfast table. Speed, efficiency, see? (211)

In what seems to be another rather obvious joke, numerous attacks are being made on the nature of writing. First, the self-awareness of the article brings the reader into a closer relationship with the author, of whom a reader is often unaware in a newspaper, a form in which many articles do not even have a name attached to them. Second, the importance of innovation in journalism and literature is mocked. The first five sentences, in fact, are a comment on nothing more than a bracket, an innovation ironically said to be 'much more exhausting than building pyramids in Egypt.' The comment here is that critics (possibly like myself) make far too much out of simple

innovations in literature, and that authors do the same with their own work.

Considered in this light, this article is in fact a satirical parodying of journalists, authors, and critics, who strive for and admire innovation in art more than they do the quality of the art itself.

A further criticism of literature, including its authors, readers, and critics, that is attacked in both *AS2B* and in the column, is literature's inability to imitate life, and life's unfortunate ability to imitate literature. In *AS2B*, this comment is made through the bringing to life of characters who can be 'hired' by an author to take part in a novel, and who lead their own lives when the author's pen is set aside. This tactic renders absurd the notion that characters can be real, and, in turn, through such things as Finn's pathetic storytelling in his leisure hours, shows that were these characters real - - i.e. imitated in life -- they would appear to be gross perversions of reality, and would be boring as well. In *CL*, O'Brien echoes this concern in a passage attacking the Abbey Theatre, and indeed all playwrights:

The Abbey Theatre is offering a prize of £100 for a new play, I believe. Apart from the objection that the proper typing of a full-length play would cost nearly that, it means more priests, kitchens, farmers' wills, a dispute over land and a murder perhaps. The prize should be at least £500, but subject to the condition that no new character may be used. The best characters have already been established by the masters, so why try to better them? New *activities* may, of course, be ascribed to them, but they must be activities-in-character: thus, a play which includes Iago and which causes him, before the end, to become a Carthusian monk would be summarily rejected.

I cannot see why a skilful writer could not combine, in one new play, the best characters in Shakespeare and Euripides. Could not Macbeth be married to Medea, for instance? Could one not, by an inspired misprint, make Hecuba

queen of Tory, instead of Troy, and substitute Finn MacCool for, perhaps, Agamemnon? (*HD* 129)

Here the limitations of literature are outlined, as are its possibilities. On the one hand, new plays are often stale reworkings of old and boring plots and conventions, involving 'a dispute over land and a murder, perhaps.' On the other hand, new plays can be improved by taking old characters from 'the masters,' and putting these characters in new situations -- so long as they be fictional. Much like *AS2B*, this article "deliberately confuses and even merges characters from one tradition with others, and so implies that they do all merge into a mixed condition where our confident premises about value, even of difference, need to be abandoned" (Knight 97). In both *AS2B* and the column, when O'Brien "takes art as life" (*Mays Art and Life* 244), he is comically criticizing not only the inabilities of the artist, but also the perversities of readers who make the results of those inabilities real.

Other satirical and parodical similarities between *AS2B* and the column are more general in nature. Devlin, speaking of Trellis, says that Trellis's insistence on only reading books with green covers is an O'Brien "jab at a particularly insular type of cultural nationalism" (94), much like those jabs mentioned above in reference to the column's attacks on the 'Gaeligores.' It is also a jab at readers in general, whose choice of reading material is almost always, in some sense at least, arbitrary, a note particularly resonant if taken in the context of the reader of journalism. Clissman observes that *AS2B* "is a satirical exposé of the way in which language is misused, particularly in the cliché-ridden speech of racing tipsters, moralists, lawyers and writers of travelogues" (*Intro* 89). This type of exposé is evident in the "Brief Extracts from the Press" of *AS2B*, cited in the first chapter, and also in *CL*'s 'Catechism of Cliché,' which is discussed below in reference to some of the major features of the column. The discussions of Shanahan, Furriskey and Lamont in *AS2B*, partly described in the first

chapter regarding Shanahan's cowboy adventure, show "the Dubliner as repressed, hypocritical, chauvinistic, slightly ridiculous in his pretension and worried about entirely trivial questions" (*Intro* 116). These are paralleled by the stories of "the Brother" in the column, also discussed below. It is thus clear that the reasons for, and the nature of, O'Brien's satire, are often much the same in O'Brien's journalism as in his first novel.

The same is true of O'Brien's second novel, The Third Policeman. Clissman notes that logic, mocked in *TP*, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, is also "much attacked in Cruiskeen Lawn", and that "one could assume from O'Brien's attack on intellectualised abstraction in Cruiskeen Lawn that he, like the narrator [of *TP*], thought that what men often vaunted as the height of intellectual prowess was, in fact, an indication of the frailty of the human mind" (*Intro* 168-169). Considering O'Brien's attitude towards Joyce, this tendency of the column is best put by O'Brien when he claims that the professors "from the University of Harvard [are the] famed inventors of James A. Joyce" (*HD* 107).

This distrust of academic critics is most often expressed in the novel, and in the column, "through a down-to-earth parody of the excesses of scholarly research" (Booker 128). Clissman quotes "a parody of the pretentious jargon of art critics" that was written in the column "at about the same time as The Third Policeman" (*Intro* 180). Speaking of coming across an odd painting, O'Brien takes the point of view of the academic reader:

Here, you say, is something that devolves, not from *Krondt, Liebz, or the Munich Group* but from that myopic, almost intuitive, awareness of naturalistic cosmic function. Here is something, you add, that Yeats himself might have acknowledged without remorse. Then you walk around with the queer picture in your brain all day, vainly asking yourself whether you are really mad. (180)

In this passage the language of the critic is ruthlessly satirized through parody. The words 'myopic,' 'intuitive,' and 'awareness of naturalistic cosmic function,' though they *sound* proper in terms of describing the painting, and certainly sound academic, are here shown to be meaningless code-words dropped only to add a flavour of 'intelligence' to an art critic's attempt to communicate an understanding of a painting. It is characteristic of both *TP* and the column that O'Brien should satirize the language of the critic, and do so parodically, in order to attack the notion of the critic itself, thus making it clear that "he hated scientists and philosophers who invented their own language (and thus their own universe) which other men did not understand and so distorted" (216).

