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**Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* and the Construction of an Alternative
Heroic Canon**

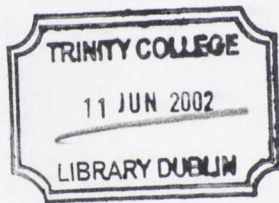
An Intertextual Analysis

Concetta Mazzullo

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

Trinity College Dublin





THESIS
6777

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Concetta Russell

Abstract

At Swim-Two-Birds and the Construction of an Alternative Heroic Canon - Concetta Mazzullo

The title “*At Swim-Two-Birds* and the Construction of an Alternative Heroic Canon” refers to O’Brien’s intertextual re-reading of traditional Irish texts (early, middle and modern Irish) providing a new image of a changing Ireland.

The aim of the thesis was to trace and analyse the sources which inspired the novel, which were included and woven into the text. The main works analysed, *Buile Suibhne* and the *Táin*, revealed unexpected connections with other texts in an all-comprehending work parodying fragments belonging to the Mythological Cycle, the Ulster Cycle, the King’s Cycle and the Fenian Cycle.

O’Brien could no longer exalt the Irish myths as the Revivalists had done. He felt he had to define himself in relation to a new cultural dimension and to include the myth of Joyce in his critique.

The MSS of *ASTB* proved to be essential to decode the texts embedded in the novel. Discovering/recovering intertextual findings was an unexpected counterpart of the process of analysis. In particular, the retrieval and a deeper reading of a fragment of the MSS referring to *Compert Con Culainn* proved to be of great importance in the economy of the texts analysed.

Chapter I outlines the contribution of critics and philologists to an assessment of *Buile Suibhne* in order to see what O’Brien in the ’30s perceived of the middle Irish composition and why he centred his novel on the figure of the anti-hero mad Sweeny. While analysing *BS*, other texts were considered either because they helped to put it in context or for reasons of contiguity in *ASTB*. The second part of the chapter analyses the recycling of *Buile Suibhne* at three different narrative levels and this revealed unexpected connections with *Caithréim/Beatha Cheallaigh*.

Chapter II follows the trajectory of the myth of Cú Chulainn to see how it was retrieved by archaeologist-scholars and translators, mythologised by popularisers and received by the Irish intelligentsia up to O’Brien. In *ASTB*, in the section defined as the Circle N Ranch, there are traces of the myth and of its disappearance. The myth of cattle-raiders combines with or underlies modern cowpunchers borrowed from western fiction and movies popular in the ’30s. A fragment later excised from the published novel attests to the presence of *Compert Con Culainn* until 3rd October 1938 (as shown by a letter of O’Brien to his publisher which is quoted).

Chapter III deals with *ASTB* and Joyce. Coincidentally it centres on the same area of *ASTB* where references to the *Táin* occur, the "Circle N Ranch", as the most consistent borrowings from Joyce are to be found there. O'Brien's "cavalcade" runs through "A Painful Case", "An Encounter", *Ulysses*, and briefly touches on *Finnegans Wake*. The chapter finally deals with "John Duffy's Brother", a brilliant parody of "A Painful Case".

Summary

At Swim-Two-Birds contains a web of narrative fragments belonging to different Irish traditions and genres. These tales only appear to be casually interconnected, but were originally assembled to construct an alternative Irish canon.

Intertextuality was the methodological key to decode the comprehensive critique embedded in *ASTB*. Approaching the novel from this experimental point of view disclosed an original, well-organised project where the milestones of early and middle-Irish tradition are made to interact with modern tradition.

Up to the '80s *At Swim-Two-Birds* had a double critical fortune. On the Continent and in the States it was seen as a perfect sample of metafiction, while in Ireland, O'Brien's brothers and Irish scholars, versed in the Irish language and culture, opened up new perspectives for the decoding of the Irish myths embedded in the text.

The aim of this work was then to combine both critical trends, to trace the sources of *At Swim-Two-Birds* in order to demonstrate that O'Brien's brilliant pastiche and parody of works belonging to the Irish heritage was part of a systematic filtering and assessment of Irish culture.

Two main texts have been traced and examined: *Buile Suibhne* and the *Táin*. The first chapter deals with *Buile Suibhne*, which is woven into the text at various narrative levels. O'Brien's great appreciation of *Buile Suibhne* was confirmed by his MA thesis. The second chapter analyses the debt to the *Táin*, fragments and even the "absence" of which are revealing of O'Brien's attitude towards the Revivalists' myths. During the research, another web of links emerged and other Irish texts such as *Acallamh na Senorách*, *Caithréim Beatha Cheallaig* appeared to be used and parodied.

It seems that Flann O'Brien chose for his parodies significant works, which were representative of the cycles of early and middle Irish literature, as he wanted to make up an "all-comprehending" work covering as much as possible of the whole of ancient literature. He parodied the poem of Amhairghin (Mythological Cycle), the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* (Ulster Cycle), *Buile Suibhne* (King's Cycle), *Acallamh na Senorách* (Fenian Cycle), to quote the most representative texts he recycled in his novel.

For both *Buile Suibhne* and the *Táin* Joyce's works, (*Dubliners*, *A Portrait*, *Ulysses*, *Work in Progress*), supplied material for O'Brien's intertextual net and proved to be a further systematic layer O'Brien used for specific critical purposes. Joyce, also part of the genetic code of the Irish canon, could not be excluded from O'Brien's critique, as he was the favourite addressee of O'Brien's "dialogic imagination".

The third chapter disentangles the web of Joycean texts beneath the surface structure of the novel-within-the novel making use of "Comthrom Féinne" (the National Student), little known articles from "Cruiskeen Lawn", his friends' recollections and the fragments of the MSS, finally edited out of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, to which I had access courtesy of the "Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre".

Of relevance was finding *Compert con Culainn* embedded in "The Pooka's Memoir" a fragment of the novel later excised from the published version, the textual manipulation of Mr Deasy's letter from *Ulysses*, *Caithréim Beatha Cheallaig*, and lots of untraced articles in "Cruiskeen Lawn". Unexpected and providential was O'Brien's dedication to his friend John Garvin where he admits the joint authorship with Joyce in writing *At Swim-Two-Birds*.

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Abbreviations

ASTB	<i>At Swim-Two-Birds</i>
BS	<i>Buile Suibhne</i>
CL	“Cruiskeen Lawn”
TBC	<i>Táin Bó Cúailgne</i>
Acallamh	<i>Acallamh na Senórach</i>
COM	<i>Cuchulainn of Muirthemne</i>
PW	<i>The Playboy of the Western World</i>
AP	<i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>
APC	“A Painful Case”
AE	“An Encounter”
JDB	“John Duffy’s Brother”
DA	<i>Dalkey Archive</i>
D	<i>Dubliners</i>
U	<i>Ulysses</i>
FW	<i>Finnegans Wake</i>

**ai miei genitori,
a Fil, Emanuele e Marco**

Cuando la ficción vive en la ficción

He enumerando muchos laberintos verbales; ninguno tan complejo como la novísima obra de Flann O'Brien: *At Swim-Two-Birds...* *At Swim-Two-Birds* no sólo es un laberinto: es una discusión de las muchas maneras de concebir la novela irlandesa y un repertorio de ejercicios en verso y prosa, que ilustran o parodian todos los estilos de Irlanda. La influencia magistral de Joyce (arquitecto de laberintos, también; Proteo literario, también) es innegable, pero no abrumadora, en este libro múltiple. (*El Hogar*, 2 June 1939).

Jorge Luis Borges

Introduction

*At Swim-Two-Birds*¹ is not an “immaculate conception”. Flann O’Brien, its author, had no virginal conception of literature and *ASTB*, a mixture of fantasy and aseptic realism, is the last stage in an endless matching of literary genres and modes.

The critical fortune or misfortune of *ASTB* marked O’Brien’s fate. Glorified by a small *coté* of other writers² and critics including Joyce, who labelled O’Brien as the writer with the “true comic spirit”, he was disregarded by “common readers” until 1960, when a re-edition of the novel eventually brought it popular acclaim. Critical assessment of the novel has been limited up to now as *ASTB* partakes, like its creator, of multiple identities: Irish and Anglo-Irish, metafiction and realism. The criticism of O’Brien has followed two divergent directions, “anti-nativist” and “nativist”. On the Continent and in the States O’Brien’s critics have praised him as the forerunner of metafiction and the anti-novel, often neglecting the Irish material wonderfully embedded in *ASTB*. In Ireland, after the publication of Ciarán Ó Nualláin’s *Óige an Deartháir*³, Timothy O’Keeffe’s *Myles: Portraits of Brian O’Nolan*, Anne Clissmann’s seminal work *Flann O’Brien: A Critical Introduction to his Writings*⁴ on O’Brien’s complete works, a new critical trend represented by Breandán Ó Conaire⁵ and Cathal G. Ó Háinle,⁶ scholars who, well-versed in Irish language and literature,⁷ felt the necessity to contribute with their knowledge to the increasing number of essays and articles that since the seventies had multiplied all over the world. But until the ’80s, with the exception of Eva Wappling’s *Four Irish Legendary Figures in ‘At Swim-Two-Birds’, A Study of Flann O’Brien’s Use of Finn, Suibhne, the Pooka and the Good Fairy*,⁸

¹ Flann O’Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, (London: Longmans Green, 13 May, 1939). (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1967), henceforth referred to as *ASTB* and page numbers.

² Graham Greene, at the time, reader for Longmans Green, labelled it as “a book in a thousand” “in the line of *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses*” and acknowledged that “it takes Pirandello and Gide a long way further”, in “A Book in a Thousand”, original Longmans jacket of *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Also Brendan Behan’s memory of somebody reading out bits of the “explosive” book *ASTB* while learning how to manufacture bombs is a strange tribute: “I read ‘At Swim-Two-Birds’ with relief and jealousy. It has been the secret scripture of a sect since just before my time. When it came out in 1939, I was a messenger boy (first class) in the I.R.A....the first time I saw a copy of ‘At Swim-Two-Birds’ was at Killiney Castle...the I.R.A. [was] then engaged in a campaign of bomb explosions... In the intervals of reading about BT2, the formula for blowing holes with gelnite in masonry bridges...I listened to Peadar O’Flaherty... read out bits of ‘At Swim-Two-Birds’...”, “Secret Scripture”, *Irish Times*, 30 July, 1960.

³ Ciarán Ó Nualláin, *Óige an Deartháir. Myles na gCopaleen*, (Baile Átha Cliath: Foilseacháin Náisiúnta Teo, 1973). It was in Irish and remained unknown to the majority of critics until Anthony Cronin made it known in the first chapters of O’Brien’s biography: *No Laughing Matter The Life and Times of Flann O’Brien*, (London, Glasgow: Paladin Grafton Books, 1990).

⁴ Anne Clissmann, *Flann O’Brien: A Critical Introduction to his Writings*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1975).

⁵ Breandán Ó Conaire’s critical contribution, *Myles na Gaeilge*, was groundbreaking but as it was in Irish, it remained unknown to most critics; however, he also wrote in English “Flann O’Brien and other Irish Matters” *Irish University Review*, 3, 2, (Autumn, 1973), pp. 121- 40; “Myles na Gaeilge”, *Scriobh*, 5, (1981); *Myles na Gaeilge: Lámhleabhar ar Shaothar Gaeilge Bhrian Ó Nualláin* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar, 1986).

⁶ Cathal G. Ó Háinle, concerned if “Irish literature in *At Swim-Two-Birds*...and O’Brien’s handling of it are [not] well understood” was “prompted to attempt to provide a straightforward account of the material that O’Brien has borrowed from the native tradition together with some analysis of his treatment of it. This will... enable critical discussion of the relevance of this material in the larger context of *ASTB* and of O’Brien’s writing as a whole...”, “Fionn and Suibhne in ‘At Swim-Two-Birds’”, *Hermathena*, CXLII, (Summer 1987), p. 13.

⁷ My list of critical studies should also include: Caoimhghín Ó Broilcháin’s unpublished dissertation, “Irish Elements in the Early Works of O’Nolan”, M.Phil.University of Northumbria at Newcastle upon Tyne, 1981, Jane Farnon’s article “Motifs of Gaelic Lore and Literature in *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *An Béal Bocht*”, read at the Flann O’Brien International Symposium, held at Newman House, Dublin 1986, and “Motifs of Gaelic Lore and Literature in *An Béal Bocht*”, M. Phil. Dissertation, Dublin: Trinity College, 1990.

⁸ Eva Wappling, *Four Irish Legendary Figures in ‘At Swim-Two-Birds’, A Study of Flann O’Brien’s Use of Finn, Suibhne, the Pooka and the Good Fairy*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis 56, (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1984).

published in Sweden, the two currents were kept asunder. The Flann O'Brien Symposium in Dublin in 1986 brought the two trends together and aroused fertile critical debate.⁹ No other critical study specifically on *ASTB* has appeared since Eva Wappling. Sue Asbee¹⁰, Thomas F. Shea,¹¹ Keith Booker,¹² Keith Hopper¹³ and Monique Gallagher¹⁴ mainly dealt with *ASTB* and *The Third Policeman* or the complete *oeuvre*, but even though two of them (Asbee and Shea) had access to the MSS of *ASTB* they mostly concentrated on metafictional-linguistic aspects and did not devote attention to the "Irish matters", as Breandán Ó Conaire called them. In line with what has been critically assessed, I hope with the present thesis to have achieved a balanced combination of the Continental and Irish trends of literary studies about Flann O'Brien.¹⁵

The primary aim of the present thesis was to trace the sources of *ASTB* and see to what extent they contributed to the development of the novel and if they were used thematically or simply offered stylistic influence. What I wanted to demonstrate was that O'Brien's brilliant pastiche of different styles and parody of works belonging to the Irish heritage was part of a systematic filtering and assessment of Irish culture. The most widespread idea about O'Brien, which I think should be opposed, is that he was simply a comic writer, "the true comic writer". Even his brother Ciarán failed to see the satiric vein of his brother in what is the most blatantly true parody of the Irish Gaelic revivalists *An Béal Bocht*:

I have read repeatedly that *An Béal Bocht* is a satire – it is nothing of the kind. Common sense and evidence of the author's enjoyment of his regular visits to the Gaeltacht preclude any suggestion of a parody on the Gaeltacht or its people.¹⁶

He does not seem to acknowledge that satire is a healthy exercise practised since ancient times by honourable poets and wise men. Parody does not necessarily imply that the author despises or does not find joy in what he/she is focusing on; rather it means that he/she must know it thoroughly and appreciate it deeply. To be able to detect and criticise the often less obvious aspects of a literary work, the parody maker must first "feel" his material, as O'Brien himself admitted:

⁹ In the '80s several studies delving into the Irish substrata of *ASTB* appeared: James MacKillop, "Fionn Mac Cumhaill in Flann O'Brien's *At Swim Two Birds*", *Fionn Mac Cumhaill: Celtic Myth in English Literature*, (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp.133-43; Patricia O'Hara, "Finn MacCool and the Bard's Lament in Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*", *The Journal of Irish Literature*, XV, 1 (January, 1986), pp. 55-61; Maureen Waters, "Flann O'Brien and Mad Sweeny", *The Comic Irishman* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), pp. 123-36. Further relevant studies will be quoted in the thesis and in the final critical bibliography.

¹⁰ Sue Asbee, *Flann O'Brien*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991).

¹¹ Thomas F. Shea, *Flann O'Brien's Exorbitant Novels*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1992).

¹² Keith Booker, *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin and Menippean Satire*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995) analyses all the novels.

¹³ Keith Hopper, *Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Postmodernist*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995).

¹⁴ Monique Gallagher, *Flann O'Brien, Myles na Gopaleen et les autres: Masques et Humeurs de Brian O'Nolan, Foulittéraire Irlandais*, (Villeneuve d'Ascq (Nord): Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1998).

¹⁵ In Italy, very few scholars and critics have tried their hand at a complete critical analysis of *ASTB*. Several theses are in progress and will probably contribute to the main stream of critical studies with fresh material.

¹⁶ Cf. Ciarán Ó Nualláin, *The Early Years of Brian O'Nolan, Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen*, (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1998), p. 107.

That book, *An t-Oileánach*, is the superbest of all books I have ever read. Its sheer gauntness is a lesson for all...the book was published about 1930 and disturbed myself so much that I put it away...But its impact was explosive. In one week I wrote a parody of it called *An Béal Bocht*...My prayer is that all who read it afresh will be stimulated into stumbling upon the majestic book upon which it is based.¹⁷

The research for the thesis was not a linear process, but had to proceed in the directions indicated by the material found. Four texts proved essential: Anne Clissmann's critical study *Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to his Writings*, Cathal G. Ó Háinle's article "Fionn and Suibhne in *At Swim-Two-Birds*"¹⁸, Eva Wappling's *Four Irish Legendary Figures in 'At Swim-Two-Birds'*, *A Study of Flann O'Brien's Use of Finn, Suibhne, the Pooka and the Good Fairy*¹⁹ and Douglas Hyde's *A Literary History of Ireland*, O'Brien's textbook at University, from which he often drew when conjuring up his parodies. Among them, Ó Háinle's analysis was particularly meaningful as he gave detailed information about all the Irish works quoted in O'Brien's novel, listed the books used for his courses at university and pointed out where O'Brien's parody recoded the original texts. However, Ó Háinle mainly focused on early and middle Irish material and did not examine O'Brien's intertextual links with Joyce.

During the research, while analysing *ASTB* in connection with *Buile Suibhne* and the *Táin*, another web of links emerged. In both cases Joyce's works supplied material for O'Brien's parody. As the research went on it became clear that references to Joyce were not chance "meetings", but that underneath *ASTB* there lay a systematic web of borrowings from Joyce's works. So it seemed necessary for a deeper analysis of *ASTB* to include his debt to *Dubliners*, *A Portrait*, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. After the first chance discoveries of superficial resemblance, a web of deeper relations appeared and proved that O'Brien's parody was a real system set up for specific critical purposes. Judging from the intricacy of the texture due to the interconnection of certain passages, from the keywords scattered apparently at random throughout the novel, it emerges that O'Brien wanted to construct a comprehensive critique of Irish culture and society. It is no coincidence that he chose for his parodies significant works, which were representative of the cycles of early and middle Irish literature, as he wanted to make up an "all-comprehending" work covering as much as possible of the whole of ancient literature. He therefore, for example, parodied the poem of Amhairghin²⁰ belonging to the Mythological Cycle, then the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*²¹ and *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* (The Deirdre story)²² of the Ulster Cycle, then *Buile Suibhne* and

¹⁷ Myles na Gopaleen (Flann O'Brien), "Islanding", Kevin O'Nolan, ed., *The Hair of the Dogma*, (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1977), pp. 180-81.

¹⁸ Cathal G. Ó Háinle, "Fionn and Suibhne in 'At Swim-Two-Birds'", op. cit., pp.13-49.

¹⁹ Eva Wappling, op. cit.

²⁰ "Mythical or fictional poet in Early Irish literature... One of the sons of Mil who led the Gaelic people in their invasion of Ireland...As Amhairgin first lands, he recites a great mystical rhetoric in which he exults in being a poet, claiming to be at one with the whole environment. He is wind, sea, bull, hawk, dewdrop, flower, boar, salmon, lake, and hill...a point of a warrior's weapon and 'a god who fashions inspiration in the head'". Cf. Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *Myth, Legend & Romance*, (New York, London: Prentice Hall, 1991), pp. 23-24.

²¹ The central saga of the Ulster Cycle.

²² Deirdre's fate is narrated in *Longes mac nUislienn* (Exile of the Sons of Uisliu) from the Ulster Cycle. Preserved in the Book of Leinster (8th-9th century) and the Yellow Book of Lecan, it is known as one of the "Sorrows of Storytelling". It

*Caithréim/Beatha Cheallaigh*²³ which are part of the Kings Cycle and *Acallamh na Senorach*²⁴ from the Fenian Cycle. To complete this encyclopaedia of Irish literary heritage he could not but land on Joyce's territory, and call on Joyce's works to provide an equivalent encyclopaedia to cover the breadth of Irish culture in the modern era. Joyce could well represent a valid model as he had ranged over all literary genres and had keenly experimented, rendering prose a poetic matter and making stylistic innovations his daily bread.

Two main texts have been traced and examined during the research; first of all *Buile Suibhne*, which is inextricably entangled with *ASTB* at various narrative levels; then the *Táin*, fragments and even the "absence" of which in *ASTB* (as will be dealt with in the 2nd chapter) are revealing of O'Brien's attitude to the Revivalists' myths. Tracing these sources became an exacting task as his parodies are often interconnected with other texts whose thematic thrust justifies their juxtaposition. Most of his parodies are not deemed complete by O'Brien if they do not involve more than one text. His intertextuality and referential scheme comprise at least two texts to be linked, the mechanism often being set off by a phonetic device or the inclusion of names or toponyms. As for tracing Joycean references, what had initially appeared to be an easy task, as *ASTB* is interspersed with a number of details and allusions to Joyce's works, pinning down ascertained borrowings proved to be challenging. The stylistic *pastiches* of various linguistic registers and modes risked altering the focus of the project. Only when comparing the textual finds in *ASTB* with O'Brien's declared interest in Joyce's specific works in "Cruiskeen Lawn" or in his published fiction other than *ASTB*, can we be sure that his parody went beyond a generalised *pastiche*.

As we have seen his mythopoiesis meant bringing to the attention of his readers long-lost texts that he highly praised for their thematic impact and artistic achievement. His declaration of love for *An t-Oileánach* can easily be extended to the rest of texts parodied in *ASTB*.

It is significant that in the Fionn section of *ASTB* he elected as a butt for his parody of Irish tales Standish H. O'Grady²⁵ with his Latinate style of "translatorese"²⁶ and not his cousin, Standish J. O'Grady²⁷, as he felt great admiration for the editor and translator of *Silva Gadelica*. If he had simply wanted to have a target for his criticism, Standish J. O'Grady, who for the sake of a national myth distorted the reality of characters like Cú Chulainn, would have been the right one. Instead,

survives in a romantic Early Modern Irish version, known as *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* which was the basis of Lady Gregory's retelling in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. Cf. Robert Welch, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 315.

²³ *The Career of Ceallach*, the story of the bishop-saint Ceallach, who was tortured and killed by his acolytes.

²⁴ *Acallamh na Senórach (Colloquy of the Ancients)*, a monastic compilation of materials from the Fionn Cycle, made in the late 12th century.

²⁵ Editor and translator of *Silva Gadelica*, a collection of medieval prose tales and repository of Fenian tales and poetry. He also compiled a catalogue of Irish manuscript material in the British Museum.

²⁶ Cathal G. Ó Háinle, in the above-mentioned article, "Fionn and Suibhne in 'At Swim-Two-Birds'", op. cit., p. 25 states that: "it is the author's intention to parody English translations of *Fiannaíocht* prose, and I would like to suggest that the translations of Standish H. O'Grady in *Silva Gadelica* are the principal butt of his humour".

