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| **O’Brien, Flann (1911-1966)** |
| Brian O’Nolan, Brian Ó Nualláin, Myles na gCopaleen, Myles na Gopaleen |
| Born Brian O’Nolan (or Ó Nualláin) in Strabane, County Tyrone, the novelist and satirist known as Flann O’Brienis now recognized as a leading figure of Irish modernism alongside James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. Like Joyce and Beckett, he is also considered to be an important transitional figure to postmodernism. His experimental novels, particularly *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) and *The Third Policeman* (1967), employ many of the techniques later identified as postmodern, including use of parody and pastiche, recycling of genres and characters, and combining of ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultural forms. Though his acclaim as a novelist was hard won and late in coming, O’Brien enjoyed significant local fame as a journalist for his *Cruiskeen Lawn* column, which ran in the *Irish Times* from 1940 to 1960 under the pseudonym Myles na gCopaleen (also na Gopaleen, ‘Myles of the Ponies’). |
| Born Brian O’Nolan (or Ó Nualláin) in Strabane, County Tyrone, the novelist and satirist known as Flann O’Brien (1911-1966)is now recognized as a leading figure of Irish modernism alongside James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. Like Joyce and Beckett, he is also considered to be an important transitional figure to postmodernism. His experimental novels, particularly *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) and *The Third Policeman* (1967), employ many of the techniques later identified as postmodern, including use of parody and pastiche, recycling of genres and characters, and combining of ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultural forms. Though his acclaim as a novelist was hard won and late in coming, O’Brien enjoyed significant local fame as a journalist for his *Cruiskeen Lawn* column, which ran in the *Irish Times* from 1940 to 1960 under the pseudonym Myles na gCopaleen (also na Gopaleen, ‘Myles of the Ponies’).  File: flann\_portrait.jpg  O’Brien’s family moved to Dublin in 1922. In 1929 O’Brien enrolled at Joyce’s alma mater, University College Dublin, where he became a leading figure in the Literary and Historical Society. It was during this period that he began to introduce some of his many pseudonyms, including Brother Barnabas and parodies of William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge (‘Lionel Prune’ and ‘Samuel Hall’, respectively) in the UCD student magazine *Comhthrom Féinne* and a satirical magazine called *Blather*, published in 1934 with his brother and Niall Sherdian. He submitted his MA thesis on ‘Nature in Irish Poetry’ in 1935 and the same year entered the Irish Civil Service, where he worked in the Department of Local Government until an early retirement in 1953.  His first novel, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, was published in 1939 to poor sales. When the remaining copies were destroyed by a Luftwaffe bomb in 1940, the book disappeared from public view for nearly two decades. *At Swim*’s narrator, a lazy UCD student who lives with his uncle, is writing a novel about Dermot Trellis, who is also writing a novel. At the end of a long and complicated journey, Trellis is murdered by a hostile cast of characters he has pillaged from Irish folklore, cowboy novels, and other genres. *The Third Policeman*, O’Brien’s second completed novel, is a hallucinatory, darkly humorous metaphysical murder mystery, in which the unnamed narrator tries to make sense of a hellish landscape — Hell itself, as it turns out — populated by policemen and bicycles and governed by a strange form of ‘atomic theory.’ The narrator is also an amateur scholar of a philosopher and scientist named de Selby, whose (absurd) writings are discussed at length in the footnotes. Completed in 1940, *The Third Policeman* failed to find a publisher until a year after the author’s death. Both of these novels, or anti-novels, challenge and undermine novelistic conventions on every page.  File: flann\_atswim1960.jpg  It was in 1940 that O’Brien, as Myles na gCopaleen, began writing his *Cruiskeen Lawn* column. With the exception of the Irish-language novel *An Béal Bocht* (1941), he gave up novel writing for the next two decades, until after the successful reissue of *At Swim-Two-Birds* in 1960. At this point his career as a novelist revived briefly with the publication of *The Hard Life: An Exegesis of Squalor* (1961), a satire on Catholic Ireland more in the style of Myles na gCopaleen, and *The Dalkey Archive* (1964), which borrows passages from the manuscript of *The Third Policeman* and includes a character named James Joyce. The original text of *The Third Policeman* was finally published in 1967, and an English translation of *An Béal Bocht* as *The Poor Mouth* appeared in 1973. In 1954 O’Brien secured another footnote to history by organizing, with John Ryan, Patrick Kavanagh, Anthony Cronin, Tom Joyce (James Joyce’s cousin), and A.J. Leventhal, the first Bloomsday anniversary pilgrimage. List of Works:**As Flann O’Brien** *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939)  *The Hard Life: An Exegesis of Squalor* (1961)  *The Dalkey Archive* (1964)  *The Third Policeman* (1967)  *Stories and Plays* (1973)  *Myles Before Myles: A Selection of the Earlier Writings of Brian O’Nolan* (1983)  *Flann O’Brien at War: Myles na gCopaleen, 1940-45* (2004)  *The Complete Novels* (2007) **As Myles na gCopaleen** *An Béal Bocht* (1941), published in English as *The Poor Mouth* (1973)  *Faustus Kelly: A Play in Three Acts* (1943)  *The Best of Myles* (1968)  *The Various Lives of Keats and Chapman and The Brother* (1976)  *Cuttings from the Cruiskeen Lawn* (1976)  *The Hair of the Dogma: A Further Selection from ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’* (1977)  *Myles Away From Dublin* (1985) |
| Further reading:  (Cronin)  (Hopper) |