The column, however, not only attacks the pretensions of critics and other academics, but also those who wish to be known as 'literary.' This is best exemplified by Myles na gCopaleen's "Buchhandlung" (bookhandling) scheme. The scheme begins when Myles visits "a man of great wealth and vulgarity" who may not be able to read, but who has "bought several book-cases and paid some rascally middleman to stuff them with all manner of new books, some of them very costly volumes on the subject of French landscape painting" (*BOM* 17). This gets Myles thinking, and asking himself, "why should a wealthy person like this be put to the trouble of pretending to read at all? Why not a professional book-handler to go in and suitably maul his library for so-much per shelf?" (18) Myles then lists various prices for various services, ranging from the slight handling of books to this offer:

'De Luxe Handling -- Each volume to be mauled savagely, the spines of the smaller volumes to be damaged in a manner that will give the impression that they have been carried around in pockets, a passage in every volume to be underlined in red pencil with an exclamation or interrogation mark inserted in the margin opposite, an old Gate Theatre programme to be inserted in each

volume as a forgotten book-mark (3 per cent discount if old Abbey programmes are accepted), not less than 30 volumes to be treated with old coffee, tea, porter or whiskey stains, and not less than five volumes to be inscribed with forged signatures of the authors. Five per cent discount for bank managers, county surveyors and the heads of business houses employing not less than 35 hands.
(19)

This is nothing, however, compared to "Le Traitement Superbe," in which even more damage is done to the books, and in which

suitable passages in not less than fifty per cent of the books [are] to be underlined in good-quality red ink and an appropriate phrase from the following list inserted in the margin, viz:

Rubbish!

Yes, indeed!

How true, how true!....

Yes, but cf. Homer, Od., iii, 151.

Well, well, well.

Quite, but Boussuet in his Discours sur l'histoire Universelle has already established the same point and given much more forceful explanations....

I remember poor Joyce saying the very same thing to me. (20-21)

And then there is the crowning service, in which

not less than six volumes [are] to be inscribed with forged messages of affection and gratitude from the author of each work, e.g.,....

'From your devoted friend and follower, K. Marx.'

'Dear A.B., - Your invaluable suggestions and assistance, not to mention your kindness, in entirely re-writing chapter 3, entitles you, surely, to this first copy of "Tess". From your old friend, T. Hardy.' (21)

The 'Buchhandlung' service satirizes, through parody, the pretensions of those who wish to be thought of as well-read, a wish that is foolish from O'Brien's point of view. The lack of their ability to properly understand and criticize literature is also mocked, through the arbitrary assignation of marginal comments that randomly praise, degrade, or comment, on works randomly selected. The references to Homer and Boussuet are particularly cutting, in the implication that they will be applied to enlighten numerous and unrelated passages, something such obscure references are unlikely to do in any meaningful sense. The 'forged messages' are for the most part humorous cuts at the authors mentioned, but also at the pretentious wish of many readers to know authors and to claim to have influenced them, which is again, for O'Brien, a mysterious and useless wish. The sentence regarding the reader re-writing chapter 3 of Hardy's "Tess" may be a cut at readers who would not know the difference between a chapter written by Hardy or by anyone else. The 'Buchhandlung' scheme is thus a broad attack on a certain type of reader, the scheme's satire informing what is on the surface a joking parody of some people's particular tendencies, and is also a good example of O'Brien's own particular attitude (well represented in *TP*) towards the fraudulent critic.

Silverthorne notes the presence of this belief in *TP*, saying that "the novel proves its premises, that time *and literature* are frauds" (83, my italics). One aspect of the fraudulent nature of literature in the novel is the parody of the structure of the detective novel, a structure reversed in *TP* through the death of the 'detective' figure early in the novel. The parody is informed by a belief that overused conventions render literature itself dead, and that literature is therefore fraudulent in its implicit insistence that it is alive (much like the insistence of the narrator of *TP*). This is echoed in the column's satirical parodying of the *style*, rather than the overall *structure*, of the detective novel. In one instance, 'Sir Myles na gCopaleen,' the father of Myles, is "standing in [a] conservatory in immaculate evening dress" as "the dusk was

performing its customary intransitive operations of 'gathering'" (*BOM* 156). As he stands there,

a clink is heard. The grand old man.... is lost in thought. He wishes to go to the library. He has business there. But he remembers that his is the only library (in the true old-fashioned sense) that remains in the whole country. And he knows a thing or two. He fears the worst.... He reaches the library and enters.

'I thought as much,' he sighs.

Stretched on the floor in a most ugly attitude is a corpse. Sir Myles has already taken up the telephone and asked for a number.

'That you, sergeant? Look here, those dreadful detective stories. Another corpse in the library this evening. Really, you know, too much of a good thing. Fourth this week. No doubt trouble is shortage of libraries. What? A young man, extremely handsome. Curious scar on left cheek. Dressed? Don't be a damn fool. You ought to know he is attired in immaculate evening dress. Do not touch the corpse and leave everything as it is until you get here? What do you take me for - an ignorant fool?'

Sir Myles puts down the instrument testily and pours himself a stiff drink. He sits down sipping it and apparently listening intently for something. Soon three shots are heard some distance away, followed by a scream.