²⁷ Novelist and journalist who popularised the legendary histories and fictions of ancient Ireland. He published *History of Ireland: The Heroic Period* (1878), *Early Bardic Literature, Ireland* (1879), *History of Ireland: Cuculain and His*

he made a parody of Standish H. O'Grady because he appreciated him as a scholar and as a creative writer as is testified to by the obituary he wrote for him:

He was a worker in the field of Irish studies, but one of an unusual kind. He combined with profound learning other qualities of humour and imagination which enabled him to deal with early texts in a lively creative way that lifted his work far out of the repellent rut traversed by most philologists ... His originality and agility of mind bubble up in the prefaces of his works and are reflected in the curious and charming English which he devised in an effort to render to the student the last glint of colour in any Irish word.²⁸

O'Brien's catalogue of likes and dislikes was decisive in driving his interest towards the texts he made a parody of. He thought for example that "Notwithstanding the candour of the 'Portrait of the Artist' (on which the "Biographical Reminiscence" of *ASTB* is modelled) [it is] truly one of the great autobiographies in English..."²⁹

But what really proved to be an irreplaceable instrument for the research were the two MSS of *ASTB* which are to be found at the "Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center" at the University of Austin, Texas. As Thomas F. Shea³⁰ saw, there are two extant MSS of *ASTB*: (MS1) and (MS2) where the first, a combination of two manuscripts, contains several passages and fragments never included in the published version, and the second is almost identical with the actual *ASTB*. During the research I have analysed both MSS (I have photocopies of the microfilms on loan, courtesy of the "Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center") and their study eventually led me to rely on and quote from what I am sure is MS1 and they call AMS³¹. MS1-AMS, the one which diverges more from the novel, proved of great use to ascertain the differences and provide interesting unknown material which was finally edited out of *ASTB* by O'Brien. Particularly one fragment, "Memoir on the Pooka's father, the Crack MacPhellimey" published by Sue Asbee³² in *Myles Before Myles*³³, proved to be helpful in assessing the presence of *Compert Con Culainn* as a model for the sub-plot of *ASTB*. The use of AMS gradually confirmed my hypotheses and the

Contemporaries, History of Ireland: The Heroic Period: Critical and Philosophical. He also wrote novels drawing on the Fenian Cycle and the Ulster Cycle: *Finn and His Companions* (1892), *The Coming of Cuculain* (1894).

²⁸ Flann O'Brien, "Standish Hayes O'Grady", *Irish Times*, (16 Oct. 1940).

²⁹ Cf. Flann O'Brien, "Enigma", (*CL*, 16 June 1962).

³⁰ See Thomas F. Shea, *Flann O'Brien's Exorbitant Novels*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1992), note n. 2, p. 169: "Two manuscript versions of the novel are housed at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin. The earlier version (MS1) is an amalgam of at least two typescripts with hundreds of autograph additions and emendations. The opening jottings and last eleven pages are entirely holograph. The exact dates of composition are unknown, but the manuscript was most likely composed between 1934 and 1937. MS1 was purchased by HRHRC from Bertram Rota Ltd., London, in 1970. The later manuscript version of the novel (MS2) is, according to O'Brien, a carbon copy of the final typescript submitted to Longmans Green in 1938. MS2 was purchased by HRHRC from Frank Hollings, London, in 1962."

³¹ What the "Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center" calls AMS coincides with Shea's MS1 as they appear to have the same characteristics. For more information see the HRHRC site: www.lib.utexas.edu/hrc/fa/obrien.html.

³² See Sue Asbee, op. cit., p. XI.

³³ Flann O'Brien, *Myles Before Myles: A Selection of the Earlier Writings of Brian O'Nolan*, John Wyse Jackson, ed., (London: Grafton Books, 1988, Paladin, 1989), pp 181-2.

provenance of O'Brien's textual borrowings. It confirmed in detail what O'Brien wrote in a letter to his agent³⁴ when they were planning a final editorial policy.

Letter to A. M. Heath & Co.

3rd Oct., 1938

1. Coarse words and references have been deleted or watered down and made innocuous.
2. "Good Spirit" (which was originally "Angel") has been changed to "Good Fairy." I think this change is desirable because "Fairy" corresponds more closely to "Pooka," removes any suggestion of the mock-religious and establishes the thing on a mythological plane.
3. **I suggest the deletion of the "Memoir," p. 327. It seems to me feeble stuff and unnecessary. I do not mind if it remains, however.**
4. I have made a change at p. 333, substituting a page or so of more amusing material as an extract from the conspectus. I do not know whether these extracts at this stage of the book are too long. The Trellis ending ("penultimate") has been extended and clarified to show that the accidental burning of Trellis's MS solves a lot of problems and saves the author's life. I think this will go a long way to remove obscurity.
5. I have scrapped the inferior "Mail from Byrne" as the final ending and substituted a passage which typifies, I think the erudite irresponsibility of the whole book.
6. I have given a lot of thoughts to the question of a title and think SWEENEY IN THE TREES quite suitable. Others that occurred to me were The Next Market Day (verse reference); Sweet-Scented Manuscript; Truth is an Odd Number; Task-Master's Eye; Through an Angel's Eye-lid; and dozens of others.

If any further minor changes are deemed necessary, I am quite content to leave them to the discretion of yourselves or the publishers. I would be interested to hear whether Longman's consider the above changes adequate....³⁵

Last but not least, O'Brien's MA thesis "Nádúir- Fhíliocht na Gaedhilge (Irish Nature Poetry)" gave further support, even though it is not in itself a serious critical study and does not open new perspectives in the study of this theme. It is basically an anthology of poems related to nature. Even in the explanatory introductory section O'Brien's comments are scarce and he limits his critical view to listing and citing the most successful natural images the Celtic poets were able to produce. Cathal G. Ó Háinle clearly states O'Brien's use of *ASTB*'s primary sources, *Buile Suibhne* and the *Fiannaíocht*, from his MA thesis.³⁶

The thesis was lightly dismissed by Ciarán Ó Nualláin³⁷ in his memoir of his brother:

³⁴ Letter to A. M. Heath & Co, quoted in Robert Hogan, Gordon Henderson, eds., "A Sheaf of Letters", *The Journal of Irish Literature*, vol. III, n. 1, (January, 1974), pp. 66-67.

³⁵ I quote extensively from this letter because it points out some of the issues discussed later on in the thesis. O'Brien is here referring to page numbers of TMS, so there is evidence that he wanted to leave reference to *Compert con Culainn* until the very end.

³⁶ Cf. Cathal G. Ó Háinle: "Two primary sources for his unpublished thesis which he submitted in August 1934 were *Buile Suibhne* and the *Fiannaíocht*. Of course he refers to the literary histories by Hyde and De Blácam and to Róis Ni Ógáin's *Duanaire Gaedhilge* in his bibliography, but he also drew on the important collections of *Fiannaíocht* prose and poetry *Silva Gadelica* (S. H. O'Grady), *Duanaire Finn* (MacNeill and Murphy). In the context of *ASTB* it is important that he also drew material for his thesis from *The Children of Lir*, *The Career / Life of Ceallach*, *The Feast in Conan's House*, and the Amergin poems, and that he refers to the Feast of Bricriu, the *Táin* and *The Adventures of the Troublesome Fellow*", op. cit., p. 18.

³⁷ Ciarán Ó Nualláin, op. cit., p. 101.

After taking his basic degree with honours, Brian did an MA. He did his thesis in Irish – ‘Irish Nature Poetry’ was the title. It runs to about 20,000 words not including the anthology. I have examined the thesis and it is clear that his aim was to get his degree so as to enhance his career prospects as he intended to apply for a post in the Civil Service...

Even though it is not at all a scientific work (idealistic view of Celtic poetry, imprecise dating, incomplete bibliography) the thesis attests to O’Brien’s respect and consideration for ancient Irish poetry. He listed examples of what he defined “true nature poetry” which he had extracted from the “treasure chest” of Irish culture and very rarely examined them critically. He confined himself to a stylistic appreciation of the ability of the Celts to express their love for nature in concise realistic images and did not usually spend more than a line on introducing the works quoted. So the relatively extensive comments on *Buile Suibhne* and the space devoted to the *Fiannaíocht* stand out from the rest and this accounts for their incorporation into *ASTB*. O’Brien’s comments testify to his critical appreciation of *Buile Suibhne*. Although he made a gross mistake, confusing the two saints St. Ronan and St. Moling, he perceived the great value of its poetry and realised that Suibhne’s poetry when he undergoes the hardness of foul weather has a fascinating appeal for its “crazed effect”. He also detected the modern aspects of *Buile Suibhne* if compared with the time of its composition:

...Between 1200 and 1500 the stories concerning ‘Mad Sweeny’, the king whom Saint Moling [sic] put out of his mind because of the attack which he made on the cleric, were composed. There are many examples of nature poetry to be found throughout the tale and poetry of various other types...When Sweeny is praising places or giving an amiable account of them, he uses normal poetry (and fine poetry it is) but when he is complaining and lamenting the cold or the hardships and insults of his life, as one in a frenzy, abroad in foul weather without covering over him...there is a crazed effect, broken, exhausted, unusual, on the poetry...It is a wonderful work when it is remembered at how early a period it was composed. (MA, 35)

The negative emphasis laid on the *aisling* poems and their main representative Eoghan Ruadh O’ Sullivan also explains O’Brien’s choice to edit out of *ASTB* the only reference to a poem related to the *aisling* tradition. “Dark Rosaleen” (as will be shown in Chapter III) was still extant in AMS but did not make its way into the published novel. The works he praised for their poetic nature are later resumed in *ASTB*. Simplicity, truthful accounts, naiveté, “which are not met anywhere today”³⁸, the “extreme colourfulness, compact brevity of speech, accuracy and sweetness which is proper to the Celtic mode”³⁹ will re-emerge in O’Brien’s works. We too will recognise the overemphasised accuracy of details in the description of nature, the light strokes in depicting the emotional perception of natural images, “the true poetry, the ‘curiosa felicitas’ in every phrase of it...”⁴⁰ To the poets of reflection he preferred the poets of the eye.

³⁸ I am quoting from an unpublished translation of O’Brien’s MA thesis, generously provided by Caoimhghín Ó Brolcháin.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, MA, p.10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.33.

In the thesis O'Brien shows an idealistic view and nostalgic concern about the loss of the true poetry of ancient times, which will be developed in the insertion and recycling of nature poetry in *ASTB*. "The greatest fault in poetry of the present age is that the interest in nature as an inspiration in itself for composition has been lost, the sharp insight, the truthfulness and the direct thinking which was felt in the literature of the old times."⁴¹ This visual power, now long lost, had already disappeared in *aísling* poems, as he explains:

... they are clichés⁴² and not true nature thoughts...We are told, for example, that the woman's breast is 'as white as a swan on a wave'...But when we meet the same comparison twenty times, it reminds us of the Latin poems which were written in the Middle Ages, poems that were woven together with lines and sayings and phrases all taken out of the books of Virgil and other ancient authors.⁴³

Finally a very early attempt at writing, an episode from the supposed "Decameron" which was "his very first, finally abandoned novel"⁴⁴ in Irish, shows O'Brien's desire to write all-comprehending works. In a letter to the art critic Ned Sheehy, O'Brien says that "when published" it "will be the absolute works as far as the Irish language is concerned – a lengthy document comprising every known dialect of Irish, including middle Irish, altirisch, bog-Irish, Bearlachas, civil service Irish, future Irish, my own Irish and every Irish. Accordingly it is labelled "Extractum O' Bhark i bPrágrais."⁴⁵ As Anthony Cronin reports, this extract "is a quirky piece full of puns and written in a language which owes more to Joyce than it does to Old or Middle Irish...".⁴⁶ but as early as 1938 it reveals O'Brien's "oblique" admission that he had been conditioned by the Führer Joyce (as he was later to call him) "It is idle to deny its affinity with the work of another eminent Irish author now resident in the French Capital."⁴⁷

So, *mutatis mutandis*, while giving the final touches to *ASTB*, O'Brien is commenting on what had been his initial intent in planning the novel, covering all the cycles of Irish Literature. It had to be an all-comprehensive work of Irish culture to counter Joyce's universal encyclopaedia which he, nevertheless, included in his *summa*.

We can therefore be fairly confident that O'Brien was aware of his totalitarian project himself, since he cheekily, but truly, described *ASTB* to a best-seller writer⁴⁸ who had failed to recognise its deep meaning in the context of the contemporary Irish literary scene as follows:

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴² "Cliché" was one of O'Brien's favourite terms and is often present in his glossary. Here is his definition from an article in "Cruiskeen Lawn", 27 August, 1943: "A Cliché is a phrase that has become fossilised, its component words deprived of their intrinsic light and meaning by incessant usage. Thus it appears that clichés reflect somewhat the frequency of the incidence of the same situations in life..."

⁴³ Ibid., p. 44.

⁴⁴ See Anthony Cronin, *op. cit.*, p.60.

⁴⁵ See Letter to Ned Sheehy (13 Jan.1938) at the National Library, Dublin, quoted in *ibid.*, pp.60-61. In the letter O'Brien asked the critic to publish his novel in *Ireland Today* where he did finally publish a very brief extract of it.

⁴⁶ Anthony Cronin, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Letter to Ethel Mannin, quoted in Anthony Cronin, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

As a genius, I do not expect to be readily understood but you may be surprised to know that my book is a definite milestone in literature, completely revolutionizes the English novel and puts the shallow pedestrian English writers in their place...

The scheme of the chapters is as follows: in Chapter I I have outlined the contribution of critics and philologists to an assessment of *Buile Suibhne* in order to see what O'Brien in the 30s perceived of the middle Irish composition and why he had centred his novel on the figure of the anti-hero mad Sweeney. I have also included essays published after *ASTB* as proof that O'Brien foresaw certain aspects of *BS* that were later brought out by critics, writers and poets. As Seamus Heaney pointed out in *Sweeney Astray*,⁴⁹ *Suibhne* embodied the nature of the cursed artist at variance with Church and State. While analysing *BS*, other texts were considered either because they helped to put it in context or for reasons of contiguity in *ASTB*. In the second part of the chapter I have analysed the recycling of *Buile Suibhne* at three different narrative levels and this revealed, unexpectedly, that in the Third Rewriting it was interconnected with *Caithréim/Beatha Cheallaigh*.

Chapter II follows the trajectory of the myth of *Cú Chulainn* to see how it was retrieved by archaeologist-scholars and translators, mythologised by popularisers and received by the Irish intelligentsia up to O'Brien. In *ASTB*, in the section defined as the Circle N Ranch, there are traces of the myth (of a disappearing myth). It could be said that *Cú Chulainn* gradually disappeared from the novel. Probably O'Brien initially felt that he had to import *Cú Chulainn* as well from early Irish literature, but what is extant in *ASTB* is the myth of the *Táin* cattle-raiders juxtaposed to cowpunchers borrowed from western fiction and movies popular in the '30s. A fragment later excised from the published novel attests to the presence of *Compert Con Culainn* until 3rd October 1938 (as shown by the letter to the editor quoted above).

Chapter III deals with *ASTB* and Joyce. Coincidentally it centres on the same area of *ASTB* where references to the *Táin* occur, the "Circle N Ranch", as the most consistent borrowings from Joyce are to be found there. O'Brien's "cavalcade" runs through "A Painful Case", "An Encounter", *Ulysses*, and briefly touches on *Finnegans Wake*, with which he was familiar even before its publication (a few months after *ASTB*) as sections of it had been published as "Work in

⁴⁹ Cf. "As Sweeney is also a figure of the artist, displaced, guilty of assuaging himself by his utterance, it is possible to read the work as an aspect of the quarrel between free creative imagination and the constraints of religious, political and domestic obligation." Introduction to *Sweeney Astray*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1983).

Progress” in several issues of *Transition*.⁵⁰ The chapter finally deals with “John Duffy’s Brother”, a brilliant parody of “A Painful Case”, as there are reminiscences of Joyce’s story in *ASTB* and “John Duffy’s Brother” was written during the final stages of composition of the novel-within-the-novel. For this chapter I have also tapped from “Cruiskeen Lawn” safely protected in the microfilms of the *Irish Times* in UCD, which reserved unexpected discoveries like the article “An Encounter” which I have entirely quoted. Other passages from the column relevant to the thesis are quoted in this chapter as evidence of O’Brien’s catalogue of likes and dislikes in Joyce’s canon.

My conclusion subverted the process of parody, plagiarism and plundering to which O’Brien accustomed us. Besides being food for other plunderings and borrowings, authors influenced by him are by now numberless, so he was also “punished”. He lives on embodied in the character of a novel by Italo Calvino. In the style of Borges he transcends the limits of fictional labyrinthine boundaries.

Throughout the thesis I have quoted extensively from articles which appeared in *Comhthrom Féinne*, in O’Brien’s brothers’ collections from “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Best of Myles* and *The Hair of the Dogma*, from the inexhaustible *Myles Before Myles* and from Anthony Cronin’s biography.

⁵⁰ Anthony Cronin, op. cit., pp. 60-61, recalls the irony implicit in the fact that *ASTB* was published (13 March 1939) nearly two months before *Finnegans Wake* (4 May 1939) which completely absorbed the energies of readers and critics in a never-ending exegetic struggle.

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⁴⁹ Cf. "As Sweeney is also a figure of the artist, displaced, guilty of assuaging himself by his utterance, it is possible to read the work as an aspect of the quarrel between free creative imagination and the constraints of religious, political and domestic obligation." Introduction to *Sweeney Astray*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1983).

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Chapter I

1. *Buile Suibhne* in *At Swim-Two-Birds*

The first chapter will mainly focus on *Buile Suibhne*. In the course of researching the present thesis this middle-Irish composition proved not surprisingly to be substantially relevant to the development of *ASTB*. The chapter will survey most of the original contributions critics and scholars have made to *Buile Suibhne* since 1913, when O’Keeffe first edited and translated it, to see to what extent O’Brien drew on the medieval figure of a levitating hero and the advantages of the text as a source.

As will be discussed, the only certain source he had access to was O’Keeffe edition, but focusing on the new perspectives opened up by critical studies on *Buile Suibhne* we will also answer queries which have remained so far unheeded. Why did O’Brien select *Buile Suibhne* as the central axis of *ASTB*? How did he insert it into *ASTB*? Did O’Brien only have a thematic interest in it? Did he ever parody it?

The second section of the chapter will analyse the actual use of *Buile Suibhne* in *ASTB*. An intertextual study has been privileged. By disentangling *Buile Suibhne* from the web of particularly revealing narrations embedded in the novel – *Acallamh na Senórach* (*The Colloquy of the Ancients*), *Caithréim /Beatha Cheallaigh* (*The Career/Life of Ceallach*), *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*The Cattle-Raid of Cooley*) – O’Brien’s dialogue with Irish Literature, and later the all-pervasive Joyce, will become manifest.

It will eventually emerge that O’Brien had a dual approach towards Irish texts. On the one hand, he deplored the inappropriate use made of Irish myths, which were either idealised or censored; on the other hand, he himself did not believe in their codified values. In his opinion they could no longer be passively received as monolithic scriptures. Needing active interlocutors to revive their meaning and value, they should be interrogated and confronted with contemporary culture.

Buile Suibhne (The Frenzy of Sweeny)

Reference to *Buile Suibhne* recurs four times in *ASTB*⁵¹ and it oscillates between pastiche and parody. The first time it is narrated almost entirely by an exceptional *scealái*, Finn Mac Cool, and it consists of a translation from Middle Irish, made by O’Brien himself. The second, third and fourth time the gist of *Buile Suibhne* is outlined in Orlick’s Manuscript, that

⁵¹ The following is a short summary of the complicated plot of the novel. A student-writer (1) plans a book. He creates the character of another writer, Trellis, (2) who in turn writes a book, both inventing and borrowing characters. Rebelling against their author, these characters contribute to the torture-writing that Orlick (3) (born as a result of Trellis’s raping one of his female characters) writes to take his revenge on his father. As the book is written, tremendous physical suffering is transferred from the paper of the manuscript to the skin of Trellis, as if it were the materialisation of an ancient curse. An end to this nightmare is brought about by Teresa, Trellis’s maid, who burns the manuscripts containing the rebellious characters. This series of interconnected narratives is complicated, but made even more fascinating, by the borrowing of figures from ancient Irish literary tradition, such as Finn, the great hero of *Fiannaíocht*, and Suibhne, who pass from a mythical dimension to that of paper figures.

is, in his “three rewritings”. Here *Buile Suibhne* is parodied to the point of distorting its essential contents.

What deserves special attention in the treatment of *Buile Suibhne* is the excessive care O’Brien took in handling it. First he translated it and then he inserted the bulk⁵² of it inside *ASTB* with the risk of unbalancing the novel. It covers nineteen pages (from 69-91) with two significant interruptions (p. 72 and p. 78) by some of the characters of *ASTB*. It is interesting to consider why O’Brien translated the middle-Irish composition even though there already existed an edition and translation of *Buile Suibhne* by O’Keeffe,⁵³ and why he took up a considerable portion of *ASTB* with this text. But first it is worth considering what *Buile Suibhne* is exactly and what it meant to a writer like O’Brien.

Thanks to Cathal G. Ó Háinle⁵⁴, who carefully studied O’Brien’s relationship with Irish literature and his university curriculum, it is clear that *Buile Suibhne* was certainly part of his second-year Irish Course and that it later became a privileged object of analysis for his MA thesis “Nature Poetry in Irish”.⁵⁵ So it is likely that *Buile Suibhne* was prominent in his studies and research and with the support of philological and critical works it will be possible to demonstrate the force hidden in this medieval masterpiece and how O’Brien decided to combine middle-Irish poetry with experimental modernism.

Buile Suibhne exists between the ancient cultural matrix of pre-Christian Ireland and the Latin monastic tradition; it gathers up and delicately balances the main strengths of the two traditions, containing substantial residues of Gaelic civilisation woven into a deep religious lexical texture. *Buile Suibhne* was brought to light when O’Keeffe published a critical edition and translation in 1913. The tale is extant in three manuscripts,⁵⁶ but the editor preferred to edit B IV I, which appeared to be the most complete. This manuscript belongs to the Stowe Collection of the Royal Irish Academy and was originally copied between 1671 and 1674 by Daniel O’ Duigenan; to the same manuscript belong two other texts to be considered because

⁵² He actually translated about 1/5 of the middle-Irish composition, but translated enough to keep the story-line. So the major part of the story survives in *ASTB*. It must also be taken into account that the story is narrated in both prose and verse; often a passage is repeated in *roscaid* form, duplicating the same content, so O’Brien eliminated such redundancies, often inventing link-passages to avoid repetitions.

⁵³ J.G. O’Keeffe, *Buile Suibhne, (The Frenzy of Suibhne) Being The Adventures of Suibhne Geilt, A Middle Irish Romance*, edited with Translation, Introduction, Notes and Glossary, Irish Texts Society, vol. XII, Irish Texts Society (London: David Nutt, 1913); henceforward indicated as *BS* when quoting from the text.

⁵⁴ Cathal G. Ó Háinle, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-49.

⁵⁵ It is also quoted by Douglas Hyde on page 43 as “Suibhne’s Madness” as a sequel to “The Battle of Moyrath” in the Ch. “Miscellaneous Romance” in (1899), *A Literary History of Ireland*, (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1967).

⁵⁶ The manuscripts are thus classified: B IV I, fo. 82a 95b; 23k 44, pp. 131-80; Brussels, 3410, fo. 59a - 61 b.

of their relevance for the historical reconstruction and possible dating of *Buile Suibhne: The Banquet of Dun na nGedh*, and *The Battle of Mag Rath*.⁵⁷

In order to appreciate the key elements of *Buile Suibhne* and the subsequent cultural stratifications which characterised and imposed it on the collective memory by creating “an interesting example of literary creation”⁵⁸ it is necessary to outline its intricate plot. The subdivision into paragraphs follows the sequential order given by O’Keeffe. The parts written in bold type refer to themes and areas of occurrence of motifs that were to be taken into consideration by O’Brien in his transcodification of the medieval text.