'I thought as much,' Sir Myles mutters, 'that will be the mysterious little Belgian governess who has been seen in the neighbourhood recently.'....

From a small press he has taken a telescope and his eagle eye is ranging the sea. In the gloom he can make out a small ship standing in the bay. It is exchanging mysterious light signals with some unknown party ashore.

'I thought as much,' Sir Myles sighs, 'question of some plans being thieved by international interests; obviously the agents of a foreign power are leaving no

stone unturned. Well well well...' (157)

Sir Myles then phones the sergeant to explain that the body has gone missing from the library, and that "also there was the usual shots and a scream and all that kind of thing" (157). The sergeant then informs him: "I have no intention of going out to your place. This once we will let the mystery be solved by the private investigator who will accidentally arrive on the scene. On this occasion we will spare the police the trouble of making mistakes, following dud clues, arresting innocent parties and generally complicating matters" (157). This article mocks the conventions of the detective novel through a self-aware form of the parody, in which the characters around whom the conventional incidents of detective fiction take place respond to them with the same kind of sighing boredom as would good readers, taking as little notice as possible and wishing to forget the entire incident. Much like O'Brien's comment, regarding the L&H, that politics are a boring subject of discussion, so is the criticism here that the conventions of literature leave the reader with no other option than to throw "away his glass and [start] using the bottle" (158), as Sir Myles does after his final conversation with the sergeant. Furthermore, much like in *TP* and O'Brien's other works, this satirical parody shows that since the conventions of literature are ridiculous when applied to real life, so should they be considered ridiculous in literature itself.

This type of satire is more explicit than the general social satire found in The Hard Life, which has more to do with the form of the novel -- its pedestrian language and characters -- than with a parody of a specific piece of literature. Many critics have failed to realize the satirical power of this work, with the notable exception of M. Keith Booker, who claims that "O'Brien's increasingly 'pedestrian' language may not represent a reversion to naturalism so much as a movement beyond his initial modernism owing to a growing recognition that the modernist project of linguistic revolution was doomed to failure" (133). Whether or not Booker's claim regarding

modernism is true, the fact remains that one cannot easily dismiss the novel simply because of its pedestrian style. Orwell and Powell make a similar defense of this style's presence in *CL*, claiming that O'Brien wrote the column "in a voice whose mock-pedantry disguises his basic seriousness" (47), also acknowledging that while such a style may obscure its satire, the satire remains. When the column is understood in such a manner, many of its regular features, which seem to be nothing more than humorous, can be seen to be informed by deeper social commentary.

One of these features is that of the 'Bores,' to which the column often returns. O'Brien describes various 'types' of people one might meet on the street, or in the bar, whose conversations are trite, false, and boring. One of these is called "THE MAN WITH THE WATCH:"

Somebody remarks that his watch, solid gold, 98 jewels, cost £50, wears it swimming, has broken down after only five years' service. The Man smiles primly at this, produces a turnip-watch, and puts it solemnly on the table. The harsh tick silences further talk. Those present perceive that the thing was once nickel-plated, but is now a dull brass colour at the edges.

'Do you know what that cost me?' the Man asks.

Everybody knows the answer is five bob or thereabouts, that it was bought eighteen years ago, that it never lost a minute, and was never cleaned. But nobody is brutal enough to spill that out. People are weak, and tend to play up to bores. (*BOM* 288)

'The Man' continues, in a pedantically theatrical style, to confirm these details that 'everybody knows'. O'Brien adds that "this particular type of pest also owns incredible cars, fifty-year-old fountain pens, gloves bought in 1915 and never lost or worn-out" (288), and so on. Other bores of note are "*The Man Who Buys Wholesale*" (289, O'Brien's italics), "*The Man Who Does His Own Carpentry And Talks About It*" (295),

"The Man Who Never Gives Pennies To Beggars" (290) and "The Man Who Spoke Irish When It Was Neither Profitable Nor Popular" (290). Orvell and Powell note of the 'Bores' feature that "some of Myles' most effective satire was in the nature of generalized social observation" (60), meaning by 'generalized social observation' that O'Brien would meet people in the pub or elsewhere, and then criticize their follies in the column through a parody of their language. That the device works so well (these people being recognizable even to a young Canadian thesis-writer in the late 1990's) is proof of the range and adaptability of the satirical parody to attack not only famous authors, but also the most pedestrian of human beings.

The effectiveness of O'Brien's pedestrian style to critically examine pedestrian topics can also be seen in another regular feature in the column, that of 'The Brother,' and it is here that Asbee's claim that "in Cruiskeen Lawn [O'Brien's] targets were *pretension of all kinds*" (114, my italics) is most clear. In this feature, a nameless narrator is told by a nameless man, as they are waiting at the bus stop, of this man's brother's exploits. This brother is supposedly involved in great matters of state, is an excellent reader and literary critic, and has a great understanding of obscure facts.¹⁸ The brother is a con artist. The nameless man describes one of the brother's bits of knowledge, involving two birds:

Two of the coolest customers I ever seen.... Do you know the funny thing about them lads?.... Them lads takes a very poor view of dry land. Never ask to go near the land at all. They do spend their lives sittin on the sea, bar an odd lep into the air to fly to another part of it. Well do you know what I'm going to tell you, I wouldn't fancy that class of a life at all.... Sure them lads might as well be dead as have a life like that... Sure they do have to lay their eggs out in the sea.... The brother says the mother-hen has some kind of pocket in under the

¹⁸ In one incident of this, the nameless man describes an incident in which the brother was reading "a big blue" book by "Sir James Johns," that is about "quateernyuns" (BOM 61). It is unlikely that the nameless man is any less ignorant of the nature of Ulysses than his infamous brother.

wing. Nobody knows how she whips the egg into the pocket when she lays it. Do you know what the brother called it? ONE OF THE GREAT UNSOLVED MYSTERIES OF THE SEA.... And of course there wouldn't be anny need for anny mystery at all if they had the sense to land on the shore like anny other bird. That's what I'd do to lay me eggs if I had anny. But no, the shore is barred, they do take a very poor view of everything but the water. Begob, here's me 'bus. Cheers! (*BOM* 53-54)

The brother, and his brother, are all of O'Brien's bores rolled into two people, and the parody of their language, interests, and ignorance, is again a general social satire of the kind of people who have opinions on subjects of which they know absolutely nothing, and of which their audiences wish to know even less. Together with Collopy and Father Farht of *HL*, these two bores suggest idiotic improvements to problems, like toilets on Dublin streets and 'mysteries of the sea,' as seriously as if their decisions were of national importance (which they sometimes believe they are). The subjects of *HL*, 'Bores,' and 'The Brother,' are pedestrian, as are their styles, but so are the subjects of everyday life, unlike those of most literature studied by critics who find it difficult to recognize the significance of the satirical parody when it is not attacking specific literary figures, works, or movements.

In The Dalkey Archive, however, the satirical parody is used to attack the specific literary figure of James Joyce, and consequently the significance of O'Brien's satirical attacks in *DA* have gained more critical attention than those in *HL*, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. But just as *HL* lost some critical attention because of its lack of recognizable attacks on Joyce, so did *CL* enjoy one of its first major critical publications regarding the column, David Powell's 1971 "An Annotated Bibliography of Myles na Gopaleen's (Flann O'Brien's) 'Cruiskeen Lawn' Commentaries on James Joyce," because of the column's ubiquitous references to

Joyce. Later criticism of the column shares this recognition. Cronin notes that “there are nearly a hundred references to Joyce in the ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’ column over the years,” and that many of these “were attacks of varying degrees of seriousness on Joyce’s work; others were pseudo-biographical, usually referring to ‘poor Joyce’ or ‘poor Jimmy Joyce’” (*NLM* 172). Thomas B. O’Grady also claims that the presence of Joyce in the column is ubiquitous, O’Brien having “targeted Joyce regularly between 1942 and 1966” (200). Tess Hurson, furthermore, recognizes that even general references to ‘the author’ in the column often appear “as parodic versions of the Joycean deity poised above his own handiwork paring his fingernails” (*CC* ix). Since its beginning, criticism on *DA* and *CL* has always revolved around these works’s various comments and criticisms regarding James Joyce and his writings.

Powell’s “Annotated Bibliography” supplies brief glimpses of O’Brien’s satirizing of Joyce and his critics. In one article, O’Brien attacks Joyce’s art, saying “Joyce is not living – though that indeed were a minor accomplishment on the part of one who reduced the entire literary world to a state of chronic and helpless exegesis” (53). In another, described by Powell, O’Brien gives a “lengthy tongue-in-cheek review of James Joyce: Two Decades of Criticism, edited by Givens and Mercier. The critics, Myles notes, attribute a number of classical works to Joyce, but omit his founding of the Hammond Lane Foundry and the Theatre Royal” (53). In others, O’Brien blames the Jesuits for Joyce’s writing (55), and says that Joyce

often committed that least excusable of follies, being ‘literary.’ His attempted disintegration, dissipation and demolition of language was his other major attainment, if you can call it that. What would you think of a man who entered a restaurant, sat down, suddenly whipped up the tablecloth and blew his nose in it? You would not like it – not if you owned the restaurant. That is what Joyce did with our beloved tongue that Shakespeare and Milton spoke. . . . I suppose

all experiment entails destruction, and every one of us may yet pay with our lives for certain nuclear experiments being now conducted by the Americans and the Russians. (59, Powell's ellipsis)

These various pieces all attack, whether through satire or more straightforward criticism, the writings and the artistic theories of Joyce, so well pilloried in all of O'Brien's novels, especially *AS2B* and *DA*. These articles, along with the novels, show clearly that, for O'Brien, "chief among writers, Joyce fell into the category of those who, like scientists and philosophers, destroyed language and substituted their own," and, "taken all in all.... they shed light on Myles's continuing obsession with Joyce and indicate some reasons for it" (*Intro* 220). Thus Joyce is targeted for the same reasons, and in the same satirical manner, in the column as in the novels, and it is clear, in this case as in others, that the column is just as significant a piece of writing as the novels, in terms of its quality of writing and the ability of O'Brien to sustain an attack on Joyce throughout his writing career.

Despite these broad connections between the novels and the column, there are satirical features of the column which have little or no parallel in the novels. These features, such as the 'Keats and Chapman' stories and the 'Catechism of Cliché,' are too often dismissed, like much of O'Brien's work, as merely humorous entertainments written to fill space in the column and to please the everyday reader of the column. This, however, is not the case, although they do stress the laugh even more so than other features in the column.

The 'Keats and Chapman' stories have always been one of the column's most popular features, and have even been collected by Benedict Kiely in *The Various Lives of Keats and Chapman and The Brother*. They all follow the same basic pattern. Keats and Chapman generally become involved in a complicated money-making scheme, or fall into some sort of trouble from which they find it difficult to extricate

themselves. The entire story, however, is always presented only for the purposes of the punning last line, delivered by Keats. The repetition of the feature, along a consistent pattern, is funny not only because of the awfulness of the puns, but also because, as in all such patterned humorous forms, "the listener becomes involved in the process of joke-making" (Nash 64). A particularly humorous story begins: "Once Chapman, in his tireless quest for a way to get rich quick, entered into a contract with a London firm for the supply of ten tons of swansdown" (*KCB* 40). Chapman invites swan-owners to deliver their swans to him to comb, for "a substantial price' per ounce for the down so obtained" (40). The project, however, fails because of the swan-owners' bargaining and a rainstorm. The article ends like this:

'Those appalling louts!' [Chapman] exploded. 'Why should I go out and humiliate myself before them, beg to be allowed to comb their filthy swans, get soaked to the skin bargaining with them?'