§1-6 **St. Ronan is marking out the foundation of a church in Suibhne’s territory. Suibhne, angered by the sound of the saint’s bell and his intrusion, is held back by his wife Eorann and naked, without his mantle, runs at the monk and throws his psalter into the lake. A messenger from Congal Claen calls him to the Battle of Mag Rath. While Suibhne is away an otter gives St. Ronan back his psalter and St. Ronan lays a curse on Suibhne saying that he will go mad and will fly naked into the wild and that he will finally die killed by a spear.**

§7-10 St. Ronan tries to make peace between the two opponents Domhnall and Congal Claen, but **Suibhne** interferes with his plans by killing a man each morning and evening. When he is blessed with holy water he **kills a psalmist and attacks St. Ronan. But the spear, which should have killed the Saint, is providentially deflected high up into the sky** by the little bell hanging on his chest. **St. Ronan curses him a second time praying again that he will die by a spear.**

§11-19 The battle starts. On the battle-field **the din is deafening. Suibhne goes mad and, naked, “flies away to safety in the woods”. Transformed into a bird, who lives among the trees and in close contact with nature, he expiates his crime.** In his wanderings through Ireland he lands in Glen Bolcain, a sacred place for Irish madmen; there **he laments all his sufferings and celebrates nature.**

§20-34 lists all his memories, tells about his poor diet of water and cress and relates that he sleeps on ivy branches. Here at § 22-23 **Suibhne comes to Snámh-dá-Én (Swim-Two-Birds, which gives the novel its title) where he experiences his moment of greatest empathy with the Christian God.** Suibhne wanders for seven years. **He meets Loingseachan and their meeting is celebrated by the lay “The Man by the Wall Snores”.** He promises to visit his wife Eorann. **He has his first meeting with his wife** who now lives with Guaire, pretender to the throne of Suibhne. Eorann confesses that she would rather lead a wild life with Suibhne. Suibhne flies away and is tempted by the wife of the Erenagh.

§35-45 **Loingseachan makes him return to sanity** by pretending that all his relatives are dead. **He is entrusted to the Hag of the Mill who, by making him remember his excesses of madness, incites him to make great leaps and he falls back into insanity.** At this point of the narration we are given one of the most outstanding Celtic specimens of nature poetry, the **Eulogy to the Trees §40. The hag dies tragically falling on the rocks after a daring leap.** Suibhne leaves Dal Araidhe.

§46-58 During his wanderings he goes to Britain where he meets and makes friends with another mad-man, Eolladhan. The latter tells him his story which for many aspects coincides with that of Suibhne.⁵⁹ He foretells his own death by drowning. (Here we have further evidence of the hypothesis put forward by Kenneth Jackson of **the link between the Threefold Death folktale motif and Buile Suibhne**). After Eolladhan’s death Suibhne goes back to Ireland where he has a **second meeting with his wife** who orders him to leave her.

§ 59-67 Sane again, he decides to go back to his people but **St. Ronan curses him again for the third time and Suibhne, pursued by horrid spirits, goes mad in terror.**

§ 68-76 **Finally he reaches St. Moling who tells him that he prophetically knew that Suibhne would come and compels him to tell him his adventures, so that he can record them.**

⁵⁷ See John O’Donovan, *The Banquet of Dun Na N-Gedh and The Battle of Mag Rath*, (Dublin: Irish Archaeological Society, 1842).

⁵⁸ J. G. O’Keeffe, op. cit., p. XXXVII.

⁵⁹ This episode in the middle-Irish poem *BS* substantiates the hypothesis that *BS* belongs to a subtype of the Wild-Man-of-the-Forest tale present in Britain.

§ 77-78 For a year he visits St. Moling. **Every day the wife of his swine-herd Mongan leaves him some milk in a hole dug into the dung. Unjustly accused of adultery, Suibhne is pierced by Mongan's spear.**

§ 79-83 **St. Moling runs to help Suibhne, gives him Holy Communion and the Extreme Unction;** he curses Mongan and his wife and assures Suibhne that he will be in heaven with him.

§84-86 St. Moling drags him towards the church. **Suibhne finally dies on consecrated ground leaning against the door-post of the church.**

Many critical points have been made by scholars who, analysing the text of *Buile Suibhne*, have pointed out several inconsistencies and borrowings from different cultural origins. There are two different motifs of biblical origin, which prove *Buile Suibhne* to be rich in Christian elements. Nebuchadnezzar mad in the wilderness⁶⁰ is a distinguished antecedent of the madman Suibhne, and Joseph and Potiphar's wife may have suggested the episode of Eorann trying to hold back Suibhne, inverting the action of seduction implied in the Bible.⁶¹

O' Keeffe was the first to notice that the tale lacked unity and that there were two interweaving stories which repeated the same motif. He suggested that there might have been an ancient Celtic Ur-text where Suibhne was driven to frenzy because of the din of the battle. He realised that only later were the tales of St. Ronan and St. Moling assimilated in the main corpus and so reached the conclusion that "the distinctly Christian passages could be omitted without radically distorting the text."⁶²

"On linguistic grounds"⁶³ he first established the date of composition as being between 1200-1500,⁶⁴ thus giving himself a wide margin, and set a new series of studies going with the precise intention of historically locating the middle-Irish composition.⁶⁵ The most ancient reference to *Buile Suibhne* is recorded in a Law Tract dating from the IX-Xth century, the *Book of Aicill*.⁶⁶

Three were the triumphs (*buadha*) of that battle (i.e. the battle of Mag Rath): the defeat of Congal Claen...and Suibhne Geilt having become mad [...] And Suibhne Geilt having become mad is not a reason why the battle is a triumph, but it is because of the stories and poems he left after him in Ireland.

Three elements mentioned here emerge as immediately defining Suibhne Geilt: "the battle" (Mag Rath), "going mad" and "...the stories and poems that he left after him..." and all

⁶⁰ Nebuchadnezzar, having lost the favour of God as had been prophesied in a dream, became beast-like and grew feathers on his body: "was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws." *The Holy Bible*, Daniel, 4, v. 33.

⁶¹ Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph and, trying to escape from her, he lost his tunic.

⁶² J. G. O'Keeffe, *op. cit.*, p. XXXIV.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. XV.

⁶⁴ In a second edition in 1931 he reconsidered his dating and said that "the tale as a whole may be ascribed to the twelfth century". See J. G. O'Keeffe, *Medieval and Modern Irish Series*, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1931), p. 4.

⁶⁵ See Kenneth Jackson, "The Motive of the Threefold Death in the Story of 'Suibhne Geilt'", *Eigse*, pp. 535-550, rpt. of *Féilsgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill*, (Dublin: J. Ryan, 1940), pp. 536-40; James Carney, "'Suibhne Geilt' and 'The Children of Lir'", *Studies in Irish Literature and History*, Ch. IV, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955), pp.129-164.

⁶⁶ *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, vol. III, p. 89, quoted in O'Keeffe, *op. cit.*, pp. XVI-XVII.

of them are strictly interdependent. It is in the battle of Mag Rath that Suibhne went mad because of St. Ronan's curse. There, on the battlefield, he experienced his madness, and as a result of it he went into the wilderness and became a poet. It is in *The Battle of Mag Rath* that we find a description of Suibhne's mental and physical metamorphosis in a passage very similar to § 11⁶⁷ in *Buile Suibhne*.

In the introduction to *Buile Suibhne*, O'Keeffe lays the basis for further research work creating connections with other extant texts. He quotes a poem which he attributes to Suibhne Geilt: "M'airiuclán hi Túaim Inbir" from an Irish MS in Carinthia⁶⁸, and associates Suibhne and his friend St. Moling with some poems in the *Anecdota from Irish Mss*⁶⁹ which, according to Kenneth Jackson "seem to point strongly to the eleventh century"⁷⁰ "In a note referring to the first three poems in that collection it is suggested that it was Suibhne who composed them, though it was Moling who put them in the 'old book,' viz.: the Book of Murchard, son of Brian[Boru]"⁷¹

Analysing the poems of the *Anecdota*, Kenneth Jackson formulated the hypothesis that five of them, which were related to Suibhne and St. Moling, might have been part of an original, irremediably lost tale in prose and verse. He pursued O'Keeffe's indication that "Suibhne's madness seems to bear some resemblance to the widely dispersed story of the Wild Man of the Woods, of which the Merlin legend is perhaps the most conspicuous offshoot"⁷² and comparing it with other tales with common although not identical characteristics, set up a scheme where *Buile Suibhne's* similarities with different tales are classified:

A man goes mad in battle (Mag Rath AD 637, Suibhne; Arfderydd in Cumberland A. D. 574, Myrdinn-Laloiken-Merlin) because of the curse of a saint (Suibhne) or a horrible vision in the sky (Laloiken; traces of it in Suibhne) or fear of the battle (traces in Suibhne) and grief for the slain (Merlin). He takes to life in the woods (all), where he lives on berries, roots or apples, etc. (all). Being mad, he is a prophet, and has dealings with various visitors (all) to whom he prophesies (Myrddin, Laloiken, Merlin). Finally, he makes friends with a saint (Suibhne with Moling; Laloiken with Kentigern) and dies.⁷³

From this it is evident that it is only Suibhne who goes mad and becomes a *geilt* because of the curse of a saint. This distinctive element (the curse of a saint) helped the critics see *Buile*

⁶⁷ J. G. O'Keeffe, op.cit, p.15. Henceforward passages from *Buile Suibhne* will be quoted with the paragraph order given by O'Keeffe. See also my plot on pages 14-5.

⁶⁸ This poem, which O'Keeffe defines "a curious riddling poem" (*Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, vol. II. p. 39) was later to engage later scholars in endless discussions about attributing it either to St. Moling or to Suibhne. See Jackson, op. cit.; Carney, op. cit., Jackson, "A Further Note on Suibhne Geilt and Merlin", *Eigse*, VII, part. II, 1953, pp. 112-116.

⁶⁹ See O. J. Bergin, R. I. Best, K. Meyer, and J.G. O'Keeffe, eds, *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, II (Halle, 1908), pp. 20-24.

⁷⁰ Kenneth Jackson, "The Motive of Threefold Death in the Story of 'Suibhne Geilt'", op. cit., p. 538.

⁷¹ J. G. O'Keeffe, op.cit., p.XVIII.

⁷² J. G. O'Keeffe, *ibid.*, p. XXXV.

⁷³ See Kenneth Jackson, "The Motive of Threefold Death in the Story of 'Suibhne Geilt'", op. cit., p. 546; also quoted in James Carney, op. cit., p. 130.

Suibhne as being modelled on a particular sub-type of the Wild Man of the Woods legend and located it in Dal Riada (Jackson)⁷⁴ or in the British Kingdom of Strathclyde (Carney).⁷⁵

The significant element of levitation, central in *Buile Suibhne* and also present in *The Battle of Mag Rath*, has led to many hypotheses about the provenance of the motif which, it is argued, could be Irish or Norse or of classical origin.

...And when the battle-cry is raised loudly on both sides, that cowardly men run wild and lose their wits from the dread and fear which seize them. And then they run into a wood away from other men, and live there like wild beasts, and shun the meeting of men like wild beasts. And it is said of these men that when they have lived in the woods in that condition for twenty years, then feathers grow on their bodies as on birds, whereby their bodies are protected against frost and cold, but the feathers are not so large that they may fly like birds...

This often quoted passage from the “Irish Mirabilia” in *Speculum Regale*, an old Norse book written about 1250 A.D.,⁷⁶ could well apply to *Suibhne*, but both Carney and O’Keeffe agree that the archetype of the Geilt was not Norse and that the Norsemen had probably only heard about the story of *Suibhne*. O’Keeffe mentions that he could not find any “instance of similar levitation in Irish literature”⁷⁷ while there certainly is a native tradition which traces the habit of leaping and levitating back to well-known Irish heroes.⁷⁸ Carney and O’ Riain mention it as related to performances of heroes. Finn and Cuchulain are known for their ability to perform high leaps, and high leaping was an initiatory practice of the Fianna.⁷⁹

A parallel between the madness of *Suibhne* and that of Heracles can be sustained in view of the quotation given as *ASTB*’s epigraph taken from *Heracles*: “εξίσταται γαρ πάντ’ απ ἀλλήλων δίχα”.⁸⁰ O’ Brien was given the Greek quotation by John Garvin, his senior officer in the civil service. John Garvin’s reminiscences keep a record of O’Brien letting his “source-finder” reveal and motivate the choice when asked by a friend: “I [Garvin] gave chapter and verse...Euripides, Hercules Furens, in consideration of the corresponding agony of Frenzied Sweeny: and the verse itself, ‘For all things go out and give place one to another’, in relation to the rapid succession of characters and plots right through the novel...[commenting

⁷⁴ Kenneth Jackson, *ibid.*, pp. 549-550.

⁷⁵ James Carney, *op. cit.*, pp. 129, 133, 150.

⁷⁶ Kuno Meyer, “The Irish Mirabilia in the Norse ‘Speculum Regale’”, *Ériu*, IV, (1908), p. 11, § 18, quoted in O’Keeffe, *op. cit.*, pp. XXXIV-XXXV, *passim*.

⁷⁷ J. G. O’Keeffe, *ibid.*, p. XXXIV.

⁷⁸ However, levitation has also been associated by subsequent critics with the loss of consciousness induced by shamanic discipline. On this interpretation of the Legend of the Wild Man, see Pádraig Ó Riain, “A Study of the Irish Legend of the Wild Man”, *Éigse*, 14 (1972), pp. 179-206; Angela Partridge, “Wild Men and Wailing Women”, *Éigse*, XVIII, (1980), pp. 27-33; J. F. Nagy, “The Wisdom of the Geilt”, *Éigse*, XIX, 1982/83, pp. 44-60.

⁷⁹ James Carney, *op. cit.*, p.147; Pádraig Ó Riain, *op. cit.*, p.197 states that “it recurs regularly as a feature of Irish heroic action, and bears a particular stress when it proves necessary to state the heroic qualifications of the novice, or unfulfilled hero (like *Suibhne* who has lost his social status by the intervention of a sacerdos).

⁸⁰ See Euripides, *Eracle*, Maria Serena Mirto, ed., (Milano: Rizzoli, 1997), p. 106, (line 104). For the English edition see Euripides, *Heracles*, J. Diggle, ed. *Euripidis Fabulae, II*, (Oxford, 1981), p. 121.

on the meaning of the quotation, O'Brien added] They all go out...when the skivvy burns the MS, that sustains their existence. John made me make this explicit..."⁸¹

As his friend had suggested, the theory of classical origin proves significant when juxtaposed with the Irish and it comes back to O'Brien as if in a circle. Heracles' madness, with Lyssas inciting him to make the jump of folly,⁸² recalls the outline of the Hag of the Mill who sends Suibhne back to insanity,⁸³ but also connects us to the circularity of *ASTB*'s epigraph foreshadowing both the death and the interchangeability of characters, myths or literary archetypes present and active in *ASTB* and the relativity of fortune and the series of inexplicable killings committed by Heracles against his own blood.⁸⁴ Likewise Suibhne, the levitating bird-man, is prey to his deranged mind. According to O'Keeffe "in the *Buile Suibhne* the levitation element is curious. It takes the form of Suibhne imagining himself as flying about from place to place, imagining, too, that feathers have grown on him."⁸⁵

Buile Suibhne is throughout permeated with the phenomenon of levitation and, whether it is literally interpreted or charged with ascetic-religious symbolic meanings, it transfigures Suibhne by clothing him with supernatural fascination.

Kenneth Jackson examined a further aspect and made an interesting association between the international motif of "Threefold Death" and *Buile Suibhne*. He defined the motif of Threefold Death as "a popular tale of the well-known international type current in Europe in medieval and modern times."⁸⁶ In these tales either a secular prophet or a cleric foretold that a man would die in three different ways (generally including fire and water). This could not rationally be accepted as likely to happen, but the doomed victim did finally die three different deaths. The Irish Threefold Death comprised death by wounding, burning and drowning.⁸⁷ Jackson found a link between the tale of St. Moling's cowherd Grácc and his threefold death with the experience of the madman Suibhne. He identified a residual fragment of this story in the final

⁸¹ John Garvin, "Sweetscented Manuscripts", Timothy O'Keeffe, ed., *Myles, Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*, (London: Martin Brian O'Keeffe, 1973), p. 58.

⁸² In *Heracles* we have the same element when Lyssas is instructed by Iris as to how she should provoke madness in Heracles' mind: (lines 835-836) "Derange his mind and make him jump hither and thither", where the terms *ποδοὺν σκιρτῆματα*, which literally translate as "jumps of feet", witness that in the classical world high uncontrollable jumps were linked with the idea of madness. See Maria Serena Mirto, op. cit. p. 202 and J. Diggle, op. cit., pp. 835-6.

⁸³ J.G. O'Keeffe, op. cit., p. XXXV.

⁸⁴ The central theme of *Heracles* is the protagonist's madness with the killing of his wife and children. It happens after the hero's descent into the reign of the Dead. Lycus threatens to kill the hero's family and when Heracles comes back and defeats his enemy madness gets hold of him and, deceived by Lyssas, he commits the terrible crime; just when he is murdering his own father he falls asleep and comes back to sanity. Determined to commit suicide, he is convinced by his friend, Theseus, to live on and bear the weight of his guilt.

⁸⁵ J. G. O'Keeffe, op. cit., p. XXXV.

⁸⁶ Kenneth Jackson, "The Motive of the Threefold Death in the Story of 'Suibhne Geilt'", op. cit., p. 535.

⁸⁷ The Irish tale of King Diarmaid as recounted by Kenneth Jackson can be seen as a paradigm for the rest of the tales: King Diarmaid ...asks his wizards how he will die. The first says by killing, the second by drowning, the third by burning. Various apparently impossible conditions must also be fulfilled. Later, the hall where he is feasting is attacked. One Aedh the Black wounds him with a spear, the house is burned over him, he creeps into a vat of beer to avoid the flames, and is drowned. Cf. Kenneth Jackson, op.cit., p. 535. The tale translated by Standish H. O'Grady is in *Silva Gadelica*, II, (1892), (New York: Lemma Publishing Corporation, 1970), p. 76.

part of *Buile Suibhne*, where in the St. Moling section Suibhne, unjustly accused of adultery, is killed by the spearpoint of St. Moling's swineherd⁸⁸ (as will be discussed later on).

Jackson's hypothesis about Threefold Death was developed by James Carney who realised that through the story of Grácc the traditions of tales about Suibhne and St. Moling had been joined. Carney reached the conclusion that the episode of Suibhne, being accused of adultery and killed by St. Moling's cowherd, had been made up to prevent a saint from being accused of adultery. He demonstrated that at an earlier stage it was St. Moling who had been accused of such a sin, and to defend the saint's honour the motif was later transferred to Suibhne. He traced some of the stages of the legend of the death of Suibhne at the hand of Mongan and compared three different stories, the first having as its central idea Crón, Grácc's wife, tempting St. Moling. The saint prophesies that she will be raped. She has a child and her husband suspects St. Moling. Grácc is finally slain. The second version falls into the Threefold Death type. Grácc steals a cow St. Moling has given Gobbán as payment. St. Moling prophesies that he will die a threefold death and this inevitably happens; trying to escape his pursuers, Grácc is first wounded then falls off a tree into a fire and then drowns in a river.⁸⁹ In the next tale of Grácc's death, which is number 5 of the *Anecdota* poems, Suibhne finally appears and the episode is very similar to the one in *Buile Suibhne*. Grácc's wife gives Suibhne milk to drink. Like Potiphar's wife she accuses him to her husband. Grácc slays him while he is drinking the milk. St. Moling prophesies a threefold death. As we shall see, this theme appears in *ASTB*.

In the development of the story the central motif of the child disappears and there is a progressive movement from St. Moling to Suibhne. Suibhne, being unjustly accused of adultery, becomes St. Moling's substitute and of the original Threefold Death only "death by spearpoint" survives. Therefore "we have here a very interesting specimen of literary biology in which a story of an attempt to discredit a well-known saint's reputation for chastity (St. Moling) is changed by assimilation of extraneous elements into a story of how the Wild Man of the Woods (Suibhne) came to die."⁹⁰ To confirm this theory, it is also worth noting that in the *Life and Birth of St Moling*, which represents the main source of information on the legend of St. Moling,⁹¹ Suibhne is hardly mentioned as there is less than a paragraph which reveals the presence of Suibhne living near the saint:

§ 73 A madman and a fox (lived with him), also a wren and a little fly that used to buzz to him when he came from matins... § 75 ... but the wren killed the fly, then the fox killed the wren ... a cowherd killed the madman, namely Suibhne son of Colman.⁹²

⁸⁸ See J. G. O'Keeffe, *op. cit.*, p. XII; § 77-78, pp. 142-145.

⁸⁹ Kenneth Jackson, "The Motive of the Threefold Death in the Story of Suibhne Geilt", *op. cit.*, p. 540.

⁹⁰ Cf. James Carney, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-141.

⁹¹ Whitley Stokes, "The Life and Birth of St Moling", *Études Celtiques*, XXVII, (1906), pp. 257-312.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 303.

The fact that *Buile Suibhne* is associated with the Threefold Death category proves of great relevance and adds a new perspective to the interpretation of the middle-Irish composition.

In her study of the significance of this motif in Celtic tradition, Joan Radner⁹³ while noticing that “Threefold Death is...in Celtic tradition an explicitly Christian narrative device...the offence that results in the death prophecy is always committed by a *secular* figure against the laws or the clergy of the Church.” states what is central in *Buile Suibhne*: “in the conflict between secular and ecclesiastical power the victor inevitably is the church.”⁹⁴

This theme is also developed elsewhere in *ASTB* and proves that O’Brien was aware of it and recycled it through the unusual conversation held at Mrs Furriskey’s home. Gathered there, the characters amicably chat about what would be the best way to die. They give different examples that strongly recall the Threefold Death, death by fire, by water and by wounding, converting the final “by wounding” into a more specific “by gun” and finally decide that to die by water is less painful:

Oh, he was a terrible drink of water. Death by fire, you know, by God it’s no joke.
They tell me drowning is worse, Lamont said.
Do you know what it is, said Furriskey, you can drown me three times before you roast me. Yes, by God and six. Put your finger in a basin of water. What do you feel? Next to nothing. But put your finger in the fire!
It’s a different story. A very, very different story...
I’d rather live myself...but if I had to go I’d choose the gun. A bullet in the heart and you’re right...(ASTB, 155).

Even though O’Brien did not know of the debate about the theme of Threefold Death, which was developed after the publication of *ASTB*, he knew the motif, as is testified by the above-mentioned passage. Douglas Hyde in his *A Literary History of Ireland*, O’Brien’s course book at university, never mentioned it as such, but extensively reported the story of the High King Diarmaid and his contest with St. Ruadhain which inevitably led him to the triple death.⁹⁵ There the violation of a sacred sanctuary (Ruadhain’s monastery) and the opposition against the cleric eventually provoke the king’s death (by spear, by fire, by ale) and the ruin of

⁹³Joan N. Radner traces the motif in three specific types of tale: 1) In the Ancestors of the Uí Néill tales; 2) in Annals, regnal lists, to distinguish kings or chiefs who died violent deaths, often used as formulaic verse; 3) in the Wild Man of the Woods tales. *BS* and its Threefold Death fall into the third category. See “The Significance of the Threefold Death in Celtic Tradition”, in Patrick K. Ford, ed. *Celtic Folklore and Christianity, Studies in Memory of William Heist*, (Santa Barbara: McNally and Loftin, 1983), pp. 180-200.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁹⁵ It is also significant that the story of the Death of King Dermot was translated and published in *Silva Gadelica* by Standish H. O’Grady in the edition and translation of Irish manuscripts from which O’Brien often drew material both for his MA thesis and for *ASTB*. See *A Collection of Tales in Irish with Extracts Illustrating Persons and Places edited from MSS and translated by Standish H. O’Grady*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1892), pp. 77-88.

his kingdom. The original Threefold Death image of the doomed person often seeking refuge from flames in a vat of water or ale is ironically diminished by O'Brien into a "basin of water".

Ruth P. Lehman's linguistic study of *Buile Suibhne* reopened the discussion on its origin. She made a thorough, extensive study of the middle-Irish composition and offered another interpretative cue. She also noticed a certain degree of disconnection between the prose and poetry sections.⁹⁶ By analysing the language of the poems she devised a taxonomic table to consider the percentage of occurrences of early forms and realised, for instance, that poems § 6 and § 10, both presenting St. Ronan's curse, are of early dating and were part of *Buile Suibhne* from an early stage.