'It'll get you down sooner or later,' Keats mumbled. (40)

Another characteristic article has Chapman ask "what have you got there?" to which Keats retorts, "a small thing but Minoan," the two having conducted an archaeological dig in "Cyprus, Greece, Turkey and Persia" (102). These two pieces are examples of typical 'Keats and Chapman' puns, both being constructed around the feature's basic design.

At times, however, this design is altered. One story, entitled "Bombay Harbour," is prefaced with a unique note in parentheses: "(Readers are warned that this is extra special; if you don't get it, you probably have a permanent cold in the head -- high up)" (65). The article continues:

Keats and Chapman were entrusted by the British Government with a secret mission which involved a trip to India. A man-of-war awaited them at a British port.... When about to rush on board, they encountered at the dockside a mutual

friend, one Mr Childs, who chanced to be there on business connected with his calling of wine importer.... The trip to India was made in the fastest time then heard of, and as soon as the ship had come to anchor in Bombay harbour, the two friends were whisked to land in a wherry. Knowing that time was of the essence of their mission, they hastened from the docks into the neighbouring streets and on turning a corner, whom should they see only -

Mr Childs? No.

Just a lot of Indians, complete strangers.

'Big world,' Keats remarked. (65)

Three things make this column 'extra special.' First, while in the other articles Keats addresses his remarks to Chapman, this one is addressed directly to the readers, and thus Chapman cannot understand Keats's pun. Secondly, Keats can only make this remark because he is aware of the article itself -- without the article, there is no reason for him to think of Mr. Childs and of his absence in India. In this sense, the article is self-aware. Thirdly, because of this latter quality, the pun is even more gratuitous than usual, and demonstrates that Keats is merely the tool of the tyrannical author -- a point often made by O'Brien regarding literary characters, and one especially relevant to a feature in which two literary figures are anachronistically placed together in time and space, partaking in actions they would not have even considered in their 'real' lives.

Yet one more example of this feature is necessary, in that it comments on the writing of the feature itself. It is called "From Readers," and refers to the habit of some readers to send O'Brien their own 'Keats and Chapman' stories (the feature was immensely popular):

Nearly all the Keats stories which reach me from outside are, for one reason or another, pretty bad. They are bad in the sense that they are too good, too polished and refined, too 'worked over', as Sean O Faolain would say. They

lack effervescence and spontaneity. They are 'literary'. They are too obviously contrived and usually omit the essential boredom of the build-up.

Let me cite an example. (73)

In the example, Keats is flying a bomber, and is buzzed by two young fighter pilots. He then stalls his plane, and the pilots, frightened at what they have done, fly away. Keats fires up the engines and lands. Chapman asks him, "what happened to you up there?" and Keats responds, "I was stalling between two fools" (73). Following this, O'Brien remarks: "You see? Smart, cute, but not really funny" (73). He then follows this with one of his own, in which a steel cable beheads Chapman.

'What happened?' [Chapman] asked.

'Part of you was cut off by a cable,' Keats whispered.

'What part?' Chapman asked.

'Your head,' Keats confided, 'but keep it under your hat.'

You see the difference? (74)

In this article, O'Brien shows that there is a certain amount of skill involved in the creation of a Keats and Chapman feature. The first one fails, partly because O'Brien did not write it (the Myles persona was known for his pride), but also because it is 'too literary,' too neat. The story does not let you forget that an awful pun is coming, and follows the conventions of the feature too closely. But where it truly fails is in its timidity; if Keats had *crashed*, it would have been a success.

The skill involved, however, in fashioning the story and the pun, is not what makes the feature significant for this thesis, in that every good joke requires such skill. For this reason, it is important to realize that while "O'Brien was essentially a comic writer.... this notion should not blind us to the fact that the impulse of clowning was a result of something fundamentally serious or sinister" (Asbee 112). Taken in this light, comedy evaporates when we dissect and analyze the joke. It is enough to say

that O'Brien produced a classic pun [in another 'Keats and Chapman' story] by making a phrase serve a totally different function in a different context. This fact in itself should help to explain his predilection: puns are another instance of the instability of language. The same words -- or, indeed, as an acceptable variation, words that *sound* the same -- used in different contexts indicate that the "meaning" of language is not fixed, that language is in fact a system of signs with no intrinsic meaning or reference. (116)

In the 'Keats and Chapman' stories, then, O'Brien not only cracks jokes, but also undermines the authority of language, something Hopper notes is part of a Bakhtinian carnival discourse, in its implicit attack on authority -- in this case the authority of those who seek to claim that one word means only one thing (37).¹⁹ Hopper extends this understanding of the pun and the 'Keats and Chapman' stories, saying that, "as one of Myles's satirical influences, Karl Kraus, once wrote: 'A pun, though despicable in itself... can be the vehicle of an artistic intention by serving as an abbreviation of a witty view... it can be social criticism'" (38, Hopper's ellipses). The 'Keats and Chapman' stories, then, are an excellent example of O'Brien's ability to couch satire, whether it be social, literary, or otherwise, in what on the surface appears to be nothing more than a joke.

The 'Catechism of Cliché' feature functions in a similar manner, breaking down language in order to show its inherent meaninglessness. In the feature, however, O'Brien does not show this breakdown of language by having a common phrase mean something else entirely unique, as he does through punning, but rather has a common phrase mean absolutely nothing. O'Brien describes "The Myles na gCopaleen Catechism of Cliché" as being "a unique compendium of all that is nauseating in contemporary writing. Compiled without regard to expense or the feelings of the

¹⁹ This is something O'Brien paradoxically defended when it came to the Irish language; but this paradoxical defense is merely another example of his ability, as a pseudonymous author, to hold two positions at once.

public. A harrowing survey of sub-literature and all that is pseudo, mal-dicted and calloused in the underworld of print" (*BOM* 202). The feature is, then, conceived of as a parodical attack on modern writing, whether it be literature, journalism or otherwise. One of the best of these features is the following, entitled "THEY'LL SAY IT ABOUT YOU":

Of what was any deceased citizen you like to mention typical?

Of all that is best in Irish life.

Correct. With what qualities did he endear himself to all who knew him?

His charm of manner and unfailing kindness.

Yes. But with what particularly did he endear himself to all who knew him?

His charm of manner and unfailing kindness....

And what more abstract assistance was readily offered to those who sought [sic] it?

The fruit of his wide reading and profound erudition.

At what time did he speak Irish?

At a time when it was neither profitable nor popular.

With what cause did he never disguise the fact that his sympathies lay?

The cause of national independence.

And at what time?

At a time when lesser men were content with the role of time-server and sycophant. (203)

This is particularly characteristic of O'Brien in its gallows humour (he is parodying obituaries), and in its implicit attack on the Gaelic Leaguers who would probably love to be remembered by many of these phrases. However, the 'Catechism of Cliché' is significant in itself in its general social critique of the Dubliner, and of the everyday writer and speaker, who repeats clichés to such an extent that they become

meaningless, and can therefore be applied, in an obituary, to anyone.

A clearer example of O'Brien's assault on everyday language, as opposed to an assault on Gaelic Leaguers and obituary writers, is needed to show more clearly the scope of his attack on the clichéd use of language. The following is a particularly fine piece:

What, as to the quality of solidity, imperviousness, and firmness, are facts?

Hard.

And as to temperature?

Cold.

With what do facts share this quality of frigidity?

Print.

To what do hard facts belong?

The situation.

And to what does a cold fact belong?

The matter.

What must we do to the hard facts of the situation?

Face up to the hard facts of the situation.

What does a cold fact frequently do?

Remain. (208)

Here the peculiar assault is more clear. The questions are asked in a 'periphrastic' style, which is the "ability to utilize everyday words for extraordinary effect" (Shea 90). This is all part of the word-game taking place in the 'Catechism of Cliché,' the effects of which are unique, in that "by using exorbitant words, or common words in exorbitant arrangements, the narrator urges us to look at words rather than to assume we are looking *through* them.... O'Brien's eccentric selection and combination of words demand that we conceive of language as an opaque, textured instrument of invention"

(93). The periphrastic questions reveal the ability of language to refer to something in new ways, no matter how common the subject. The answers, then, following quickly upon such verbal ingenuity, frame the clichés in such a manner as to make them almost unendurable assaults upon the language. Sensing the effectiveness of his attack, O'Brien wrote at the end of one of the features, "well that isn't my fault. I merely record what goes on around me. I just write down what goes on" (*BOM* 208), and at the end of another, "is this killing you? It certainly is" (209).

Orvell and Powell note that O'Brien "doubtless took great pleasure in playing the pedant, or mock-pedant" in the 'Catechism of Cliché' feature, "but one cannot doubt the seriousness of his mission," O'Brien himself having said that the feature "was 'sinisterly efficient in bringing out the empty horror of this most modern of human aberrations' - language without meaning" (64). The feature is a parody of spoken and written language that is satirical in nature, in that it attempts to show up, and possibly improve, the impoverished state of these types of communication. The satirical parodies in the 'Catechism of Cliché' are thus much like the satirical parodies that appear in all of O'Brien's works, including the 'Keats and Chapman' stories, in that they display O'Brien's fear that "it is the inability of the stock phrase [or convention] to prevent thought that makes it so dangerous" (Asbee 115). The repetition of overused conventions of language and literature destroys the imaginative potential of these forms of communication, a problem displayed most effectively in The Third Policeman by the eponymous character's and the narrator's inability to use omnium, or ink, to its full potential. The 'Catechism of Cliché' and 'Keats and Chapman' features of the column, then, are significant satirical parodies that rank alongside the more famous, and more critically recognized, satires to be found in O'Brien's novels.

These regular features run thematically alongside other topics to which O'Brien regularly (and critically) returned in the column, such as literary criticism, poetry, art,

Sean O'Faolain and his magazine The Bell, general literary conventions, and other modes of discourse, whether they be legal, political, or otherwise. The connections between these topics and the regular features discussed above are their similar attacks on the misuses of language, as well as their use of the satirical parody to implement these attacks. It must be noted, however, that more often than not these attacks take the form of what is simply vituperative anger or silliness, such as "I hold that all literature is, *per se*, disgusting. Turning a page is like lifting a flat stone - you see maggots. The most impermissible department of literature is poetry. The pretences are scandalous" (*HD* 165, O'Brien's italics).