Among the early poems there are § 27 "The Man by the Wall Snores", a lay O'Brien worked on in his remake of *Buile Suibhne* in the "third rewriting" and which will be analysed later in this chapter, and § 40, the very well-known "Eulogy to Trees", which is the longest poem in *Buile Suibhne* and shows clear signs of the interpolation or addition of stanzas with different subject-matter. She also recorded that none of the poems referring to St. Moling belong to the earliest group, thus confirming Carney's supposition of St. Moling's tales having been added (XIth century) to the main corpus of the story. Lehman finally drew the hypothetical conclusion that *Buile Suibhne* was the result of the assembling of poems and prose sections belonging to different periods and put together by a crafty compiler who made up a story, fitting in pieces from different traditions. So she contradicted O'Keefe's hypothesis that there was a Celtic story in which Suibhne went mad because of the din of the battle, since lays § 6 and § 10, which recite St. Ronan's curse against Suibhne, must have been, on account of the presence of ancient verbal forms, essential parts of *Buile Suibhne* from the beginning and not later additions to a hypothetical Celtic story.

The linguistic analysis made by the Celtic philologist Umberto Rapallo,⁹⁷ the Italian translator of the middle-Irish composition, gives further confirmation of this theory. He lists and examines many Latin borrowings, calques and liturgical terms in *Buile Suibhne* which make up a consistent religious linguistic texture. In his opinion, *Buile Suibhne* is characterised by a fundamentally Christian religious inspiration as the text is scattered with frequent ascetic meditations and is influenced by clerical rhetoric and Christian hagiography. In order to assess the provenance of linguistic data he followed the hypothesis that native lexis, borrowings and calques from other languages all contributed to determine that cultural syncretism of Christian

⁹⁶ Ruth P. Lehman noted that sometimes information given in the prose passages (the early pursuit of Suibhne by Domhnall, the names of *Erenachs*, the detailed description of the vision on *Sliabh Fuaid* that drove him mad again, the conversation of headless trunks etc.) was not included in the poems and often a different distribution of prose passages implied a different use of linguistic registers. She found that the poems could stand by themselves while the prose sections functioned as a comment on the verses or made links with verses by making up narrative passages. See "A Study of the '*Buile Suibhne*', *Études Celtiques*, 6, (1953-54), *Études Celtiques*, 7, (1955), pp. 115-138.

⁹⁷ Umberto Rapallo, "Il lessico religioso medio irlandese della *Buile Suibhne*", *Studi Italiani di Linguistica Teorica ed Applicata*, 6, (1977), pp. 541-597.

and pagan religion, which is one of the most original aspects of the Christianisation of Ireland. To decode the cultural and linguistic models which interact in *Buile Suibhne*, he studied the exact typology of the borrowings and calques and distinguished between late and early borrowings with or without British mediation.

He says that the story of the middle-Irish composition pivots on the encounter/clash between two similar but different persons who interact with one another as in a chiasmus: St. Ronan and Suibhne, the first pursued/pursuer, the second pursuer/pursued. St. Ronan, for the love of his eternal Lord, crucifies his body by enduring persecutions; his miracles, nevertheless, drive Suibhne to madness while his curses provoke the vindication of God. On the other hand Suibhne, who prevents St. Ronan from settling on his land, who transfixes St. Ronan's bell and violently snatches the saint's psalter, becomes after a period of forced asceticism a prophet of superior knowledge, an interpreter of the Divine Word.

As the text centres on the consequences of the curse, an analysis of the occurrences of the use of this term in *Buile Suibhne* can shed more light on it. From a cursory examination it is evident that about 16 lexical items directly using *mallacht* or derived forms are employed. *Mallacht* is a borrowing from the Latin *maledictio* whereas a term not derived from Latin such as “*escáine* §13, *roesgcáoin* § 15, *roescaoin-siomh* § 49 (from *escáin*, old Ir. *escainid*)...”⁹⁸ is used only three times.⁹⁹ This is accounted for by the fact that *Buile Suibhne* is highly permeated by religious lexis semantically redetermined through Latin and the culture of monasteries. St. Ronan, Suibhne, the narrator, St. Moling all prefer to use *mallacht*, a Latin-imbued term, while *escaine* hardly occurs.¹⁰⁰

It is significant that Dottin, the author of the *Manuel de Moyen Irlandais*, in his 1913 review¹⁰¹ of the edition of *Buile Suibhne*, does not agree with its editor O’Keeffe and states:

Il me semble difficile de distinguer comme l’essaie J. O’ Keeffe, un apport chrétien ajouté à l’ancien recit païen. L’ inspiration de la légende est visiblement chrétienne. Elle serait donc de

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

⁹⁹ *Mallacht* occurs in § 5 (Narrator), §6, 9, 10 (St. Ronan), §16 (Domhnall), § 37,40, 45, 49, 67 (Suibhne), § 48 (Eolladhan), §67 (apparitions), § 82, 83 (St Moling); *Esgcaoine* occurs in § 13 (Narrator), § 15 (Domhnall), § 49 (Suibhne). This does not mean that *escaine* was not used by Christian communities. As Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha states in a personal communication there is evidence to show that churchmen performed a ritual described as *ord escaine*. This ritual involved the recital of an order of ‘psalms of *escaine*’ which is set out in the late seventh-century law text, *Cáin Adomnán*, Kuno Meyer, ed. (Oxford: Anecdota Oxoniensia 1905), § 32. What I wanted to emphasise following Rapallo’s definition of the history of the terms is that the lexis used in *BS* is highly “Christianised” and particularly as regards the curse there is a high percentage of occurrences of the term *mallacht*, a Latin borrowing [maledictio] of a Hebrew calque.

¹⁰⁰ When it does, it is in connection with Domhnall who tells of the fate of Suibhne being cursed by Ronan on the day of the battle of Mag Rath, with the narrator reporting the conversation between Suibhne’s kinsman Aongus the Stout and his men after the battle, and with Suibhne who recalls being cursed by St. Ronan. In all these cases the term is used by native secular characters.

¹⁰¹ G. Dottin, “*Buile Suibhne*”, *Revue Celtique*, 34, (1913), pp. 326-330.

formation plus recente que ne le suppose M. O'Keeffe et appartiendrait à ce groupe de recits épiques chrétiens dont la *Vie de Saint Cellach de Killala* offre un bon modèle...¹⁰²

But a further contribution towards a definition of *Buile Suibhne* as it is and towards a different interpretative perspective which might have exerted an influence on O'Brien, is represented by the image of a comic Suibhne. The only scholar who saw him as a pathetic being, ironically depicted as a lunatic who has lost any human characteristic, was N.K. Chadwick, who in "Geilt"¹⁰³ remarked:

Buile Suibhne [is] ...essentially in its present form a story designed to entertain us, a humorous masterpiece of the Irish *shannachie* or professional story-teller, who throughout is concerned to hold up to ridicule, albeit delicately, as Cervantes satirises his hero in the story of Don Quixote...

She considered the work, like *Aisling Mac Conglinne*, to be a parody of monastic power where the highly culpable behaviour of the clerics is ridiculed in a mock-heroic flogging of the protagonist. She proves her point by giving evidence of an utterly ridiculous Suibhne after he has gone mad on the battle-field, which is more evident in the prolix, redundant style of *The Battle of Mag Rath*, *Buile Suibhne*'s cognate story.

The Battle of Mag Rath presents us with the character of Suibhne seized by madness with an over-detailed and repetitive style, which O'Brien probably drew on when translating the corresponding passage of *Buile Suibhne*. There, as will later be demonstrated, he inflated the original text by adding chains of alliterative words and archaic turns of phrase and introducing comic effects.

Fits of giddiness came over him at the sight of the horrors... so that from the uproar of the battle, the frantic pranks of demons, and the clashing of arms, the sound of the heavy blows reverberating on the points of heroic spears and keen edges of swords, and the warlike borders of broad shields, the noble hero Suibhne was filled and intoxicated with tremor, horror, panic, dismay, fickleness, unsteadiness, fear, flightiness, giddiness, terror, and imbecility; so that there was not a joint of a member of him from foot to head which was not converted into a confused, shaking mass, from the effect of fear, and the panic of dismay. His feet trembled, as if incessantly shaken by the force of a stream; his arms and various edged weapons fell from him, the power of his hands having been enfeebled and relaxed around them, and rendered incapable of holding them. The inlets of hearing were expanded and quickened by the horrors of lunacy; the vigour of his brain in the cavities of his head was destroyed by the clamour of the conflict; his heart shrunk within him the panic of dismay; his speech became faltering from the giddiness of imbecility; his very soul fluttered with

¹⁰² "It seems difficult to distinguish as Mr O'Keeffe tries to do, a Christian contribution added to the ancient heathen story. The inspiration of the legend is certainly Christian. It would therefore be of later origin than is assumed by Mr. O'Keeffe and it would belong to the group of epic Christian tales of which *The Life of St Cellach of Killala* offers a good model..." (my translation) op. cit., p. 329.

¹⁰³ Nora K. Chadwick, "Geilt", *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 5, 2, (1942), p. 108.

hallucination, and with many and various phantasms, for that (i.e. *the soul*) was the root and true basis of fear itself.¹⁰⁴ (Italics added)

The Suibhne finally emerging from the *Battle* text is a cowardly, hallucinating character, flitting and fluttering from the shoulders to the helmets of the heroes joining battle. What happens to him is then unpredictable and raises laughter and compassion for a man who ultimately behaves like a bird¹⁰⁵

*When he was seized with this frantic fit, he made a supple, very light leap, and where he alighted was on the fine boss of the shield of the hero next to him; and he made a second leap as he perched on the vertex of the crest of the helmet of the same hero, who, however, did not feel him, though the chair on which he rested was an uneasy one. Wherefore he came to an imbecile, irrational determination, namely to turn his back on mankind, and to herd with deer, run along with the showers, and flee with the birds, and to feast in wildernesses. Accordingly he made a third, active, very light leap, and perched on the top of the sacred tree which grew on the smooth surface of the plain... but it happened that, instead of avoiding it, he went back into the same field of conflict, through the giddiness and imbecility of his hallucination; but it was not the earth he reached, but alighted on the shoulders of men and the tops of their helmets.*¹⁰⁶(Italics added)

From an examination of these passages taken from *The Battle of Mag Rath* it is clear that the Suibhne presented here is very far from the image of the penitent levitating man who is going to be a singer of nature and who will celebrate a mystic union with God through his existence in the woods. Suibhne has lost both his heroic and sylvan dignity.

So it is possible that O'Brien perceived Suibhne's pathetic aspect amplified through the pages of *The Battle of Mag Rath* and through its overflowing prose style.

Seamus Heaney, when asked to reconsider the conditions under which he approached the translation of *Buile Suibhne* also detected "the hilarious strain" as the main feature of Flann O'Brien's Suibhne. He acknowledged that *Buile Suibhne* was very well known because of Flann O'Brien's hilarious incorporation of its central character into the apparatus of his *ASTB*¹⁰⁷

O'Brien's penchant for the ludicrous and grotesque even when dealing with the poet-bird-man Suibhne could not go unnoticed and Angeline H. Kelly in her article "Heaney's

¹⁰⁴ John O'Donovan, *The Banquet of Dun na-ngeadh and the Battle of Mag Rath, An Ancient Historical Tale*, Now first published in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, with a translation and notes, (Dublin: For the Irish Archaeological Society, MDCCCXLII (1842), pp. 231-233. Also quoted in Nora K. Chadwick, op. cit., p. 115.

¹⁰⁵ Nora K. Chadwick, op. cit., p. 108.

¹⁰⁶ John O'Donovan, op. cit., p. 235. See Nora K. Chadwick, op. cit., pp. 115-116. See also her comment on Suibhne's behaviour: "In the passage just quoted (also) it is clear that the author is giving rein to his humour. The figurative diction relating to Suibhne's flight as a bird, and his departure from the battle, have set the imagination to work, and the hero is humorously depicted as perching on the helmet of his neighbour, and on a tree which was regarded as safe from the missiles of battle". Ibid., p.117.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Seamus Heaney, "Notes on Translating *Buile Suibhne*", Rosanna Warren, ed., *The Art of Translation, Voices from the Field*, (Boston: Northeastern University, 1989), pp. 13-20.

Sweeney: Poet as Version-Maker” suggested that O’Brien may have come to the same conclusion as Chadwick in “Geilt”.¹⁰⁸ O’Brien must have had the vision of a miserable being, grotesquely pursued by Christian monks, reduced to a heap of rattling bones, raving on the branch of a tree.

This hypothesis does not necessarily imply that *Buile Suibhne* is in its present state a comic work, but that the redactor might have inserted in his compilation glimpses of irony to highlight the cruelty of religious holders of power, who interfered with native power by imposing a code unknown to worshippers of nature and magic.¹⁰⁹

Nora K. Chadwick’s work on the *geilt* also opened up other perspectives of interpretation and created interest in the figure of Suibhne in Irish culture as a holder of supernatural knowledge; Suibhne the original Celtic king “came to be seen as a *file*, anchorite, as a prophet [...], and a threat to the warrior-function in society”.¹¹⁰

Now there can be no doubt that not only in his poetry, but also in his way of life Suibhne has a great deal in common with the anchorites of the early Church. He resembles them in his excessive asceticism, in his recluse habits, and simple abnegation of all property and all rights, in his spiritual concentration and in his extreme mobility. He is a friend of anchorites, though his own calling seems to be penitential rather than contemplative... On the other hand ...Suibhne... shares many of the characteristics of the earlier *filid*. We may point to their feather dress, reminiscent of the *tugen*, or feather cloak, of the *file*, and to their mobile character... But the feature which Suibhne shares most completely with the *filid* and the old heathen world, is the gift of poetry. ...Moreover his is exactly the kind of poetry which we should expect to find as survivals of the druidical tradition [...] which was largely dependent on oral poetry, and associated with deep woods and outdoor life.¹¹¹

Although Pádraig Ó Riain did not specifically deal with *Buile Suibhne*, he thematically grouped all the literary references to madmen according to three main categories: occasions of madness, state of madness and occasions of restoration to sanity.¹¹² Comparing Suibhne with other *geilts*, he concluded that what ultimately connects the exponents of this scheme is that they are all either people “who having occupied a certain position, [are] deprived of it or else aspire to a certain position.” Their common denominator is “the hero’s separation from wanted

¹⁰⁸ Chadwick’s article appeared in 1942 in Scotland so O’Brien could not have been influenced by it during the composition of *ASTB*. See Angeline H. Kelly, “Heaney’s Sweeney: The Poet as Version-Maker”, *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 65, 3, (Summer 1986), p. 303.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

¹¹⁰ Pádraig Ó Riain, “A Study of the Irish Legend of the Wild Man”, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-206.

¹¹¹ Cf. Nora K. Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p.150. See also John Ryan, *Irish Monasticism*, (1931), (Dublin: Four Courts, 1992), p. 408. “Severe bodily austerity is a marked feature of the Irish monastic system... The quantity of food and drink is reduced to the barest minimum ...Battling with sleep was a common form of asceticism... Added to these mortifications were exposure to heat and cold, labours undertaken to wear down the body, various individual exercises of asceticism voluntarily undertaken...Austerities of all sorts were expected to accompany [...] periods of lonely contemplation -fasts, vigils, exposure, nakedness, self-inflicted penances.” They are also characterised by zeal for study. “Such a union of hard study and hard discipline is unique [and] is to be sought in the native schools of druids, *fáthi*, *filid*, bards, which preceded Christianity”.

¹¹² In his three categories he listed 1) the curse of a *sacerdos*, a battlefield experience, the consumption of contaminated food or drink and the loss of a lover 2) the conditions shared by madmen, and specifically by Suibhne: the madman takes to the wilderness, the madman perches on trees, collects firewood, is naked, hairy, covered with feathers or clothed in rags, levitates and/or performs great leaps, is very swift, is restless and travels great distances, experiences hallucinations, follows a special diet 3) the intervention of a *sacerdos*, the consumption of “blessed food” or drink and the act of coition. Pádraig Ó Riain, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-85.

status”¹¹³ An interesting result of his research is that it is not the battlefield experience that provokes madness, but the sacerdotal curse: “the sacerdotal curse is practically a constant.” Thus he endorses all previous critical and philological studies which do not agree with O’Keeffe in dismissing the Christian parts. In a subsequent article,¹¹⁴ quoting from James Carney, he made an interesting point and suggested that “*Buile Suibhne* remained excluded from the canon of *literati* until the seventeenth century”, and attributed the paternity of *Buile Suibhne* to a monastic scriptorium. The conclusion of his article on *Buile Suibhne*:

In view of our great debt to the monasteries for the preservation and development of the Suibhne legend it is with a certain irony that we must view the statement of the modern editor of *Buile Suibhne* that “the distinctly Christian passages could be omitted without any serious distortions of the tale.”¹¹⁵

From the hypotheses considered so far two different trends emerge - one that assumes the existence of a Celtic nucleus on to which the compiler grafted the Christianised story centred on St. Ronan’s curse (O’ Keeffe) and one which, considering the texts as the final result of a long process of interaction between subsequent compilations and interpolations, studies them synchronically as final linguistic data in relation to the period of reception of the MS without pursuing a hypothetic Ur-text but verifying concrete data.

As regards *Buile Suibhne* and O’Brien, at this stage it would be useful to consider which critical sources on this text were available to O’Brien in 1934-5. Certainly the main guide-line was the edition and translation by O’Keeffe. As indicated by Ó Hainle Hyde and his *Early Irish Literary History*, Gerard Murphy’s “The Origin of Irish Nature Poetry” (1931) and his *Duanaire Finn* were part of O’Brien’s curriculum at University College Dublin, and were also material for his thesis. He might also have read Kenneth Jackson’s *Early Celtic Nature Poetry*, published in Cambridge in 1935, but certainly not the Jackson and Carney of the challenging exchange (1940-55), or Chadwick or Lehman’s articles, which were published in 1942 and 1955 respectively.

It is also important to recall that when O’Brien undertook the study of nature poetry for his MA thesis the only philological-critical study of *Buile Suibhne* he could make use of was the two O’Keeffe editions (1913 and 1931).¹¹⁶ And as confirmed by the results of subsequent philological works which contradict O’Keeffe and demonstrate that there are two opposing forces within the pages of *Buile Suibhne*, those of *filid* and clerics trying to invade each other’s

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹¹⁴ Pádraig Ó Riain, “The Materials of Provenance of ‘Buile Shuibhne’”, *Éigse* XV, (1973-74), p. 174.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹¹⁶ O’Brien, probably, used both as a reference for his translation.

domain,¹¹⁷ O'Brien understood, as will be shown in his translation, the contrast operating in the text and noticed that the power of clerics had enslaved Suibhne within the framework of Christian culture.

In this context it would be useful to reconsider what has been brought up by recent studies as the nativist-antinativist "querelle"¹¹⁸. According to Kim McCone,

scholars like Myles Dillon, D.A. Binchy, Kenneth Jackson, Proinsias MacCana and Seán Ó Coiléan have in various ways discussed medieval Irish society, law and letters... stressing the conservatism of the 'tradition', its fundamentally oral transmission and continuity with a Pagan past rooted in Celtic and Indo-European antiquity. While the role of Christianity and literacy in this process could hardly be ignored, the tendency was to minimise their 'impact' upon 'secular' genres.¹¹⁹

Following James Carney's lead, McCone states that: "it is a fact that what have come down to us from the period in question are exclusively the written products of the monastically educated." As, therefore, the transmission of ancient tales was not neutrally filtered by clerics, O'Brien's perception of the tension of the Christian and Pagan cultures in the text, as it has come down to us, certainly anticipated more modern approaches to *Buile Suibhne*.

Acallamh na Senórach (The Colloquy of the Ancient Men)

Besides *Buile Suibhne* another work, *Acallamh na Senórach*, must be examined as it preserves a reference to St. Moling and Suibhne, both evoked in a prophesy by Finn mac Cumhaill. *Acallamh na Senórach* is definitely a landmark amongst twelfth-century imaginative manuscripts, and, as it has been handed down to us, a successful "combination of antiquity and innovation."¹²⁰ As its very title declares, it makes dialectic confrontation and storytelling the actual fabric of its text by centring on words and dialogue. Composed in the last quarter of the 12th century, it relates the meeting of the survivors of the Fianna, Caoilte and Oisín, with St. Patrick and his acolytes, and as they wander over Ireland together, Caoilte tells St. Patrick the

¹¹⁷ See Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1991), pp. 6-7, p. 35. Cf. also Proinsias MacCana who, though assuming that: "it is well known that Early Irish churchmen were remarkably liberal and sympathetic in their attitude to pagan tradition..." admitted that "this is not to say that the monastic recording of native tradition was free of censorship, and there is in fact clear indication of such censorship..." Proinsias MacCana, "Conservation and Innovation in Early Celtic Literature", *Études Celtiques*, 13, p. 99.

¹¹⁸ Kim McCone, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹²⁰ Gerard Murphy, "Acallamh na Senórach", in Myles Dillon, ed., *Irish Sagas*, (Cork: The Mercier Press), 1968, p.122.

legends of the Fianna and of the woods, hills and lakes where they have proved their valour in the manner of a *Dinnsenchas*.¹²¹ When they meet:

fear [falls] on the [clerics] before the tall men with their huge wolf-dogs that accompanied them, for they were not people of one epoch or of one time with the clergy... Patrick [takes] the aspergillum to sprinkle holy water on the great men; a thousand legions of demons...into the outer borders of the region...depart in all directions...¹²²

Only after they are exorcised and purified, can the storytelling start and the dreadful pagan feats of the Fianna tradition be revealed to the churchmen. Throughout *Acallamh*, as a coda to the narrations, St. Patrick often hesitates, as he does not know if he ought to indulge in the pleasure of listening to their stories. His guardian angels reassure him, or rather bid him to record “what they (Caoilte and Ossian) say...on poets’ staves...for it will be a delight to gatherings of people and to noblemen in later times to listen to those tales.”¹²³ Thus storytelling and its social function finally get divine approval. As J.F. Nagy¹²⁴ suggests in a study on *Acallamh*, St Patrick’s comment after he has been told a story: “that storytelling is complicated” (as *gabhlánach in scelaigeacht sin*, ll 3666-67), later taken up by the narrator “storytelling is a complicated matter” in *Acallamh na Senórach*, can be seen as a metatextual interpretation of the whole work. “The first mention of *Acallamh* occurs in a Recension of *Dinnsenchus Erenn* (*The Place Lore of Ireland*). In that Recension a poem recited by Caoilte is said to have been recited in the course of *Acallamh*.”¹²⁵ This links *Acallamh* with place lore and sees its origin as deriving from *dinnsenchus* literature.

What makes this twelfth-century composition distinctive is its framework and even though the material narrated through about 250 stories is traditional it is the way in which the web of its storytelling is conjured that renders it “a new untraditional creation.”¹²⁶ Its stories are cyclical, redundant and casual, and tend to be developed around the same pattern: “emergence from obscurity...(of the hero), accomplishment ...and return to obscurity (or decay).”¹²⁷

Consistently with the idea of renewability implicit in the tales, *Acallamh* itself as it has been preserved lacks a conclusion, as if it could start all over again.¹²⁸ It was edited and translated by Standish H. O’Grady¹²⁹ in *Silva Gadelica* 1892. The earliest extant Recension (c.

¹²¹ See Nora K. Chadwick, *The Celts*, (1971), (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 279.

¹²² Standish H. O’Grady, “The Colloquy”, op. cit., p. 103.

¹²³ Gerard Murphy, op. cit, p. 128.

¹²⁴ J. F. Nagy, “Compositional Concerns in *Acallamh na Senórach*”, in Donnchadh O Corrain, Liam Breatnach, Kim McCone, eds., *Sages, Saints and Storytellers*, (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), pp. 149-158.