O'Brien's contempt for poetry is well-noted by critics, most of whom are somewhat mystified by his hatred of the form. Cronin wonders that "although his own verse translations from the Irish have great freshness and sensitivity, [O'Brien] had what almost amounted to a blind spot for poetry" (*NLM* 58). This 'blind spot' is represented best by an article in the column:

Having considered the matter in -- of course -- all its aspects, I have decided that there is no excuse for poetry. Poetry gives no adequate return in money, is expensive to print by reason of the waste of space occasioned by its form, and nearly always promulgates illusory concepts of life. But a better case for the banning of all poetry is the simple fact that most of it is bad. Nobody is going to manufacture a thousand tons of jam in the expectation that five tons may be eatable. Furthermore, poetry has the effect on the negligible handful who read it of stimulating them to write poetry themselves. One poem, if widely disseminated, will breed perhaps a thousand inferior copies. (*BOM* 239)

This is, of course, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, as shown by that facetious 'of course' in the first sentence, but passages such as these are repeated so much throughout the column's history that they must, to a certain extent, express something of O'Brien's

beliefs, at least in the obsessive repetition of a single position on the subject of poetry that they represent.

O'Brien's obsessive hatred of poetry began, unsurprisingly, with a hatred of the pretentious aesthete. For O'Brien, the typical aesthete-poet-poseur is Yeats, whose pretensions O'Brien mocked in his earliest writings in Comhthrom Feinne. O'Brien's dislike of the aesthete is as well noted in the criticism as his dislike of poetry (see Booker 108, *Intro* 230-231, and Orvell 103-104), and it seems clear, since Yeats, his proto-poet, fits both categories and is attacked for both reasons in O'Brien's writings, that O'Brien's blind spot for poetry is caused by his dislike of the aesthete. This conclusion is supported by an excellent satirical parody in the column:

Practically anybody can write poetry.... It's all right if these things are done as a hobby or as a manifestation of harmless eccentricity. Now *here's* a defensible poem, for example:

Two voices are there: one is of the deep:

It learns the storm-cloud's thunderous melody,

Now roars, now murmurs with the changing sea,

Now bird-like pipes, now closes soft in sleep:

And one is of an old half-witted sheep

Which bleats articulate monotony,

And indicates that one and two are three,

That grass is green, lakes damp and mountains steep;

And, Wordsworth, both are thine; at certain times

Forth from the heart of thy melodious rhymes,

The form and pressure of high thoughts will burst:

At other times - Good Lord! I'd rather be

Quite unacquainted with the A B C

Than write such hopeless rubbish as thy worst.

That's a bit better than the work of palefaces who write about Autumn, Love, Disillusion, the Hell of it All, and that class of hopeless rubbish.

Who is the poet? That can be answered another day. (*HD* 166-167)

Whether or not O'Brien is the poet, the parody shows up what is most offensive to O'Brien about Wordsworth's poetry, and poetry in general. The parody misuses language, having words like 'murmur' and 'melody' mean absolutely nothing, a point emphasized by the 'articulate' bleating of the sheep that indicates such commonplace things as the greenness of grass, the dampness of lakes, and the steepness of mountains. In O'Brien's estimation, this poem consciously parodies the worst kind of poetry -- including Wordsworth's -- and therefore satirizes poetry's misuse of language in some of its most revered forms.

O'Brien's general dislike of the aesthete is also linked to his dislike of academic and literary critics, already discussed in reference to his novels and his dislike of the Joycean critical industry. Below, O'Brien displays the connection between both the aesthete and the critic, in a satirical parody of the feelings of the former and the jargon of the latter:

Search any old lukewarm bath and you will find one of these aesthetical technicians enjoying himself. He is having a luke-warm bath, it is rather good, it is something real, something that has its roots in the soil, a tangible, valid, unique, complete, integrating, vertical experience, a diatonic spatio-temporal cognition in terms of realistic harmonic spacing, differential interval and vector (emmanuel) analysis, of those passional orphic inferences which must be proto-morphously lodged in writing with the Manager on or before the latest closing date. (*BOM* 249)

The jargon of the literary critic is criticized here for its use of obscure words in a

clichéd, and therefore meaningless, form. For a critic describing a bath, O'Brien seems to say, the experience can somehow be 'vertical', can have its 'roots in the soil', and is in some mysterious sense 'valid'. The point is that critics will use this kind of jargon simply in order to use this kind of jargon, to prove to their readers not something about the subject at hand (e.g. a lukewarm bath), but rather to prove their acquaintance with words that signal something critical must be at hand. In terms of the subject of the bath, then, the words are meaningless, and the passage is a proof that "the satire of all kinds of jargon in Cruiskeen Lawn had revealed clearly enough that O'Brien was intolerant of any language which tended to obscure rather than reveal its subject" (*Intro* 290).

Asbee suggests that O'Brien had yet other reasons for attacking the academic, and, more particularly, the critic. She notes that "O'Brien's attitude toward modern 'academic' criticism is clear in various aspects of his work. It is the basis of his entire mocking stance toward his reader in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and numerous Cruiskeen Lawn columns castigate the inaccuracies of contemporary criticism and its (in his own opinion) parasitic nature" (67-68). This 'parasitic nature' of the critic is further represented by The Third Policeman, in which the narrator kills a man in order to gain enough money to print his critical writings, and by a characteristic article in the column, in which a critic is sent "ten bob with a new book and asked.... to say that once one takes the book up one cannot leave it down" (*BOM* 23). The critic asks for more money to propagate the lie,

but for once [Myles] took steps to see that our critic spoke the truth. The cover the volume [sic] was treated with a special brand of invisible glue that acts only when subjected to the heat of the hands. When our friend had concluded his cursory glance through the work and was about to throw it away, it had become practically part of his physical personality. (23)

Here, the meaningless but commonplace critical lie that a book 'cannot be put down' is rendered meaningful through a typical O'Brien literalism, which itself only emphasizes further the meaninglessness of the phrase in question. This passage highlights one of the aspects in which the nature of the critic, for O'Brien, is parasitic.