¹²⁵ Gerard Murphy, *Ossianic Lore and Romantic Tales of Medieval Ireland*, (Dublin: At the Sign of Three Candles, 1955), p. 24.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

¹²⁷ Cf. J. F. Nagy, op. cit., p. 150.

¹²⁸ For the idea of cyclicity and renewability, see *ibid.*, p. 150.

¹²⁹ Standish H. O’Grady, *Silva Gadelica, a Collection of Tales in Irish*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1892).

1200) of the *Acallamh na Senórach*, portions of which are contained in the fifteenth-century *Book of Lismore*, was edited by Whitley Stokes¹³⁰ in 1900, and by Nessa Ní Sheaghda¹³¹ in 1942-45. The second portion was edited by Douglas Hyde in *Agallamh Bheag* in 1924 and, significantly enough, was part of the third-year course of O'Brien's curriculum at U. C. D.¹³² As pointed out by Cathal G. Ó Háinle, in the course of the end of the 12th century a great expansion of Fionn material took place and all this culminated... in the writing of the *Acallamh na Senórach* which fixed Finn's literary background.¹³³

In particular *Acallamh na Senórach* is included in the present chapter as it very likely suggested to O'Brien that Finn was to cover the role of *shannachie* at the Red Swan Hotel and offered a structural scheme for a central part of *ASTB*, as will be explained below.

It must be said that the first to note this connection between Suibhne and *Acallamh na Senórach* was O'Keeffe himself in his introduction: "He (Suibhne) is mentioned in the *Acallamh na Senórach* in connection with St. Moling and Ros Brocc..."¹³⁴ and it was taken up and emphasised by Dottin in his review of O'Keeffe's edition and translation of *Buile Suibhne*.¹³⁵ The link between these two works is offered by St. Moling, the levitating prophet, who assures Suibhne of his protection.

In *Buile Suibhne* St. Moling has structural, cultural-thematic functions and maintained them even when *Buile Suibhne* was incorporated in *ASTB*. His relevance to the novel, nevertheless, is shown in a macrotextual link outside its pages, by his presence in *Acallamh na Senórach*, a text which is far from the semiotic world of *Buile Suibhne*.

Both Cathal G. Ó Háinle in "Fionn and Suibhne in *At Swim-Two-Birds*" and Eva Wappling¹³⁶ in "*Four Irish Legendary Figures in 'At Swim-Two-Birds'*" have independently reached the same idea that a passage of *Acallamh* might have suggested to O'Brien the image of Finn as story-teller.

It also represents a successful example of epistemic readaptation of Irish tales to a pre-established Christian canon. *Acallamh na Senórach* has Oisín and Caoilte telling St. Patrick about the glorious Fianna's past but both of them have to subject Finn to Christian belief in order to give the hero credibility. Finn, "the great, big, the God-Finn", who by means of magic beats enemies and foresees the future, must fit in the new cultural perspective set up by Christianity for the whole Celtic world. Having been recalled from the ancient past he even has

¹³⁰ Whitley Stokes, *Irische Texte*, IV, Vierte Serie, (I), (Leipzig: Heft, 1900).

¹³¹ Nessa ni Sheaghda, *Acallamh na Senórach*, (Dublin; Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1942-45).

¹³² See Cathal G. Ó Háinle, op. cit., p.17.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 15.

¹³⁴ G. K. O'Keeffe, Introduction, op. cit., p. XXI.

¹³⁵ Dottin, op. cit., pp.329. Gerard Murphy also noticed this link. See *Duanaire Finn* III, Introduction, Irish Texts Society, (Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland Ltd., 1953), § 3-6, pp. XII-LXI.

¹³⁶ Eva Wappling, op. cit., p. 10.

to “make (this) act of belief, and by the same” has to gain Heaven. In one of his prophecies he links St. Moling and Suibhne together:

under his knowledge-tooth he put his thumb, and the third greatest revelation that was ever shown to him it was now that it took place. He said therefore: ‘four chosen seers they are that after me shall arise in Ireland, who for the King of Heaven and of Earth [...] shall practise their confession and set forth their doctrine ...As the fourth ...will come Moling ...and a battle which in the latter time will be fought in Ireland, that of Mag Rath or ‘Moira’ namely: Suibhne (surnamed geilte or ‘the madman’) that shall escape out of that battle ...¹³⁷

Finn continues his prophecy and gives more details about the place where St. Moling will build his church and “hither out of the north from Moira the flighty man (S.) shall come: unto the cleric on a propitious morning”.¹³⁸ In her analysis Eva Wappling points out another important connection between *Acallamh na Senórach* and *Buile Suibhne*. She found that in *Acallamh* the toponym *Snámh dhá Én*¹³⁹ represents the place where, according to Caoilte, Finn began to believe in the coming of Christianity:

“Where was it that Finn believed actually, or did he ever?”... “It was on Druimh diammhair or ‘The secret ridge’ which now men call druim da en or ‘Two bird ridge’ upon the Shannon; and the origin of his belief was the rehabilitation of Bodhb’s daughter Finnin, who...had killed her own husband, Conan, whereas it was Conan and Ferdoman that had slain each other” ... a bowl of pale gold was brought to Finn, he washed his white hands, and under his knowledge-tooth put his thumb. The true was revealed to him...the false hidden from his ken...there it was that Finn made this act of belief, and by the same time gained Heaven... Woe for the Fian-warrior that heard the tidings when we came to *snámh dá én*: slaughter of Conan...Ferdoman’s slaughter too...¹⁴⁰

From the occurrence of Finn’s prophecy in *Acallamh* and particularly the overlapping of the presence of *Snámh dá Én* both in *Acallamh na Senórach* and *Buile Suibhne* as the place where Finn and Suibhne respectively had their Christian revelation, Wappling and Ó Háinle deduced that O’Brien had been inspired by them for his reduplication pattern. Such linking of St. Moling and Suibhne in Finn’s prophecy may have given the writer the idea of connecting them in *ASTB* by entrusting Finn with the task of narrating the tale of *Buile Suibhne* and introducing Suibhne and St. Moling into the texture of *ASTB*.

But the details later added to the prophecy shed more light on why O’ Brien chose them and gave Finn and Sweeney leading structural positions in *ASTB*’s different narrative levels.

¹³⁷ Standish H. O’Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, pp. 169-70.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹³⁹ From the toponym *Snámh Dá Én*, O’Brien derived the title *At Swim-Two-Birds*. In the *Metrical Dindshencas*, its origin is thus explained: “*Snám Dá Én*, whence comes the name? ...The druid told ...that they were Buide and Luan, in the shape of birds. The next day they came and swam upon the Shannon, and Estiu came to meet them. Nar came ...and made a cast at the birds and slew them both at one shot. So *Snám Dá Én* gets its name from the swimming of the birds thereon...” See Edward Gwynn, ed., *Metrical Dindshencas*, Todd Lecture Series, XI, part IV, (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1924), p. 351.

¹⁴⁰ Standish H. O’Grady, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Finn's foreseeing the "propitious morning" on which Suibhne alighted in Teach Moling and met the saint has a cultural-historical weight, often ignored by critics, in that St. Moling fixes Suibhne's poetry on vellum. Caoilte's recalling of *drúimh dá éin*, (which Eva Wappling confirms as being linked with *Snámh dá Én*¹⁴¹) as the place where Finn had his conversion, cannot but be the source for Suibhne's change of faith in the same place, central to the germinal organisation of *ASTB* as it gave the novel its title.

At this point a slightly different turn must be given to Wappling's interesting consideration. All the characters are seers and so deserve the same prestige given to *filidh*: Finn, the seer *par excellence* with his magic thumb and his tooth of knowledge, Suibhne and St. Moling who share the ability to foresee the future.¹⁴² These qualities entitle them to the same predominant role in *ASTB* as *filidh* in early Irish culture and so O'Brien linked them on both a paradigmatic and syntagmatic axis. 1) Finn, holder of the power of oral tradition, introduces the tale of Mad Sweeny and represents the ancient *shannachie* who by orally reciting his lore acts as a catalyst of popular attention. 2) St. Moling symbolises and controls the moment of transition from oral to written culture. 3) Suibhne embodies the myth of the poet exiled by the human community and draws strength for his poetic composition from physical-spiritual unity with God and nature.

Eva Wappling's emphasis on the role of *shannachie* can be extended from the Finn-Suibhne-Moling relationship of Finn's prophecy in *Acallamh* to the whole of *ASTB* and specifically to the role of Finn and Suibhne as representatives of a lost heroic world.

As we have already remarked, *Buile Suibhne* has three functional roles in *ASTB* and is found in each narrative level. A) As a translation, it is introduced as an oral narration, after the characters rebel by drugging their author Trellis (2nd - 3rd level). The old Finn takes over and tells of Suibhne and his painful poetic inspiration.¹⁴³ B) Suibhne adapted into Sweeny is extrapolated from his medieval context and introduced into the student's narrative (1st level) C) *Buile Suibhne* is evoked and some episodes are relived in the three re-writings set up by Orlick, Trellis's illegitimate heir, to take his revenge on Trellis's abuse of power.

¹⁴¹ As concerns the title *At Swim-Two-Birds*, according to P. L. Henry: "[it] is a daring attempt to represent the Gaelic place-name *Snámh-dá-Én* in English; daring because the relation between the elements *Swim*, *Two* and *Birds* is left unexpressed. There are many Irish place-names with the internal element *da*, which in Modern Irish is always taken to represent the Irish numeral *dá* =2. But in origin the element *dá* may be the mark of the old genitive plural (*inda*) which would yield to *At Swim-Of-The-Birds* ...Another daring feature of the anglicized place-name is *Swim* (rather than *Swimming*) for *Snám*." Cf. "The Structure of Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*", *Irish University Review*, 20, 1, (Spring 1990), p. 35.

¹⁴² St. Moling knows that Suibhne will come to Teach Moling and that he will conquer Heaven...Suibhne, like Eolladhan, the other madman, can prophesy his death and has knowledge of what time it is in Rome.

¹⁴³ A) His tale is interrupted three times by Trellis's characters who comment on the story of *BS* and compare Suibhne's poetry to that of the poetaster Jem Casey. Once his role as the narrator of the *BS* is over, Finn disappears from *ASTB*. B) Trellis's characters meet him in flesh and blood in the wood while they are on their way to see Orlick, as yet unborn (3rd level), the progeny "of the quasi illusory type" of Trellis as a result of Sheila Lamont's rape. Having discovered Orlick's literary talent, they persuade him to write a "torture" tale. C) Here we have three attempts at writing which take up themes and episodes from *BS*. In the last one the revenge is taken and Orlick gets all the characters (and Sweeny is

Therefore it can be demonstrated that the compositional method of the tripartite scheme as regards the distribution of *Buile Suibhne* in *ASTB* was drawn from the compositional ability of the anonymous author of *Acallamh*. As is easily detectable from this text, at the first level Finn narrates *Buile Suibhne* to the people at the Red Swan; at the second level, after he has been evoked by Finn, Suibhne in flesh and blood acts on the same narratological axis as the other characters. At the third level the three manuscripts written by Orlick show the parodic remakes of *Buile Suibhne* where Trellis undergoes the same physical tortures as Suibhne after St. Ronan's curse. Even this third compositional device used by O'Brien to recycle *Buile Suibhne* in *ASTB* mainly derives from the way in which oral story-telling, as is deftly shown in *Acallamh*, undergoes limitations when diverted into the written form.

In *Acallamh na Senórach* Caoilte is very old and his main concern is to revive the fame of Finn and his Fianna. As J.F. Nagy notes: "Caoilte the *shannachie* recycles and recreates the tradition in which he played such a central role, and for which he now functions as a narratological saviour" and a catalyst of the meeting of two cultures.¹⁴⁴ While he refers to the past there is always some tangible object (a weapon, a spear which once belonged to the heroes) or a place, a well, a hill which immediately brings Finn or his warriors forward to the present. Particularly when Caoilte takes leave of St. Patrick and heads towards the *sid* he is involved in a fight with Lir, at the same narratological level as the old heroes evoked from the past. So not only is he miraculously in direct contact with St. Patrick, filling a gap of two hundred and fifty years, he is also able to act in the timeless dimension of the *sid*. Caoilte's intervention results in two fundamental events within the epistemology of *Acallamh*. In the meeting of these two dimensions Caoilte commutes between past and present to carry out his mission of renovating the ancient tradition of Finn and by doing so he restores his physical power and revives the Fianna. St Patrick, comforted by the advice of his three guardian angels, orders his scribe to write down these tales for the pleasure of posterity; but in the process of conveying these tales Caoilte has to face the reality that Fenian heroic deeds no longer have the same value; they must be renewed, changed by contact, contaminated by the culture of the receiver St. Patrick.

So in *ASTB* we have Finn who, like Caoilte, retrieves an old tale from the past (Suibhne). His audience is the Red Swan characters (1) who, like St. Patrick, come centuries after their *shannachie*. In this way the paradigm of evoking heroes from the past and of putting them on the same syntagmatic axis as the contemporary audience is applied to *ASTB*. Neither St. Patrick nor the Red Swan characters share the cultural premises of their narrator and their

among them) to hold a trial to decide on the fate of Trellis. Eventually the rebellious characters go up in smoke. On the last page of *ASTB* we still significantly find Sweeny returned to madness, on a tree, as in *Buile Suibhne*.

¹⁴⁴ I am readapting a quotation, applied to Caoilte, the ever-green recycled hero, who commutes between different worlds. See J. F. Nagy, *op. cit.*, p.154.

response is negative. None of them accept the ancient values without superimposing their own cultural background on the old tales. While in *Acallamh* we have Caoilte opening up a well dear to the Fianna and giving it to St. Patrick to use in baptism, in *ASTB*, while listening to the story about Suibhne (2) and his beautiful poetry, the characters interrupt Finn, celebrate Jem Casey, a working man poet, with his proletarian contrasting poems, and juxtapose them to *Buile Suibhne*.¹⁴⁵ But as happens in story-telling, Caoilte's/Finn's function of narrating/evoking the past is taken over by Caoilte/Orlick (3) who recycles the story of *Buile Suibhne* and by writing a curse-story makes his father relive the painful and sorrowful experience of Suibhne.

Acallamh must have been at the centre of O'Brien's interests as it welds together "folk-motifs, mythological motifs, warrior motifs, *dinn-senchus* motifs...in a single whole."¹⁴⁶ It certainly functioned as an inspiring model for a novel like *ASTB*, whose basic plan is to show, emphasise and criticise the way in which ancient Celtic tales were being and had been transmitted to Irish people through the three stages by which *Buile Suibhne* develops and unfolds itself within *ASTB: translation, oral narration and written readaptations*. This process entails the ever-present risk of losing the original cultural values, as is clearly admitted both by the anonymous compiler of *Acallamh* and by St. Patrick's guardian angels themselves in *Acallamh*: "No more than a third of their stories do those ancient warriors tell, by reason of forgetfulness and lack of memory."¹⁴⁷ In this context Cathal G. Ó Háinle says: "Two primary sources for his unpublished thesis *Nádúir-fhilíocht na Gaedhilge (Irish Nature Poetry)* which he submitted in August 1934, were *Buile Suibhne* and *the Fiannaíocht*...In the same context it is also extremely significant that the texts of *The Career/ Life of Ceallach* and of the *Colloquy of the Ancient Men* used for the thesis were those edited by O'Grady in *Silva Gadelica*."¹⁴⁸ But what really helps to establish the centrality of Finn as a nostalgic *shannachie* and as an abused representative of heroic Celtic times is the very significant presence of "Finn's Lament". There Finn laments that he shares the same unhappy fate with Suibhne, The Children of Lir and St. Ceallach and for it blames the book-poets and story-tellers.

There are three main points distinguishing *Acallamh* which are transferred to the mythic structural organisation of *ASTB*: the gap dividing heroic past from changed present; the contrast between the cyclic nature of ancient Irish story-telling¹⁴⁹ and the transition from oral

¹⁴⁵ Shanahan recites A PINT OF PLAIN IS YOUR ONLY MAN, Jem Casey the poet himself gives out THE GIFT OF GOD IS A WORKIN' MAN. (*ASTB*, 77, 121)

¹⁴⁶ Gerard Murphy also mentions: "lyric poetry, ballad poetry, and learned poetry in a single whole", "Acallamh na Senórach", op. cit., p. 128.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁴⁸ Cathal G. Ó Háinle, op. cit., p.18.

¹⁴⁹ Nagy uses the term "cyclicity" with reference to storytelling as opposed to the linearity of Christian stories and history, op. cit., p.115.

to written form¹⁵⁰ partly as the result of loss of memory and the basic superimposition of Christian codes on heroic tales. To confirm the assumption that *Acallamh* is a structural source together with *Buile Suibhne* we have the thematic link of Finn and Suibhne who are, in a way, victims of clerics, and the knowledge that they were valuable source material for his MA.

Small wonder, said Finn, that Finn is without honour in the breast of a sea-blue book, Finn that is twisted and trampled and tortured for the weaving of a teller's book web. Who but a book-poet would dishonour the God-big Finn for the sake of a gap-worded story? Who could have the Saint Ceallach carried off by his four acolytes and he feeble and thin from his Lent-fast, laid in the timbers of an old boat, hidden for a night in a hollow tree and slaughtered without mercy in the morning, his shrivelled body to be torn by a wolf and a scaldcrow and the Kite of Cluain Eo? Who could think to turn the children of a king into white swans...changing the fat white legs of a maiden into plumes and troubling her body with shameful eggs? Who could put a terrible madness on the head of Sweeny for the slaughter of a single Lent-gaunt cleric, to make him live in tree-tops and roost in the middle of a yew perished to the marrow without company of women ... Who but a story-teller? Indeed it is true that there has been ill-usage to the men of Erin from the book-poets of the world and dishonour to Finn... (*ASTB*, 19-20)

His Lament could very well be a synthetic manifesto of the whole of *ASTB* as the characters involved in it are all victims of narrators; but it is no coincidence that it is Finn, Suibhne and St. Cellach who are all victims of religion and of books.¹⁵¹ Now only Finn, the old representative of the glorious past of the Fianna, whose power was diminished by the Christian story-tellers, can take up their defence. From the pages of *ASTB* he polemically attacks the "story book tellers" for the infamous destiny they create for their paper phantoms. This appears from the published text of *ASTB* but there is also another fragment, which was originally part of Finn's Lament:

What makes me mad, said Finn, is a book full of history...What makes me mad with the anger is Patrick that came from far away to badger Oisín of the Fian of Finn Lent-boned Patrick of the acolytes and the generous nuns the hero with the crooked spear. Where was cornyellowed Finn that he had not a restraining thumb on every shore of the eight shores of Erin against the coming of the sanctified stranger?¹⁵²

In the AMS manuscript of the novel, there is a slightly different version from the final one, from which some parts were excised for reasons of economy or self-censorship. Oisín and St. Patrick are recalled by Finn and *Acallamh* stands out from Finn's Lament with the same dignity as *Buile Suibhne*, *The Children of Lir* and *The Career/ Life of St Ceallach*. This adds

¹⁵⁰ Very often St. Patrick, after the end of a story, asks his scribe Brogan to write down the content: "but by thee be it written on tabular staffs of poets, and in ollaves' words; for to the companies and nobles of the latter time to give ear to these stories will be for a pastime", "The Colloquy" in *Silva Gadelica.*, p.108; "be that tale written by thee", 'tis a good story thou hast told; and where is scribe Brogan?... "By thee be written down all that Caoilte hath uttered", p.122; "be that tale written down by thee, so that to the chiefs of the world's latter time it prove a diversion", p. 127.

¹⁵¹ The first as representative of the heroic past ill-treated by St. Patrick, the second as condemned by St. Ronan's curse and St. Ceallach pursued by his former tutor.

¹⁵²AMS, p. 24.

further value if it is considered that with the exception of the *Children of Lir* (as will be demonstrated) all the works mentioned are extensively or intensively reworked on and parodied in *ASTB*. These lines, deleted in the final version, explain why O'Brien preferred to avoid including this passage from the text, the attack against the church representative St. Patrick, (an institution in himself) being too overt.¹⁵³

To the sets of parallels already outlined between *Acallamh*, *Buile Suibhne* and *ASTB*, we must add the journey¹⁵⁴ through the wood of two pilgrims, the Good Fairy and the Pooka, who go to the baptism of the newborn Orlick and on the way meet strange characters, coming out of the pages of different literary traditions. As in the *Acallamh* the narrator O'Brien often refers to the "colloquy" the two parties are engaged in, and also alludes to the lays and poems with which Caoilte delighted his listener on his journey with Patrick and the scribe "to seek the hills, spaces and landmarks...where my friends were with me". Patrick seeks to convert the Irish, the Pooka and the Good Fairy want to gain control of the new-born soul.

The company continued to travel throughout the day...pausing at evening to provide themselves with the sustenance of oakmast and coconuts and with the refreshment of pure water...They did not cease, either walking or eating, from *the delights of colloquy and harmonised talk contrapuntal in character...*(*ASTB*, 130)

The travellers would sometimes tire of the drone of one another's *talk* and join together in the metre of an old-fashioned song, filling their lungs with fly-thickened air and raising their voices above the sleeping trees. (*ASTB*, 131) (Italics added)

At the outset of the mission we have the Good Fairy literally referring to *Acallamh* = Colloquy at a metalinguistic level.

Fifteen subordinate clauses in all, said the Good Fairy, and the substance of each of them contained matter sufficient for a *colloquy* in itself. There is nothing so bad as the compression of *fine talk* that should last for six hours into one small hour. (*ASTB*, 110)

In the Pooka's hut he undertakes a "multiclauser" dialogue with his heathen opponent, and keeps referring to the qualities of his "colloquy":¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Nevertheless, Patrick's nagging at Caoilte and then Oisín from the thirteenth century onwards had become a well-codified pattern of poems in dialogue form where "criticism and ridicule of the Christian faith find a natural outlet in the popular ballads narrating the quarrels of Oisín and St. Patrick about the merits of Finn and his warriors." So it may well be that O'Brien drew, for his reference to Oisín annoyed by St. Patrick, on a well-established popular code or "genre", but eventually decided to leave it out of the novel. Cf. Vivian Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition*, (1962), (London: Souvenir Press, 1991), p. 177. See also Pádraig Ó Fiannachta: "The Development of the Debate between Pádraig and Oisín", *Béaloides*, vol. 54-5, (1986-7), pp.183-206.

¹⁵⁴ Further extract from my Manuscript, descriptive of the Pooka MacPhellimey, his journey and other matters (*ASTB*, 103)

¹⁵⁵ From the beginning of the episode several references to the *Colloquy* and *talk* between Caoilte and Patrick are made. Here is a list: (*ASTB*, 104) quoted above; "your talk surprises me" (*ASTB*, 105); "Fifteen subordinate clauses..." mentioned above; "It seems to me ...that you are endeavouring to engage me in *multi-clause colloquy*." (*ASTB*, 110);

I have come to visit you, said the voice, and to spend an hour in *fine talk* and to enter a *colloquy* with you ... it is never too early of a morning for *sapient colloquy*.” (ASTB, 104) (Italics added)

The Good Fairy comments on the Pooka’s inclination for talking by echoing the *Colloquy of the Ancient Men*: “there is little doubt that you are over-fond of the *old talk*” (ASTB, 113). The Pooka not only likes talk but, consistently with Caoilte, also indulges in storytelling; at the Red Swan Hotel, while playing cards he starts off the tale of Dermot and Granya, which belongs to the Fenian canon: “Did I ever tell you the old story about Dermot and Granya?” To which the Good Fairy opposes St. Patrick’s usual scruples after listening to Fenian memories: whether he was allowed to listen to heathen stories: “No, said the Good Fairy, I never heard that particular story. If it is dirty of course, etiquette precludes me from listening to it at all” (ASTB, 140). This time it is not God’s law that bids him not to listen, but “etiquette”. This parallel is also developed when the Good Fairy is about to declare he has no money to pay his gambling debts: “Pray excuse us for a moment, the Fairy and myself have a private matter to discuss in the hallway, though itself it is a draughty place for *colloquy and fine talk*” (ASTB, 142). From the examples considered so far (a more complete list of which is given in note 104) a thick texture of references to *Acallamh* is detectable. O’Brien is also satirising the old stiff style of “*translatorese*”, the way the term *Acallamh*, literally: “address, discourse, conversation”¹⁵⁶ was translated by Standish H. O’Grady into the more pompous “*Colloquy*”, with a Latinate touch, to give more dignity to the tales of the ancient Irish.

To further substantiate this parodic borrowing, the dispute of the Pooka and the Good Fairy for the control of Orlick’s soul (the soul of a would-be writer) follows the scheme of St. Patrick and Caoilte each trying to impose their cultural codes and worlds on the other. The intertextual operation is active until the newborn Orlick is won by the Pooka who, like St. Patrick, teaches his doctrine to his acolyte who is baptised into a new life of “evil, revolt and non serviam.” (ASTB, 150) The Pooka’s remark on the tale of Dermot and Granya, “It is a long story and a crooked one” (ASTB, 143), well parallels St. Patrick’s quip on the nature of storytelling quoted by J. F. Nagy as a paramount manifesto of *Acallamh*: “that storytelling is complicated”.

There is little doubt that you are over-fond of *the old talk*, said the Good Fairy. Could I trouble you, Sir, to start walking? (ASTB, 113); “...the pair of us are now engaged on a *private journey*. He is very gentlemanly and very good at *conversation*. (ASTB, 116); “...you gentlemen would care to join us in our happy mission.” (ASTB, 117); “*And as they talked*, they threaded through the twilight and the sudden sun-pools of the wild country.” (ASTB, 130); (ASTB, 130) on the same page there is an interesting piece mentioned above; (ASTB, 131); reference to the story of Dermot and Granya (ASTB, 140); chessboard game (ASTB, 141); “hallway, though itself a draughty place for *colloquy and fine talk*.” (ASTB, 142); “*it is a long story and a crooked one*” (ASTB, 144); “The door closed, and for a long time the limping beat of the Pooka’s club could be heard, and the low hum of his *fine talk* as they paced the passage, the Pooka and his Orlick.” (ASTB, 148).

¹⁵⁶ *Gearrthoclóir Gaeilge-Béarla*, (Dublin: Rialtas na hÉireann, 1981), p. 6.

1.2 Transcodification: *Translation* - Pastiche

The myth of “Sweeney...figure of the artist, displaced, guilty, assuaging himself by his utterance”, symbol of “the quarrel between free creative imagination and the constraints of religious political...obligation” surfacing in the works of Seamus Heaney and many other writers¹⁵⁷ was neglected for a long time.¹⁵⁸ It is significant that not even the Revivalists paid great attention to it since its revolutionary content and the image of an impotent poet had no potential for those who wanted to resurrect the destiny of their land with myths of unbeatable heroes.

The Celtic warrior not only had to wait for O’Brien before being resurrected.¹⁵⁹ he also had to undergo an unpredictable process of transformation: in the translation O’Brien inserted into *ASTB* he had to become Sweeney, and had to change the nature of his self. In fact O’Brien did not retell his story, but translated almost a fifth¹⁶⁰ of the middle-Irish composition into *ASTB*, a contemporary novel, thus tying up medieval memory and twentieth-century experimentalism.

O’Brien’s method does not proceed along a straight line, but develops by means of transcodification.¹⁶¹ This leaves him room to manipulate at will, at least at a signifier level, the text of *Buile Suibhne* which was originally entrusted to the patient conservative work of a medieval Irish scriptorium. This programmatic choice which implied precise thematic-structural views of transcodification is deeply rooted in his literary interests. In a letter to Longmans O’Brien defended his own translation and declared that he had not relied on O’Keeffe’s, but the restricted lexical range of O’Brien’s language and the presence of almost identical phrases would seem to point to the contrary. Alongside his adherence to O’Keeffe’s text there is, however, another stream which runs through O’Brien’s rendering of *Buile Suibhne* and is manifest in his almost perverse desire to get as far away as possible from O’Keeffe by exploiting phonological and prosodic elements.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ As Declan Kiberd confirms in his essay “The Frenzy of Christy: Synge and *Buile Suibhne*”, *Éire-Ireland*, 14, (1979), pp.68-79, the tale of the *BS* was used by several authors down to Seamus Heaney: George Moore, Austin Clarke, John M. Synge, T. S. Eliot and Ted Hughes.

¹⁵⁸ James Carney, not having found any reference to *Suibhne* in Bardic poetry, remarks that this tale “was never admitted into the literary canon from which the *literati* were wont to draw their allusions and apologues. (*Buile Suibhne*) seemed to me to have a unique flavour and not to fit in easily into the usual Irish categories.” Cf. “‘Suibne Gelt’ and ‘The Children of Lir’” op. cit., p. 160.

¹⁵⁹ Austin Clarke had previously referred to the story of *BS* as a background to his novel *The Bright Temptation*; he had mainly exploited the episode of the madmen of Ireland grouping at Glen Bolcain to illustrate the drawbacks of sexual repression in Ireland. See *The Bright Temptation*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1932).

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Cathal G. Ó Háinle: “In all, then of the 379 stanzas in *BS* only 71 are translated”, op. cit., p.41.

¹⁶¹ Production of sense in the passage from one code to another.

¹⁶² Cf. Cathal G. Ó Háinle, op. cit., p. 41.

O'Keeffe's critical deductions that *Buile Suibhne* originally had a Celtic nucleus, to which the Christian tale of the curse was added, surely influenced O'Brien's attempt to recover the Celtic character of the tale when he thought of inserting *Buile Suibhne* into *ASTB*. This delicate surgical operation presented problems of a technical, linguistic and structural nature, and so *Buile Suibhne* underwent a process of transcodification and a series of intertextual relations with *ASTB* which involve all levels of the narrative.

Buile Suibhne first appears as an orally narrated tale, recited by the exceptional *shannachie* Finn.¹⁶³ Finn acts as a vehicle for the whole story, as he and his tale almost constitute a separate corpus, interrupted three times by the comments of the other characters. Later O'Brien takes up motifs and episodes from *Buile Suibhne* again, and places them at various points of intersection. The autonomous character Sweeny and his suffering, relived by Trellis in the three versions, has the essential role of connecting the three axes of *ASTB*.¹⁶⁴ However, this delicate interweaving of two works belonging to such distant semiotic horizons required further technical support. In order to link them indissolubly, the author started up a process of linguistic osmosis in the translation itself, a process which led him both to exaggerate the features and stylistic artifices of middle-Irish poetic diction and to adopt the pastiche technique which is typical of the whole novel. Various kinds of literary genres, professional slang and colloquialisms (to name but a few of the elements which characterise O'Brien's pervasive idiolect) are mixed with an obsessive hyperbolic use of medieval elements. A comparison between the beginning of O'Brien's translation of *Buile Suibhne* and that of O'Keeffe illustrates the way in which O'Brien manipulated the text:¹⁶⁵

A saint called Ronan a shield against evil was this gentle generous, friendly, active man, who was out in the matin-hours taping out the wall-steads of a new (sunbright) church **and ringing his bell in the morning...** Now Sweeny heard **the clack of the clergyman's bell**, his brain and **his spleen and his gut were exercised by turn and together with the fever of a flaming anger...**and he did not rest till he had snatched the beauteous light-lined psalter from the cleric... But evil destiny, he was deterred by the big storm-voiced hoarse shout, **the shout of a scullion** calling him to the profession of arms at the Battle of Mag Rath. (*ASTB*, 64) (Bold type added)¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Fionn Mac Cumhaill, originally a mythical character, loses his traditional identity being parodically introduced in *ASTB* in clownish disguise in the literary exercises of the student-narrator and as an old story-teller.

¹⁶⁴ As will be demonstrated, the drama of Suibhne-Sweeny which is present in three different areas of *ASTB* -in the translation of the *BS*, in the autonomous re-utilisation of the character, in Suibhne's sufferings physically transferred to Trellis - reflects the drama of the writer and gives thematic unity to *ASTB*.

¹⁶⁵ In his essay Cathal G. Ó Háinle, op. cit., p. 49, made a general classification of the stylistic devices O'Brien experimented with (gross overstatements, synonymous pairs, unusual compounds, high-flown phrases) which would be worth extending and deepening.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. *BS* § 2: "...a sheltering shield against the evil attacks of the devil and against vices was that gentle, friendly active man"; § 3: "... Suibhne heard the sound of Ronan's bell as he was marking out the church...Suibhne was greatly angered and enraged"; § 4: "... he found the cleric ... crying his psalms with his lined, right beautiful psalter...he heard a cry of alarm. It was a serving-man ...who uttered that cry who had come ...to Suibhne in order that he ...might engage in battle at Mag Rath". It is interesting to note that in the search for alliterating words O'Brien respects the Gaelic text more than O'Keeffe as in the case of "light-lined psalter" for "isneach Inluinn." All this, keeping in mind the different aims of the two translators.

In these few lines O'Brien exaggerates the alliteration, assonance and internal rhyme, taking to extremes his imitation of middle-Irish poetic diction and its emphasis on pure sounds.¹⁶⁷ But although he exaggerates in his use of phonological and prosodic elements, creates new compounds ("storm-voiced") and juxtaposes colloquialisms "taping out", which are out of tune with the medieval context, alongside a more formal style "the shout of a scullion...", the contents of *Buile Suibhne* are not changed and the essential elements of the episode concerning the curse of St. Ronan are still there. Not even the grotesque amplification "his brain...and his spleen..." and "the clack of the clergyman" hide Suibhne's anger at the intrusion of the Christian monk in his territory; it is, rather, stressed by the strong signifying alliteration.

By making a translation-pastiche,¹⁶⁸ O'Brien not only stresses his elective ties with the past and the desire to imitate rich, stimulating material like *Buile Suibhne*; by superimposing new meaning by means of parody,¹⁶⁹ he also shows how the medieval work can lead to new texts, not only copies or critical comments, but autonomous literary creations like *ASTB*.

Within the lines traced so far it will be seen how the activity of transcodification¹⁷⁰ is constant and that in *ASTB Buile Suibhne* is restored with a complex play of preservation and re-creation which is present throughout the novel on the triple axis of translation-pastiche-parody.

In the way *Buile Suibhne* is treated in *ASTB*, we can point to a system of manipulation with varying degrees of intensity. In his translation-pastiche, O'Brien's main contribution which is made up of extremely clever linguistic games, there is an oscillation between overt

¹⁶⁷ *BS* is a wonderful concentration of stylistic techniques, highly refined so as to increase the musical quality of the verse. It combines the characteristics of anisosyllabic poetry (rhythmic, alliterative verse with no rhyme) and syllabic poetry (isosyllabism, rhyme and assonance). For these definitions see Enrico Campanile, "Metrica celtica antica e metrica germanica antica", *Enciclopedia Classica*, vol. VI, ch. 2, (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1968), pp. 3-21.

¹⁶⁸ That O'Brien enjoyed playing with language, and that he paid particular attention to uncommon words and a mixture of styles, is evident in his articles published in "Cruiskeen Lawn" in *The Irish Times* (1940-1966). A good example is a dialogue in Latin and English between a flight controller and a pilot. See Myles na Gopaleen, *Further Cuttings from Cruiskeen Lawn*, (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1976), pp. 77-79.

¹⁶⁹ I feel it is important to draw a line between pastiche and parody, By the former I mean an imitation which often involves a mixture of styles, without necessarily altering the basic meaning of the work that is being imitated. By the latter I mean a transformation of sense, This is well exemplified in L. Hutcheon's definitions: "imitation with difference", "imitation with critical ironic distance", and "transcontextualisation", in a *Theory of Parody*, (New York: Methuen, 1985), pp. 32, 36-7. Unfortunately, the term parody is not always quite clear and is often mixed up with the term burlesque, disguise and satire. This confusion is inevitable because the historical and literary origin of the genre puts it in an ambivalent position (para = against, beside), and in its evolution this ambiguity has survived on account of the double semantic value attributed to it. On this subject see Linda Hutcheon, op. cit., and for a history of the term R. S. Borello, *Materiali per lo studio della parodia*, (Turin: Cooperativa Libreria Universitaria Torinese, 1984), pp. 40-42.

¹⁷⁰ With this term borrowed from J. Lotman, *La Struttura del Testo Poetico*, (Milan: Mursia, 1972), I refer to the production of sense in the passage from one code to another. Here I will refer to two types of external transcodification (as distinct from semanticisation, given for instance by the vertical passage from the phonoprosodic to the semantic level). The first is exemplified by the operation of recoding a given subject without changing its contents (as is found in the translation of the *BS* where, although it is deformed by a mimetic pastiche, it is in substance consistent with the original). The second, in transferring elements belonging to one coded system to another, involves a definite transformation of sense, determined by the superimposition or juxtaposition of external elements (as is to be found in the rewriting and autonomous use of *Suibhne*, and in the critical counterpoint the characters provide for the tale of the *BS* told by Finn).

and concealed parody.¹⁷¹ O'Brien's respect for *Buile Suibhne* can be seen in the delicacy with which he keeps the descriptive passages intact - those describing green Erin and the famous "Eulogy to Trees" (*BS*, § 40).¹⁷² Like a Celtic canticle of creatures, it transfuses the purifying power of its "pure naming of the elements of nature"¹⁷³ into *ASTB* where it is no chance that it marks most of the verses O'Brien translated. Here the author confines himself to morpho-syntactic respect eliminating any semantic ambiguity, but preserving the play of sounds:

The herons are calling in cold Glen Eila/swift flying flocks are flying, /coming and going (*ASTB*, 80)

...Cry of a heron from the blue-watered green-watered water, or the clear call of a cormorant, or a leap of a woodcock from a tree, the note or the sound of a waking plover, or the crack-crackle of withered branches...(ASTB, 83)¹⁷⁴

In these lines he differs from O'Keeffe, with a chain of synthetic-descriptive alliteration, the result providing strokes of swift energy which exalt the sensuous perception of nature. In the attempt to keep his parodic instinct under control, O'Brien's desire to reevaluate this fragment of *Buile Suibhne*, which is still full of the values of ancient Celtic civilisation, is evident.

O'Brien's tendency towards parody within the limits of translation is to be found in the cuts he makes. The decisions he made about reducing *Buile Suibhne* might have been dictated by reasons of space, of cohesion or of consistency with *ASTB*. Nevertheless, behind such a policy there might lie antipathies, obsessions and inclinations. He excludes a substantial part of the historical and political references to the battle of Mag Rath (to Congal Cláen and Domhnall, the two opponents in the battle § 13, 16, 17). All references to Suibhne's wife Eorann are ignored, in particular Suibhne's encounters with her, even the one when she regrets having lost him (§ 31-32, 55-56). Other women and their relationships with the madman, belonging to the misogynistic monastic view that all women are temptresses, are either cut out (the cress-woman § 42-43) or glossed over (the hag § 37-41, Muirghil § 77, 78, the *erenach*'s

¹⁷¹ I am quoting here Cathal G. Ó Háinle's comment on O'Brien and O'Keeffe's translations as it gives an objective general view to the issue in question: "It is important to emphasise the distinction between the two kinds of version. O'Keeffe was attempting to represent as accurately as possible in English the content of the original, losing in the process the specific poetic quality of the original verse, and casts off, when necessary, the limitations of close translation... O'Keeffe is trying to render the original as faithfully as he may, whereas O'Brien is free to superimpose his own conceits.", op. cit., pp. 48-9, n. 67.

¹⁷² Composed of 65 stanzas, with a number of changes in subject matter, which attest to many interpolations, it is one of the oldest poems of *Buile Suibhne*. It represents the authentic poetic nucleus of the work. Above all in the first 15 stanzas in which Suibhne names plants, animals and places, in total shamanistic identification with nature, we can grasp the strength of the bond between man and nature, an essential feature of the Celtic world. See Kenneth Jackson, *Early Celtic Nature Poetry*, Ch. II, (Cambridge, 1935) and Melita Cataldi, Introduction to *Antica Lirica Irlandese*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1982).

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. x.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *BS* § 40: "the herons a-calling in Glen Aighle swift flocks of birds coming and going..."

wife¹⁷⁵ § 35). Even place-names, relevant in *Buile Suibhne*, are denied the right emphasis within O'Brien's translation. Furthermore, many passages emphasising religion, Suibhne's repentance and his feeling part of Christianity are omitted.¹⁷⁶

Partly dictated by reasons of space, these cuts constitute an abridgement of the translation of *Buile Suibhne* to be inserted in a new context.¹⁷⁷ As results from the translation he did not plan either radical transformations or a complete upheaval of *Buile Suibhne*. The story was to remain recognisable, its essential features unchanged, so that the legendary Irish background would always be available for comparison. It is for this reason that the gaps take on a great significance, which is even more marked in the variations he makes with respect to the original, which is imbued with deep religious elements. In particular in the episodes of *Snámh-dá Én*¹⁷⁸ and St. Moling:

After another time he set forth in the air again till he reached the church of Snamh-da-En... arriving there on a Friday, to speak precisely; here the clerics were engaged at the observation of their nones, flax was being beaten and here and there a woman was giving birth to a child...(ASTB, 68)

If we compare O'Keeffe's text with O'Brien's, we immediately notice that besides eliminating the lay invoking Christ (§ 23),¹⁷⁹ in the prose version O'Brien minimises the references to the conversion of Sweeny and his religiousness. He does not mention his fasting in memory of the Passion of Christ, and his reproach to the woman who gives birth on a Friday is ironically reported as "here and there a woman was giving birth to a child." The simple intrusion of the adverbial phrase disrespectfully increases the number of women giving birth.

In O'Brien's version, the meeting between Suibhne and St. Moling, which in *Buile Suibhne* is fundamental to show that both of them are deeply aware of the divine reality, has none of the religious elements of the original: there is no mention of either the communion Suibhne receives at his death (which occurs twice in the original, both in prose and verse (§ 81, 83),¹⁸⁰ or any reference to his death on holy ground, leaning against the church door-post. O'Brien stresses the literary agreement between Suibhne and St. Moling. Both St. Moling and

¹⁷⁵ The erenach's wife explicitly makes a sexual offer. Cf. Pádraig Ó Riain, "A Study of the Irish Legend of the Wild Man", op. cit., p.196. Cf. also O'Keeffe's translation § 33, p.51.

¹⁷⁶ The omissions also include a curse (§ 6), the description of Suibhne's tunic (§ 8), the encounter with the cleric (§ 70); important episodes underlying Suibhne's religious affinity to St. Moling are also left out (§ 75, 80, 82, 83).

¹⁷⁷ O'Brien only translated a fifth of the *BS*, (71 of the 379 stanzas), and summarised and paraphrased several passages in prose.

¹⁷⁸ *Snámh-dá Én*, of which the title *At Swim-Two-Birds* is a translation, is a place near the river Shannon where Suibhne experiences his moment of greatest empathy with the Christian God, see note 82.

¹⁷⁹ Both Anne Clissmann, op. cit., and Eva Wappling, op. cit., note with surprise that O'Brien did not include "the most beautiful of all the lays in the tale...", p.12 and that "O'Brien's omission of the important passages about Sweeny's change of faith...is puzzling, especially in view of the fact that he uses the placename as the title of his novel...", p. 63.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *BS* § 81: "Suibhne acknowledged his faults and made his confession to Moling and he partook of Christ's body and thanked God for having received it, and he was anointed afterwards by the clerics" (*BS*, § 83) "to thee Christ, I give thanks "for partaking of Thy Body sincere repentance in this world" "for each evil I have ever done"(*BS*, § 86) "When Suibhne placed his shoulders against the door post he breathed a loud sigh and his spirit fled to Heaven..."

Suibhne share the mantic gift of prophecy, both are levitationists, both are connected with poetry. After going mad Suibhne becomes a poet, a figure who in Celtic ideology is a possessor of supernatural information. Their encounter, full of religious meaning, is mainly retained to stress the transition from oral to written records through poetic experience. With his vertical and horizontal flights Suibhne weaves the web for his adventures and the thread of his stories and poems while St. Moling records them on vellum. This implies a graphic sign of conquest, but also of loss, the loss of memory of time. As is emphasised in *Acallamh na Senórach* by St. Patrick's guardian angels, what is really handed down of the ancient tales of heroes is the third part¹⁸¹ "by reason of forgetfulness and lack of memory."

Being a double of Suibhne, St. Moling plays an active role in Suibhne's reintegration into the human community of monks and has a double meaning inside *ASTB*, as shown in connection with *Acallamh na Senórach*; this is very important if it is recalled that O'Brien noticed the two of them mentioned in this work and made Suibhne and St. Moling so important for the construction of *ASTB*. He sympathetically made Sweeny remember a time when he preferred the wild call of nature to the voice of the cleric "melling and megling within". (*ASTB*, 91)¹⁸²

When translating *Buile Suibhne* into *ASTB* O'Brien restrained his linguistic games and respected this important figure in the evolution of *Buile Suibhne*. He diligently translated the style of the language. O'Brien might have interpreted the simple sentence: "I bind you, said Moling, that however much of Ireland you may travel each day, you will come to me each evening so that I may write your history" (*BS*, §76), as derogatory though St. Moling, in reality, never tells Suibhne to leave the wilderness. Instead O'Brien sharpens his pen to stigmatise the figure of St. Ronan, the chastiser and devises linguistic tricks such as "the sainty bell", "he returned to his devotions with joyous piety" depicting him with a certain degree of irony.

All this points to O'Brien's desire to plunge the slightly corrupted original myth into the waters of the Shannon at *Snámh dá Én*, (it being no coincidence that the name provides the title of the novel), in order to restore its original Celtic aspect, eliminating and ridiculing the superimposed Christian elements. It almost seems as if O'Brien wanted to prove the assumption implicit in O'Keefe's statement about the origin of *Buile Suibhne*: "...that the distinctly Christian passages could be omitted without any serious distortion of the tale"¹⁸³

Where O'Brien did exaggerate is in the translation of the passage of Suibhne going mad. From the way he reduplicates the effects of the curse ignoring O'Keefe's translation and

¹⁸¹ This process entails the ever-present risk of losing the original cultural premises, as is clearly admitted both by the anonymous compiler of *Acallamh* and by St. Patrick's guardian angels themselves who want to reassure him in *Acallamh*. Cf. Tom P. Cross and Clark H. Slover, "The Colloquy of the Old Men", *Ancient Irish Tales*, (London: George G. Harrap & Company Ltd., 1935), p. 464.

¹⁸² This is an interesting alliterative recuperation of the Gaelic *ag meiligh is ag meigeallaigh* with the terms *megle* and *melle*, where *mell* (M. E. does not mean "bleating" as in Irish, but "mix, mingle, have intercourse with"). Cf. S.O.E.D., vol. II, p.130.

¹⁸³ Cf. O'Keefe, Introduction, op. cit., p. XXXIV.

adding more terms to define his state of mind than are contained in the original, we can think that O'Brien is trying to reproduce the kind of unrestrained baroque prose of the battle of Mag Rath (see quotations on page 23-24). The same episode of Suibhne's madness described in *Buile Suibhne* needs two more pages in the *Battle of Mag Rath* to describe the slightest changes in his physical posture and mental derangement. As we have already said, O'Brien probably read it¹⁸⁴ and was inspired by it for his grotesque depicting of Sweeny:

...and gave three audible world-wide shouts till Sweeny heard them and their hollow reverberations in the sky vault, he was beleaguered by an anger and darkness, and fury and fits and frenzy and fright-fraught fear" (*ASTB*, 66)

Here the rhythm of the translation is highly accelerated if we compare it with O'Keeffe's "fear brought about by fear" (*BS*, § 11)

...he was palsied of hand and foot and eye-mad and heart-quick and went from the curse of Ronan bird-quick in craze and madness from the battle (*ASTB*, 66)

"Eye-mad, heart-quick, bird-quick" with other unusual compounds will characterise the whole of the translation section, but will also be taken up over and over again in the section of Trellis's torture where he relives Suibhne's hallucinations.