Another article highlights this nature of the critic, with a peculiar twist that demonstrates O'Brien's attitude towards humour and its relation to criticism:

Take it this way. Charlie Chaplin was once a great clown.... but the lower-cases ('film art: an international review of advance guard cinema') found him out. One day some toad - some velveteened work-shy 'marxist' toad - sternly reproved people for laughing at mister Cheplin. Do you not see, old boy, that in Cheplin we hev an expression on the highest artistic plain of all our pathetic human striving. I mean the pursuit of heppiness and all that, our poor frustrated human nature. The little tremp, I mean, is you and I. Cheplin is a great artist, I mean.

You mustn't loff, you now. Such pure, such exquisite sensibility! (230)

Here the critic not only uses Chaplin to further his own ideology, but destroys much of what makes Chaplin worthwhile by saying 'you mustn't loff,' implying that to laugh is to undermine the importance of literature, one of the worst mistakes, for O'Brien, ever committed by literary criticism. O'Brien's position is thus that "if one is interested in art, then it is important; but it must never be treated too solemnly by artists or by the public. This view sums up the attitude underlying the Myles and O'Brien personas. It is to be found underpinning the writer's fiction and his -- equally unorthodox -- criticism" (Asbee 114). This position of O'Brien's may also account for the lack of critical recognition the column has received from literary critics, who often display a misunderstanding of the function of humour similar to that of the 'Cheplin' critic above.

This 'unorthodox' writing and criticism is best represented by O'Brien's satirical parodying, whether in his novels or in his journalism. In the column, he attacks not

only writers of literature, but “his other favourite enemies, lawyers, doctors, bankers, journalists and academics,” and also “bureaucrats and professionals through their use of jargon, illustrating in the process his own command of parodic language” (*Intro* 207-208). A few of these general attacks on jargon stand out. His parodies of legalese, such as the one below, appeared regularly in the column:

Well, this distinguished jurist has written to me asking whether an estate with remainders to the first and fourth sons in tail can be alienated without reversionary codicils terminating *pro tanto* all seignory advowsons in gross, the assumption being that appendant copyholds can be extinguished at will under the Land Transfer Act 1897. (*BOM* 82)

Much like the ‘literary criticism’ cited above, this type of language obscures its subject in what either is, or ought to be, meaningless jargon.²⁰ In a similar vein, O’Brien attacks advertisements, and their ability to exaggerate, or completely alter, the truth and purpose of a product. In one instance, he explains “the limited edition ramp:”

If you write very obscure verse.... for which there is little or no market, you pretend that there is an enormous demand, and that the stuff has to be rationed. Only 300 copies will be printed, you say, and then the type will be broken up for ever.... Well, I have decided to carry this thing a bit farther. I beg to announce respectfully my coming volume of verse entitled ‘Scorn for Taurus’.... But look out for the catch. When the type has been set up, it will be instantly destroyed and NO COPY WHATEVER WILL BE PRINTED. *In no circumstances will the company’s servants be permitted to carry away even a rough printer’s proof.*

The edition will be so utterly limited that a thousand pounds will not buy even

²⁰ In another article, Sir Myles na gCopaleen (the da) is buried alive for a few months. His will is read and disputed; for instance, when he says he wishes to leave a few paintings to ‘the nation,’ some lawyers point out that no nation is specified. Upon rising from his grave, he is considered dead and his cheques are not honoured. Furthermore, the Registrar-General refuses “to issue a new birth certificate on the grounds that the applicant could not be born at the age of eighty-one and that in any event he was not born but exhumed” (*BOM* 160). This parody of the process, rather than the language, of the law, is particularly critical of the excesses of legal pedantry, as O’Brien saw them, at any rate.

one copy. This is my idea of being exclusive. (228)

Here the jargon of the advertisement is shown to be misleading in its declaration that the poetical works offered are actually of value, and actually in demand. The parodies of legalese and advertising, which take place alongside parodies of Time magazine (89), and romantic conventions in film and literature (108-110, 349-350), are universally satirical in that their intention and effect is to show up the lack of imagination and lack of meaning, in other words, the lack of importance, of these kinds of writing.

Cruiskeen Lawn is thus not only a testament to O'Brien's productivity, his imagination, and his all-encompassing humour, but also to his ability to satirize everything from literature to the man in the street. The column's often pedestrian style is what has caused it, in the past, to be disregarded by critics, but the realization that this style was consciously chosen for satirical purposes, and that in any case the column is just as often *not* pedestrian, has allowed it to begin to gain some critical attention. With this critical attention, it is inevitable that the important similarities between the novels and the column will be more fully understood. Furthermore, it is through a study of the satirical parodying in the novels and the column, such as that in this thesis, that the connection between the column and the novels can be most profitably realized. It is even possible, should the critical attention to the column continue to develop, that some day Cruiskeen Lawn may be able to stand on its own, as proudly as such works as At Swim-Two-Birds and The Third Policeman do today. In this light, it seems appropriate to conclude with a poem by Morris Bishop, cited by Nash, that concerns the nature of humour, and that describes, with uncanny precision, Myles na gCopaleen, Flann O'Brien, and even the elusive Brian O'Nolan:

Contusions are funny, not open wounds,

And automobiles that go

Crash into trees by the highwyside;

Industrial accidents, no.

The habit of a drink is a hundred per cent,

But drug addiction is nil.

A nervous breakdown will get no laughs;

Insanity surely will.

Humour, aloof from the cigarette,

Inhabits the droll cigar;

The middle-aged are not very funny;

The young and the old, they are.

So the funniest thing in the world would be

A grandsire, drunk, insane,

Maimed in a motor accident,

And enduring moderate pain. 10

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(For convenience, all primary works will be listed under the name "Flann O'Brien," despite the fact that some were originally printed under a different pseudonym(s))

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