Another example of extremely redundant style lies in the translation of the vision of the spectres where O'Brien played on the phonic level. Accumulating words connected by alliteration and assonance, he wittily varied O'Keeffe's "headless trunks and heads without bodies" with the chiasmic "headless trunks and trunkless heads" thus conveying a more accelerated rhythm and a closer connection of words as though "headless trunks and trunkless heads" were a complementary unit.

...there were strange apparitions before him there, red headless trunks and trunkless heads and five stubby rough grey heads without trunk or body between them, screaming and squealing and bounding hither and thither about the dark road beleaguering and besetting him and shouting...(ASTB, 85)...

strange apparitions appeared to him...: even trunks headless and red and heads without bodies, and five bristling rough-grey heads without body or trunk among them screaming and leaping this way and that about the road. (*BS*, § 64)¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ The *Battle of Mag Rath* is often referred to in O'Keeffe's introduction for its historical and narrative connections with *BS*.

¹⁸⁵ "taidhbhisi n-iongnadh dho' annsin a medho'noidhchi .i. méidhedha maoidherga 7 cinn gan cholla 7 cuig cinn gaoisidecha, gairbhliata gan chorp, gan cholainn etarra, ag sianghail 7 ag leimnigh imon sligidh anond 7 anall." (*BS*, § 64).

From these examples it is possible to appreciate a difference between the aseptic straightforward style of O’Keeffe and the more expressive hard-to-digest one of O’Brien. In fact he kept the passage alive by overloading it with alliterative sounds and internal rhymes, often repeating the same words to accentuate the overall effect. In this particular case, adding something to the Irish original, he included in his text six gerunds rolling behind Suibhne, while O’Keeffe only used two. Thus he succeeded in rendering the obsessive rhythm and sound accumulation of the medieval poem more impressive.

The translation as a whole, however, has a penchant towards literal translation, often overliteral translation. If it cannot be said that fidelity to the text was O’Brien’s creed, it can be confirmed that O’Brien privileges Irish turns of phrase even at the cost of using a more ambiguous opaque language. Even when his parodic approach is absent, he still translates trying to revive and obsessively repeat Irish double synonyms, alliteration, often recreating the same sound pattern, abounding in repetitions, unusual compounds, always with an ear to the sound of single words and word groupings. What requires verification¹⁸⁶ is if O’Brien, with his conservative attitude towards *Buile Suibhne*, kept to the metre and stylistic devices of the middle-Irish composition. Certainly he did not keep to the various metrical schemes present in *Buile Suibhne*;¹⁸⁷ it would have been impossible for him to maintain such a straining discipline together with the linguistic games he scattered the text with. Anyway it is interesting to note that in the lay “The man by the wall snores”¹⁸⁸ (*BS*, § 27) which in the “third rewriting” will become an object of parody, he devoted much of his poetic craft to trying to reconstruct two *aicills* and he kept to the *dunad saigid*¹⁸⁹ which was present in the Irish text.

As some scholars of *Buile Suibhne* have noticed, Suibhne’s story presented comic nuclei as sometimes in the midst of the depictions of Suibhne’s pathetic state the fantastically comic, the surrealistic and grotesque found their way into the body of the text. The former king, the abased Celtic warrior, reaches an ambivalent status: having endured terrible degradation he is ultimately endowed with artistic power. The poet bird-man is suspended within the dialogic reality of the medieval carnival when authority can be temporarily subverted; Julia Kristeva theorising on Bakhtin, levelling the values of the comic pinpoints its essential relativity and ambivalence in *Buile Suibhne*: “The laughter of the carnival is not

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Cathal G. Ó Hainle, op. cit., pp. 1-2 and p. 49.

¹⁸⁷ Mainly *deibhíde* metre.

¹⁸⁸ Lay § 27 is one of the oldest lays of *BS*, dating back to 12th century, where the figure of Loingseachan, an important character who will bring Suibhne to sanity, is introduced. According to Ruth P. Lehman it has a special meaning for the antiquity of its verbal forms and represents a highly poetic moment of *BS*, where Suibhne laments his impossibility to drift into sleep because rain and frost tear his body to pieces.

¹⁸⁹ *Aicill*: rhyme between end-word of one line and word within next line, *dunad saigid*: same beginning and ending which guarantees the completeness of the poem.

simply parodic; it is no more comic than tragic; it is both at once, one might say that it is *serious*.”¹⁹⁰

Suibhne’s leaping high, being pursued by the hag, is read in this vein and the hag finally dropping down and ending in bits adds a tragicomic dimension to the mad flights of the feathered Suibhne. O’Keeffe’s hag “leaped quickly after him, but dropped on the Cliff of Dun Sobairce, where she was broken to pieces and fell into the sea”. (*BS*, § 51) O’Brien’s hag “followed him in swift course and dropped on the precipices of Dun Sobairce till fine-pulp and small bits were made of her, falling lastly into the sea. (*ASTB*, 82). Almost sadistic delight is clearly discernible in the disintegrating hag. O’Brien’s account often reduces the succession of Suibhne’s misadventures to slapstick. One incident is alarming, but a repetition of the same event can provoke laughter, even liberating laughter, out of the sadistic frustrating treatment of such a monotonous hero. A comic strain is also perceivable in the source story where sexual offers are included in a story of spiritual suffering and lyricism. O’Brien’s Suibhne becomes tragicomic when Linchehaun (Loingseachan)¹⁹¹ cheats him by making him experience a sense of loss at the death of his kin. Desecrating laughter creeps in and thoroughly reveals the farcical situation when his son calls him “Pop”.

Your mother is likewise dead.
Now all the pity in me is at an end.
Dead is your brother.
Gaping open is my side on account of that.
She has died too your sister.
A needle for the heart is an only sister.
Ah, dumb dead is the little son that called you pop... (*ASTB*, 70)

At the narrative level Finn ends his narration of *Buile Suibhne*, but Sweeny does not conclude his existence in *ASTB*; he will be taken up and reused as a character in three different passages of *ASTB* which will be defined the “three rewritings”. A quotation from a synopsis the writer-student includes in *ASTB* will set the “three rewritings” in the right perspective:

ORLICK TRELIS, having concluded his course of study at the residence of the Pooka MacPhellimey, now takes his place in civil life, living as a lodger... SHANAHAN and LAMONT, fearing that Trellis would soon become immune to the drugs and sufficiently regain the use of his faculties...are continually endeavouring to devise A PLAN. One day in Furriskey’s sitting-room they discover what appear to be some pages of manuscript of a high-class story in which the names of painters and French wines are used with knowledge and authority. On investigation they find that Orlick has inherited his father’s gift for literary composition. Greatly excited, they suggest that he utilize his gift to turn the tables (as it were) and compose a story on the subject of Trellis, a fitting punishment... Smouldering with resentment at the stigma of his own bastardy ... he agrees. He comes one evening to his lodging where the rest of his friends are gathered and a start is made on the manuscript in the presence of the interested parties.... (*ASTB*, 164)

¹⁹⁰ Julia Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue, and Novel” in Leon S. Roudiez, ed., *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 80.

¹⁹¹ O’Brien anglicised the Irish name.

The “First Rewriting”

Employed in Orlick’s MSS, *Buile Suibhne* becomes material for an authentic process of re-elaboration. After providing the novel with the original text of *Buile Suibhne*, O’Brien takes it to pieces and re-adapts it with a marked parodic effect. This is particularly evident in his repeated use of the opening passage of *Buile Suibhne* about St. Ronan, which is recycled and almost metabolised in *ASTB*. The transformation of meaning typical of parody becomes a kind of law and weaves this episode from *Buile Suibhne* into the three versions at different narrative levels. Having discovered his narrative powers, the characters get Orlick to write a torture-tale to take revenge on his father Trellis. They make various attempts and taking the story of Suibhne in various ways they repeat the introductory passage portraying St. Ronan at least three times. Here we have the most sustained example of the scheme Linda Hutcheon detects in parody: “imitation with a critical variation”. O’Brien intentionally “makes variations” on the monk:

Extract from Manuscript by O. Trellis. Part One : ...A cleric attaining the ledge of the window with the help of a stout ladder of ashplant rungs,...quietly peered in through the glass. The bar of the sunbeams made a great play of his fair hair and burnished it into the appearance of a halo... He was meek and of pleasing manners and none but an ear that listened for it could perceive the click of the window as it was shut. The texture of his face was mottled by a blight of Lent-pocks, but - stern memorials of his fasts - they did not lessen the clear beauty of his brow... His manner was meek ... He drew a low sound from a delph wash-jug with a blow of his club and a bell-note was the sound he brought forth with the two of them, his sandal and a chamber. (ASTB, 165) (Italics added)

The description of the saint is evoked through the references to the halo, the repetition of “meek” alluding to the string of adjectives which qualify him as an active, generous creature. The “clack of the clergyman” (underlined by O’Brien in the opening passage of St. Ronan’s intrusion in Sweeny’s territory) is evoked through the almost imperceptible “click” of the window. Then O’Brien alludes to the traces of fasting on his face with its “Lent-pocks.” He goes even further by repeating “his manner was meek”, which is in decided contrast with his role as a chastiser by means of the curse. The sound of the bell, which drives Suibhne mad, is desecrated, produced as it is by his sandal knocking against a chamberpot. It is no surprise then to discover on the next page that here, unlike the *Buile Suibhne*, the monk who disturbs Sweeny’s peace is St. Moling and not St. Ronan. The only element which reconciles Suibhne with the Christian church is now, in O’Brien’s fiction, set against him to show that

representatives of the monastic community can never be trusted, especially when they are fascinated by the beauties of a chamberpot!

I am Moling, said the cleric...I was acquainted of the way by angels...and the ladder I have climbed to your window was fashioned by angelic craftsmen...I am here to make a bargain...To make a bargain between the pair of us ...There is fine handwork in that thing on the floor. Too delightful the roundness of its handle...His voice was of a light quality and was unsupported by the majority of his wits, because these were occupied with the beauty of the round thing, its whiteness, its star-twinkle face. (ASTB, 165-66) (Italics added)

In AMS¹⁹² the description of St. Moling includes: "Each of his features enunciated between them a *pax vobiscum*" instead of "dignity" (ASTB, 165) and it also contains an interesting revelation: "Who are you? he asked ...I am Moling, responded the cleric. I am a saint. I give you my blessing...I am here...to make a bargain." Here, ironically, Moling frankly introduces himself as saint. He, as in ASTB, also declares that he is interested in Trellis's chamberpot lying on the floor, but he has a secret intention, he wants to use it for a different purpose.

- There is fine handiwork in that font there on the floor. Too delightful the roundness of its handle.
- That is a chamber, said Trellis. Who did you say you were? What was that noise? What is the ringing for?
 - The bells of my acolytes, said the cleric. His voice was of a light quality and was unsupported by the majority of his wits, because these were occupied with the beauty of the font, its whiteness its star-twinkle face as a font for a new church it (was) would be matchless. (AMS, 228, iii)

Captivated by its round handle, Moling thinks it could be used as receptacle for sacred water with which to cross oneself or to baptise new converts and children.

From a comparison between the AMS version and the published one it emerges that in the former there is more emphasis on the idea of the cleric ingenuously wanting to recycle the chamber into a font.

As O'Brien well knew, Joyce had extensively paralleled Catholic rites with bodily functions and sexuality.¹⁹³ In *Ulysses*, his epics of the body, from Mulligan's shaving bowl, a

¹⁹² The section I have defined as "First, Second and Third Rewritings" seems to have been a later interpolation. In AMS it covers from p. 226 to p. 265 and is also numbered by Roman numbers running from I-IX, with the addition of a holograph page: 265A. Then it goes on with the trial section.

¹⁹³ As Richard Ellmann remarks, Joyce had been preparing since "Proteus" a secret parallel and opposition: the body of God and the body of woman share blood in common. In "Penelope", the final chapter of *Ulysses*, "In allowing Molly to menstruate...Joyce consecrates the blood in the chamberpot rather than the blood ...in the chalice". The symbol of the sacred chalice running parallel with the sacrality of the female body and reproduction started in Joyce's macrotext as early as *Dubliners* and *A Portrait*. In "The Sisters" and "Araby" two chalices oppose each other, one malignantly sitting on the belly of the dead priest, having provoked his spiritual destitution, the other being the chalice of love to be offered to the boy's beloved "...The old priest was lying still in his coffin as we had seen him, solemn and truculent in death, an idle chalice on his breast", (*D*, 11), "I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes". (*D*, 33). In *Ulysses* from the first chapter through "Circe" (where the chalice dominates Mina Purefoy's swollen belly) the chalice reaches its anticlimax in "Penelope", being converted into a one-handled receptacle for blood. Cf. "Why Molly Bloom Menstruates" in *Ulysses on the Liffey*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 171.

parodic Eucharistic chalice to Molly Bloom's chamberpot¹⁹⁴ consecrating menstrual blood, the sacred and the scatological were juxtaposed. In O'Brien, as well, the codes of liturgy are subverted. Resurrection can only be gained through the blessing of Trellis's pot.

But O'Brien finally opted to delete the ludicrous treatment of the cleric in view of possible attacks of censorship. This segment nevertheless has value and acquires new meaning if seen in the perspective of a parodic import from Joyce.

O'Brien's focusing on the monk's search for the chamberpot marks a further parody of *Buile Suibhne* with the progressive substitution of the original "sacerdos figure" from St. Ronan to St. Moling.

No doubt O'Brien wanted to parody it, to undermine it. After all his care in reviving a middle-Irish composition inside a twentieth-century novel, after translating it and making its story an essential structural axis of *ASTB*, *Buile Suibhne* is undermined by the cleric's search for a chamberpot. By changing the conciliating role attributed to St. Moling in *Buile Suibhne*, into that of a threatening presence; by devaluing *Buile Suibhne*, he exhibits and parodies the loss implicit in any process of retelling and reception of middle-Irish texts.

The "Second Rewriting"

In the second version, after a long description of Trellis, modelled on the figure of the bard lying in the dark with a lighted lamp, intent on a poetic composition, as a parody of the figure of the student-narrator who makes his literary reflections lying on his bed,¹⁹⁵ the same scene is repeated again and again. Trellis sees: "...a saint in his garden taping out the wall-steads of a new sunbright church..." surrounded by a "concourse of clerics... ringing shrill iron bells" (*ASTB*, 171). Here the sound of the bell is much more acute and the sacrilege is more violent; the psalmist becomes a "clergyman", evoking once again the "clack of the clergyman", and he is inelegantly stoned to death:

¹⁹⁴ The term is common in Joyce's linguistic code and often occurs in his macrotext. Evoked in "Gas from a Burner" (where the ashes of *Dubliners* will be kept in a one-handed urn), present since the beginning, it dominates in the title of the collection of poems *Chamber Music*, and is quoted in *A Portrait*: "...you might as well be talking... to a flaming chamberpot..." (*AP*, 200). In *Ulysses* it recurs many times and connects Bloom and Molly's streams of consciousness related to the object and its style and the way it is used by both of them: "BLOOM: ...That antiquated commode. It wasn't her weight...Eh, And that absurd *orangekeyed utensil* which has only one handle." (*U*, 657); "...I better not make an alnight sitting on this affair they ought to make *chambers* a natural size so that a woman could sit on it properly..." (*U*, 917).

¹⁹⁵ This way of composing in the dark lying on a bed was similar to the method used in Bardic schools of which O'Brien must have read both in Douglas Hyde's *A Literary History of Ireland*, and in Osborn Bergin's essay "Bardic Poetry" Cf. Thomas B. O'Grady, "At Swim-Two-Birds and the Bardic Schools", *Éire-Ireland*, XXIV, 3, (1989), pp. 69-70. Cf. also Robin Flower: "...it was the custom ...of immemorial antiquity to compose in the dark. The poets 'tossing on their beds' ...ordered the lines of their verses, disposed their assonances and alliterations in 'a chamber deaf to noise and blind to

...Trellis took the saint by a hold of his wasted arm and ran (the two of them), until the head of the cleric had been hurt by a stone wall. The evil one then took a hold of the saint's breviary -the one used by holy Kevin - and tore at it until it was a-tatters in his angry hand; and he added this to his sins, videlicet, the hammering of a young clergyman, an acolyte... with a lump of a stone. (ASTB, 171)

Here there is proof of further damage inflicted on the sacred book which strictly connects Trellis-Suibhne to Ceallach, included in O'Brien's MA thesis, where the protagonist is cursed and suffers a violent death like Suibhne, even more harsh because he abandoned his life of books.¹⁹⁶ Furthermore the awkward run of Trellis and the saint against the wall recall the violent death "by wall" of Deirdre,¹⁹⁷ thus stratifying *Buile Suibhne's* opening scene with another sorrowful story drawn from eternal Irish lore.

The third time, the rite of the torture-writing is performed in the attempt to kill Trellis. The game of superimposing meanings here becomes cruel and the attempt to follow the escalation of violence Sweeny is submitted to, simultaneously transferred from paper to skin, retraces certain episodes of *Buile Suibhne* with a strong inclination towards the bloody and the macabre. The references to madness and hallucinations are evident. The greatest degree of parodic manipulation of *Buile Suibhne* is anyway reached in the autonomous re-use of the character Sweeny.

We find Sweeny again in flesh and blood in the woods in a piteous state of total psychological and physical abandon at the same narrative level as the other characters. They meet him in the woods during their well-wishing trip for the birth of Orlick Trellis. The passage in which Sweeny regains consciousness and the sentence "he fell with a crap...from the middle of the yew to the ground"¹⁹⁸(ASTB,70) more ruthlessly dismembers the myth of the former Celtic king of Dal Araidhe. So in two physically distant places we have a being who collapses into pieces, is "percolated through the sieve of a sharp yew" (ASTB, 126) with the ambiguous connotations of the various meanings that can be attributed to the term "crap" thus stressing the disgusting appearance of Sweeny. This repetitive passage in *Buile Suibhne* (the same parallel is found on pp. 67, 70, 126. "and dropped with a crap" p. 179; "and came upon the ground with a thud" p. 185) is not only significant, as many critics have pointed out, on

light'...in the evening candles were brought into the main chamber ...and the poems were written down to be submitted to the searching technical criticism of the master." *The Irish Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.153.

¹⁹⁶ Kathleen Mulchrone, *Caithréim Cellaig*, Medieval and Modern Irish Series, vol. IV, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies), 1933.

¹⁹⁷ Deirdre's fate is narrated in *Longes mac nUislienn* (Exile of the Sons of Uisliu) from the Ulster Cycle. Preserved in the Book of Leinster (8th-9th cent.) and the Yellow Book of Lecan. A later version *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneac* is part of the "Sorrows of Storytelling". Cf. Robert Welch, ed., op.cit., p.315. "The tragical Death of the Sons of Uisneach" was translated by Whitley Stokes, O'Flanagan, and included in Eleanor Hull, *The Cuchulin Saga in Irish Literature*, (London: David Nutt, 1898), pp. 21-51.

¹⁹⁸ *Crap* now dial. ME, DU *Krappe* conn. w. *krappen*, pluck off, cut off. Cf. also O. Fr. *crappe* siftings, AL. *chaff* (XIII) the husk of grain... (coarse slang) Excrement defecation... S.O.E.D., vol. I., p.450.

same parallel is found on pp. 67, 70, 126. “and dropped with a crap” p. 179; “and came upon the ground with a thud” p. 185) is not only significant, as many critics have pointed out, on account of O’Brien’s obsession with tragic fall, but also because it degrades the character of Sweeny even further.

In the translation O’Brien had alliteratively portrayed Sweeny, the victim of St. Ronan’s curse, as a prey to “fury and fits and frenzy and fright-fraught fear”, (*ASTB*, 66), without radically detaching the image of the bird-poet from the medieval model. Here the process of degradation is taken to extremes, the ancient Celtic hero is transformed into Sweeny, a malodorous featherless bird dribbling out his disconnected lays: “a tormented cress-stained mouth never halting from the recital of inaudible strange stanzas...” (*ASTB*, 126)

The “Third Rewriting”

The “third rewriting” is a brief fragment of *ASTB* which, borrowing from different literary contexts, has the same intricate intertextual play as the whole novel, but in microcosmic proportions. By closely following and parodying *Buile Suibhne*, it develops as the writing-torture to which Trellis, the figure of the writer, is subjected, showing the same vigour as an early Irish curse. Pursuing Dermot Trellis, with its flight up and down the “third rewriting” “is remarkably like the hell which is so vividly evoked in the retreat sermon in *A Portrait*. It has the same physical qualities, noisome stenches and impenetrable darkness...”¹⁹⁹ and juxtaposes Celtic and Catholic otherworld dimensions. But this multifunctional fragment has another hidden aspect. It is also the generative nucleus of *The Third Policeman*, in which a new disquieting, timeless, cyclical reality is added to O’Brien’s otherworld.²⁰⁰ This multitextual synthesis is not simply erratic but shows a coherent precise scheme which results in the direct appropriation and parody of several key episodes of *Buile Suibhne* (Suibhne’s frenzy, Loingseachan, trunkless heads).²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Anne Clissmann, Flann O’Brien: *A Critical Introduction*, op. cit., p. 113.

²⁰⁰ The opening scene of *BS* is also to be found even outside *ASTB* and links in a macrotext with *The Third Policeman*. It is indeed the generative nucleus of this novel (the meeting of the protagonist with Old Mathers). See my article “Flann O’Brien’s Hellish Otherworld: From *Buile Suibhne* to *The Third Policeman*”, *Irish University Review*, vol. 25, n. 2, (Autumn/Winter, 1995), pp. 318-327.

²⁰¹ These titles refer to specific important lays or narrative passages, which are essential to the development of the story of *BS*.

Latin monastic culture. The revitalisation of Suibhne inside *ASTB* and especially in the “third rewriting” has a double thematic-structural meaning. Suibhne as the figure of poet-bird-man functionally links the three basic narrative levels of *ASTB* where three writers write novels on writers and parallels another mythological flyer, Daedalus, who is evoked through the parody of Stephen Daedalus which runs extensively through *ASTB* in the frame story parodying *A Portrait*.²⁰² A summary of the fragment is essential to enable us to follow the ludic parodic game, and realise the part it plays in *ASTB* as a complete section of the story in itself as well as in the overall structure.

The characters of Dermot Trellis’s “book against sin” rebel against him using writing as a curse in order to kill him and deprive him of his physical and mental powers. They try to do it three times, appointing Orlick, his son, to this purpose. To carry out their revenge Orlick takes inspiration from the episodes of *Buile Suibhne* concerning Suibhne’s curse, madness and levitation. Only the third time do they succeed in punishing him by evoking the Pooka McPhellimey. Trellis-Suibhne undergoes terrible tortures, in the same atmosphere as the “Hell Sermon”. He is nearly killed and is also put on trial. Many witnesses, Trellis’s characters, together with Sweeny, sentence him to death. But the providential intervention of Teresa, Trellis’s maid, who accidentally burns the papers where the revengeful characters were born, saves his life. A hellish fire is their final experience and Trellis, with some dead leaves on the soles of his feet, goes back to his bedroom saying. “too much thinking and writing...” (*ASTB*, 216).

The “third rewriting” can thus be considered as the final result of the obsessive repetitional scheme of *ASTB* and its forty-four pages are inhabited not only by Trellis and the Pooka, but also by the phantoms of Suibhne, the hag and Loingseachan and traces of its intertextual journey from the middle-Irish composition.

The whole section pivots on two main referents: the idea of atrocious punishment, and St. Ronan’s curse, imported from *Buile Suibhne*.

Word becomes flesh yet again and the Pooka, a parodic folkloric being ready to stigmatise Suibhne-Trellis, the Celtic king-poet of Dal Araidhe and his literary counter-figure, inaugurates his torture.

The Pooka administers his justice “sitting on the cabinet of his pots” (*ASTB*, 172). “ He utters his malediction and magically proceeds in his “mission”. “By the sorcery of [his]...thumbs” (*ASTB*, 184) the Pooka causes “a stasis of the natural order” (*ASTB*, 175). The hallucinating chaos triggered off by the sound of St. Ronan’s bell (which becomes “the clack

²⁰² Cf. Anne Clissmann: “All the images of flight and falling in the Sweeny tale correspond with those implied by the Icarus-Daedalus theme in *A Portrait*”, op. cit., p. 112

of the clergyman" in the translation section of *Buile Suibhne*), is here provoked by the "Pooka's civil cough" (*ASTB*, 174). Suibhne's madness and consequential levitation are experienced by Trellis when he loses control of his mind and body undergoing the magical engravings of the writing-torture. Just like Suibhne, he is caught in a nightmare. Suibhne's battle of Mag Rath is re-lived in the nightmarish setting of Trellis's room. As a result Trellis flies out of the window. Just like Suibhne, he goes to the wood and leaps up into the sky many times, and here O'Brien, linking *Buile Suibhne* and *ASTB*, insists on the theme of the tragic fall, which will become paramount in all the rest of his literary production. The Catholic idea of the Fall into sin reverberates in Trellis's tragic pitiful falls (in "the third rewriting" alone he falls on pages 176, 177, 179, 181, 183 and 185).²⁰³ In this way O'Brien not only imitates Suibhne with his ascending and descending flights, but adds a graphic-dramatic tension to the fall of his character - no longer the levitating poet-king Suibhne, but Trellis, a bleeding shadow, a remnant from a former literary creator.

In the apocalyptic atmosphere of sudden darkness and sinister sounds a significant structural design emerges. O'Brien makes a careful narrative and redistributive choice of key episodes from *Buile Suibhne*: the spectres, Loingseachan. Suibhne's trunkless heads and headless trunks that roll behind him converge into the figure of a terrible dog terrier, not by chance an Airedale, the anagram of which suggests the geographical provenance of Suibhne, the kingdom of Dal Araidhe.²⁰⁴

These episodes are essential for the narrative development of *Buile Suibhne* and were probably taken up by O'Brien to transfer Suibhne's physical and mental derangement to Trellis. As for the Loingseachan episode, it is very clearly rendered by the transferring of the Pooka and Trellis into a wood, having Trellis roost on the branch of a tree and then fall ruinously on the ground. There is a reminiscence of "The man by the wall snores" in the image of the Pooka who "snored soundly through the night" (*ASTB*, 184), but the reference, as we will see, ties in O'Brien's parody of St. Ceallach's torture at the hand of his acolytes. Thus the referential schemes overlap and we have in perspective Trellis, Suibhne and St. Ceallach who have to face a frightening experience as a fit punishment for their sins.

²⁰³ He is possibly alluding to Joyce's Fall of Lucifer in Father Arnall's "Hell Sermon". Cf. (*AP*, 117): "Lucifer...was a...radiant and mighty angel; yet he fell: and there fell with him a third part of the host of heaven: he fell and was hurled with his rebellious angels into hell." Also the following passage which with its high percentage of occurrences of "fall" "fallen", "falling" might have suggested to O'Brien the parody of the tragic fall of Suibhne-Sweeny-Trellis. "The snares of the world were its ways of sin. He (Stephen) would fall. He had not yet fallen but he would fall silently, in an instant. Not to fall was too hard; and he felt the silent lapse of his soul, as it would be at some instant to come, falling, falling, but not yet fallen, still unfallen, but about to fall." (*AP*, 162).

²⁰⁴ Those heads are mainly the result of his battle slaughter: severed heads of enemies, as Nora K. Chadwick says in "Geilt", op. cit. p. 111. Cf. *BS*, § 65: "Great in sooth was the terror, the crying, the wailing, the screaming and crying aloud, the din and tumult of the heads after him as they were clutching and eagerly pursuing him. Such were the force and swiftness of that pursuit that the heads leaped on his calves and his houghs, his thighs, his shoulders, the nape of all against the sides of trees and the head of the rocks."

And to emphasis Suibhne's mental derangement O'Brien cannot but reproduce verbatim from his translation of *Buile Suibhne*:

Trellis was beleaguered by an anger and a darkness and he was filled with a restless tottering unquiet and with a disgust for the places that he knew and with a desire to go where he never was, so that he was palsied of hand and foot and eye-mad and heart-quick so that he went bird-quick in craze and madness into the upper air.." (ASTB, 66, 179).

Through the pen of Orlick, O'Brien keeps the high-flown style he had earlier adopted. He even retains the unusual matching of registers in "restless tottering" with "unquiet".

In the "third rewriting", after the trial Trellis is condemned to death and his rebel characters decide to go to bed, afraid that he may recover from his nightmarish sleep. As a result Teresa, Trellis's maidservant, tidying up his room burns some pieces of paper where their lives had been created. "Now they were blazing, curling and twisting and turning black, straining uneasily in the draught, and then taking flight red-flecked and wrinkled hurrying to the sky." (ASTB, 216) And here the circle closes with Trellis-Suibhne going back home after his tragic falls, for which he blames writing: "I am ill Teresa, I've done too much thinking and writing, too much work..." He only retains the memory of a hallucination. And like Finn and his companion in a *bruidhean* theme tale²⁰⁵ Trellis's nightmare of being tormented by a supernatural being leaves minor traces.²⁰⁶ So Trellis, rescued by his maid because of the accidental burning of the MSS, can go back to his room: "in his night-shirt, which was slightly discoloured as if by rain, and some dead leaves were attached to the soles of his poor feet..." (ASTB, 216). This purgatorial ending to Trellis's ordeal provides the "third rewriting" with no cathartic solution, while O'Brien's linking together of the two-dimensional intertextual play brings with it a double extratextual significance.

Caithréim/Beatha Cheallaigh (The Career/Life of Ceallach)

Nearly at the end of the "third rewriting" another text reveals its potential in connection with *Buile Suibhne* with which it symmetrically shares motifs and themes. Evoked in Finn's

²⁰⁵As Gerard Murphy underlines: "the *Bruidhean* theme, which is a feature of early Modern Fionn lore, seems to be...mythological. It relates how Fionn was enticed to a magical dwelling. Folklore preserves it in a form...which makes it almost clear that the original *Bruidhean* was an otherworld dwelling equivalent to the Greek Hades", *The Ossianic Lore and Romantic Tales of Medieval Ireland*, op. cit., p. 53.

²⁰⁶The *bruidhean* tale has a common theme; the character by magic undergoes a nightmarish experience, often as punishment for lust or greediness, then the hallucinating vision disappears and the character is sent back to normality

Lament, *The Career/Life of Ceallach*²⁰⁷ deserves special attention as it is parodied by O'Brien at the end of Trellis's torture by the Pooka in the "third rewriting". The textual cues which lead to its decoding are apparently scarce, but nevertheless pertinent and significant. Of particular interest is the reference to the toponym *Cluain Eo* which revealed the connection with this tale.

Cathal G. Ó Hainle thinks that although *The Career/Life of Ceallach*, also known as "The Life of Ceallach" relates the life of a king-bishop-saint it is not hagiography, but can be seen as a King-tale.²⁰⁸ He also acknowledges it to be part of the source material of O'Brien's thesis. "In the context of *ASTB* it is important to note that he also drew material for his thesis from *The Children of Lir, The Career/Life of Ceallach...*" He furthermore reports that Douglas Hyde's *A Literary History of Ireland*, dealing with *The Career/Life of Ceallach* and extensively quoting from O'Grady's translation in *Silva Gadelica*, was required reading for O'Brien's degree.

Presenting the text, Douglas Hyde praises O'Grady's robust style in translating from the Irish tale "whose vigorous rendering (he has) closely followed",²⁰⁹ and reports quite a long passage, which O'Brien must have read during his course and for his thesis.²¹⁰

Here is a fragment of the Life of St. Ceallach ...which is preserved in that ample repository of ecclesiastical lore the *Leabhar Breac*, a great vellum manuscript written shortly after the year 1400. The story deals with the dispute between Guaire... king of Connacht and St. Ceallach, the latter of whom had during his student life left St. Ciaran and his studies, and thus drawn upon himself the prediction of the great saint that he would die by point of weapon...Guaire having banished Ceallach, against whom his mind had been poisoned by lying tongues, the fugitive took refuge in an island in Loch Con, where he remained for a long time. Guaire still excited against him... invited him to a feast with intent to kill him. He refused however to go. The King's messengers then requested him to at least allow his four condisciples ... to go with them to the feast.

Douglas Hyde continues the story by directly quoting from O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica*.²¹¹ *The Career/Life of Ceallach* also conceals some characteristics common to the Threefold Death tales - curse, prophesy, fulfillment of prophesy, residual death by wounding²¹² therefore St. Ciaran's prophesy cannot go unfulfilled and the condisciples are easily bribed and agree to kill Ceallach. When they meet again St. Ceallach soon realises their evil intent. They attack the saint, put him in a boat and take him to "the dark recesses of the wood". Knowing he has no chance of survival he asks for "one night's respite". They find a hollow oak and confine him in

with some penalties (i.e. loses his hair or grows hair on his posterior). See Vivian Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition*, (1962), (London: Souvenir Press, 1990), pp.18-23.

²⁰⁷ Kathleen Mulchrane: *Caithréim Cellaig*. (Medieval and Modern Irish Series, vol. IV), (Dublin: D I A S, 1933).

²⁰⁸ As Cathal G. Ó Hainle quotes from Gerard Murphy "these tales are not concerned with heroic character but with matters of importance for the community, the origin of peoples or of dynasties...", op. cit., p. 14.

²⁰⁹ Douglas Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland*, op. cit., p. 395.

²¹⁰ Cathal G. Ó Hainle also specifies: "it is ...extremely significant that the texts of *The Career/Life of Ceallach* and of *The Colloquy of the Ancient Men* were those edited by O'Grady in *Silva Gadelica*", op. cit. p.18.

²¹¹ Standish H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, op. cit., p. 57.

²¹² Like *BS*, the tale of the three deaths (by water, by fire, by wounding) typical of Threefold Death has a residual death by wounding.

it, but unlike them he cannot rest or sleep. Morning comes. Finally he accepts God's will through St. Ciaran's curse and he is put to death. Then the Kite of Cluain Eo, the wolf and the scaldcrow tear his flesh, as he himself had previously dreamt.

The most interesting datum to be found in *ASTB* is a textual import into the last part of the "third rewriting", the last and most sustained experiment of interconnecting parodic treatment of *Buile Suibhne*. There, after the metropolitan nightmare, Trellis-Suibhne is brought to the woods - Suibhne's sylvan dimension - or it could be said to the same woods which were the setting for St. Ceallach's killing. The torture is started in the open air by means of the magical powers of a third *sacerdos*, the Pooka. In fact in the retelling of *Buile Suibhne* in the "three rewritings", there is continual shifting of the role of the first cursing *sacerdos*: from St Ronan (*Buile Suibhne*, translation), to St. Moling ("first rewriting"), to the Pooka ("third rewriting"); here in this particular subsection of "the third rewriting", the character of the Pooka stratifies into Loingseachan, the man who gained Suibhne back to sanity, into Brian Boru, praying in his tent during the battle of Clontarf, and into Ceallach's traitors and murderers. O'Brien's text will help detect evidence of the points made above:

*That night they rested at the tree of Cluain Eo, Trellis at his birds' roost on a thin branch ...By the sorcery of his thumbs the Pooka produced a canvas tent ... He then knelt down and occupied himself with his devotions, making sounds with his tongue... The Pooka retired to the secrecy of his tent ... And of the two of them , this much is sure , i.e. **that one of them snored soundly through the night.** The night passed and *the morning...*came...He (the Pooka) arose, prayed...He afterwards...baked himself an oaten farl...He fed on this politely in a shaded corner of the wood he was in, *but did not begin his feasting until he had extended to the man upon the branch a courteous invitation to make company with him at eating.**

Breakfast ? said Trellis...

Not incorrect, replied the Pooka. *I beg that you will come and eat with me and the better to destroy the oddity of a single invitation, I add this, that you must refuse it.*

I will not have any of it, thank you, said Trellis.

That is a pity, rejoined the Pooka...*Not to eat is a great mistake.*

It was the length of two hours before the Pooka had put the entirety of the farl deep in his stomach. At the end of that time the cripple in the tree was abandoned by each of his wits...he fell senseless... and came to the ground with a thud that placed him deeper in the darkness of his sleep. The **thorns which were embedded in his person** could be ascertained on counting to be no less than 944 in number. (*ASTB*, 184-85)²¹³

The textual borrowing from *The Career/Life of Ceallach* is manifest from the outset, with its clearly marked toponym *Cluain Eo* which brings to *ASTB* an implicit echo of Ceallach's atrocious death and the tearing of his body by the kite of Cluain Eo. The sentence "That night they abode there, but at the morning meal, with one accord they consented to kill him" is syntactically evoked at the beginning of the section: "That night they rested at the tree of Cluain Eo" while the "morning meal" at which they agree to kill St. Ceallach is rendered with "Breakfast?".

²¹³ Italics refer to *The Career/Life of Ceallach*; bold type refers to *BS*; underlined part refers to *Brian Boru*.

The Pooka, resembling both Brian Boru praying in his tent and Loingseachan (“The Man by the Wall Snores” *BS*, § 27), but also more significantly in this context Guaire, invites Trellis to eat. Manifestly the Pooka’s invitation and Trellis’s imposed refusal correspond to Guaire’s evil invitation and St. Ceallach’s refusal. But O’Brien adds more macabre details to his parody. In the morning the Pooka cooks his breakfast “...but did not begin his *feasting* until he had extended to the man upon the branch a courteous invitation...” By making use of *feasting* O’Brien is at the same time referring to the death feast St. Ceallach was invited to, to the feast his condisciples went to and to the feast the preying creatures of the wood made on his body. Significantly O’Brien could have derived the term from both Douglas Hyde and Standish H. O’Grady as they both used it.²¹⁴ In the textual stratification other elements connect Ceallach with Suibhne. In total accordance with Suibhne St. Ceallach is also a prophet and foresees his horrendous death, “four wild dogs rent me and dragged me through the bracken.”²¹⁵ Both are victims of a Saint’s curse, but St. Ciaran’s curse was elicited for a slightly different reason: “I, acting for my Lord that is Heaven’s King and Earth’s, bequeath moreover that for all time such death by point be that which, beyond every help and without fail, shall take him whosoe’er he be that thus deserts his student-life.”²¹⁶ Ceallach and Suibhne are victims of two representatives of the power of books, and Ceallach who mainly bears the weight of the *mallacht* only because he has forsaken his books gives an extratextual cue for the interpretation of “the third rewriting”. Probably on account of St. Ceallach’s similarity with Suibhne in being cursed by a saint O’Brien decided to interweave them in “the third rewriting”.

As regards St. Ceallach and Brian Boru it is likely that O’Brien was inspired for it by another “link by contiguity”. Just as happened with Finn’s prophecy in *Acallamh* which triggered off the connection with *Buile Suibhne*, Brian Boru and St. Ceallach are to be found on two consecutive pages of Douglas Hyde’s *A Literary History of Ireland* (394-95). Page 395 recounts the story of Ceallach which has been extensively quoted to substantiate O’Brien’s parody. His textual “thefts” often happen by means of a process of contiguity, but the two examples examined in this chapter might well point to a more extensive system.

As has been illustrated from the study of the occurrences of *Buile Suibhne* in *ASTB*, it permeates the novel but shares its role with other middle-Irish texts. What seems relevant as a result of the present research is that, in his revival of the poetic middle-Irish composition O’Brien drew from two streams of Irish culture: on the one hand from other early and middle-

²¹⁴ Cf. Douglas Hyde, op. cit., p. 395: “invited him to a feast with intent to kill him. He refuses to go...to the feast”; Standish H. O’Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, op. cit., p. 56: “they came to fetch him, both to a great feast which the king had for him, and to speak with him. ‘No more will I go thither’, Ceallach said, ‘nor for sake of the perishable poor world’s feast or favour neglect mine offices.’”

²¹⁵ Douglas Hyde, op. cit., p. 397.

²¹⁶ Standish H. O’Grady, op. cit., p. 52.

Irish tales, on the other from Joyce's works which questioned and interrogated the cultural premises supporting those two dichotomic worlds, debunking the absolute values implicit in their realities and introducing the concept of relativity present in the comic. O'Brien's work presupposes an epistemological study of literary society and a thorough knowledge of the way culture is transmitted, which goes much further than a ludic exercise.

Chapter II

2. *Táin* tales in *At Swim-Two-Birds*

2.1 The *Táin* and Cú Chulainn

Archaeologists, popularisers and translators

I am Ireland:
I am older than the Old Woman of Beare.

Great my glory:
I that bore Cuchulainn the valiant.

Great my shame:
My own children that sold their mother.

I am Ireland:
I am lonelier than the Old Woman of Beare.

(Pádraig Mac Piaras)²¹⁷

Cú Chulainn²¹⁸ and the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* are alluded to in *ASTB* in the “Circle N Ranch” episode and significant traces of their presence are visible in the MSS in “Memoir on the Pooka’s Father, the Crack²¹⁹ MacPhellimey”, an excised fragment from the published novel which unequivocally draws on *Compert con Culainn (The Conception of Cuchulainn)*²²⁰

As has been argued in the introduction to this thesis, O’Brien wanted to cover the entire corpus of early and middle-Irish literature; he could not do so without reference to the Ulster Cycle and therefore Cú Chulainn could potentially have been the hero of a section of *ASTB*. Moreover, O’Brien’s attitude to the myth of the young warrior can be seen as his personal reading of the mythologising of the Cú Chulainn figure both by the Revivalists of Irish language and culture and by those who idealised his heroism to awaken political Irish awareness. It will be demonstrated that after being unearthed by Irish and German philologists the *Táin* was appropriated by the Revival and became a myth fit for the cultural nationalism which aimed at increasing the Irish cultural identity. Vivian Mercier, in *Modern Irish Literature Sources and Founders*,²²¹ suggested that from the changes in the spelling of the

²¹⁷ Quoted in Sean Mac Mahon, Jo O’Donoghue, *Taisce Duan*, (Swords: Poolbeg, 1992), p. 161.

²¹⁸ The spelling Cú Chulainn will be used throughout the thesis, the non-standardised form will only occur when quotations from other texts or titles are needed.

²¹⁹ (krak), n. v., adj. Also in the form crak 1. talk, gossip, chat. 2 A good story, gossip (H). 3 A good conversationalist, talker; esp. one with a fund of amusing stories. He’s (a) great crack... See Michael Traynor, *The English Dialect of Donegal, A Glossary*, Dublin, The Royal Irish Academy, 1953, p. 64.

²²⁰ A. G. Van Hamel, *Compert con Culainn and Other Stories*, (Medieval and Modern Irish Series, vol. III), (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1933).

²²¹ I am extending Vivian Mercier’s interpretation of Standish J. O’Grady’s unscholarly use of the spelling “Cuculain” to the other authors who with varying degrees of accuracy and competence re-told the feats of Cú Chulainn. See Vivian Mercier, *Modern Irish Literature, Sources and Founders*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 98.

name of the young warrior Cú Chulain and related characters (from Cuchullin to Cuchulain and Cuculain) it is possible to deduce the degree of accuracy, or lack of it, with which the *Táin* was dealt and to trace the path taken by various scholars, philologists and charlatans who studied and translated it from the nineteenth century onwards according to their knowledge of the Irish language, customs and manners. Macpherson's 18th century forgery was an indirect cause for the renewal of interest in ancient Irish literature. Due in part to the interest he aroused, the Irish cultural heritage started being explored, the Irish re-discovered the traditions that had always belonged to them. The birth of the Royal Irish Academy and the emergence of pre-scientific antiquarians and translators in the 18th century set the process of Revivalism in motion. The Irish felt the importance of re-establishing the right of ownership over their myths and ancient tales: MacPherson's "Darthula" simply was "The Tragic Fate of the Sons of Uisneach".²²² Wishing to "throw some light on the antiquities of this country" Charlotte Brooke used the right word in her introduction to *Reliques of Poetry*²²³ when she stated that with her translations from Irish she wanted to: "vindicate, in part [Irish] history, and prove its claim to scientific as well as military fame". An even more militant spirit moved Theophilus O'Flanagan, who founded the Gaelic Society "for the investigation and revival of Ancient Irish Literature". Through *Deirdre and the Sons of Uisneach*²²⁴ he gave *Darthula* back her identity with her real name Deirdre. The Revival of Irish culture, myth and literary tradition started then as a conscious act with the attempt to re-appropriate a re-discovered cultural identity.

In this rediscovery, Cú Chulainn first appears in O'Curry's enormous amount of MSS material collected in *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History* (1861). This major task, defined by Mercier "the prime source-book of the literary Revival" included the translation of "The Sick Bed of Cuchulain and the Only Jealousy of Emer", whereas in *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish, Táin Bó Cuailnge* is briefly reported in six pages and is often quoted to support O'Curry's descriptions of Celtic weapons, dress and ornaments. O'Curry's work, to which he was appointed by the Ordnance Survey, of collecting any possible fragment of ancient Irish culture and tradition was recognised by a well-known contemporary reporter of the Revival, John Millington Synge. While promoting the Irish Revival to his French readers he named O'Curry, not simply as an antiquarian, but as "l'un des premiers Irlandais qui a étudié la question avec un réel sens critique" and according to him "il existe dans les bibliothèques du Collège de la Trinité de Dublin et de l'Académie d'Irlande assez des manuscrits pour exiger, dans le cas où l'on voudrait les publier, près de 60.000

²²² James MacPherson, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland and Translated from the Gaelic or Erse language*, 1761; *The Poems of Ossian*, 1765.

²²³ Charlotte Brooke, *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, 1789. Her translations of the Red Branch and Fenian stories had great influence.

²²⁴ O'Flanagan's translation of the Deirdre legend *Deirdre, or the Lamentable Fate of the Sons of Uisneach*, was published in the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society*, (Dublin: Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Dublin, 1808).

pages in-quarto, imprimées en caractères serrés.”²²⁵ And one of the main episodes of Cú Chulainn’s cycle “The Fight of Ferdiad and Cúchulainn” where the great theme of friendship beyond death is celebrated, appears in the third volume of O’Curry’s *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History* edited by W.K. Sullivan.²²⁶

Among the antiquarians John O’ Donovan (Irish Archaeological Society) should be named even though he is not known for editing or translating from the *Táin*. He edited and translated the *Battle of Mag Rath* and *The Banquet of Dun nan Gédh*, both tales tightly connected with *Buile Suibhne* which were carefully studied and analysed by O’Keeffe in the introduction to *Buile Suibhne*, so O’Brien cannot have overlooked them when taking up the task of translating *Buile Suibhne*.

Myles na Gopaleen’s words in “Cruiskeen Lawn”, as he imagines being the co-founder of the Gaelic Union and the founder of the Royal Irish Academy, testify to O’Brien’s knowledge of and preoccupation with the scholars and antiquarians who raised and kept alive the interest in ancient Irish culture.

Many years ago I had occasion to examine, at the instance of his Grace the second Duke of Argyll, that extremely odd assemblage of hagiologies, prayers, incantations, myths and poems which you claim to be your national literature and, impressed by the mystical focus of all that, admiring its hardness and elegance of language, taking note of its remoteness from the corruption of contemporary European thought, I arranged with one or two friends - John Fleming and Michael Cusack are names which come to me undimmed from the past- for the foundation, in 1881, of the Gaelic Union, the aim of which was ‘the preservation and cultivation of the Irish language’. (Horried of prolixity and discursiveness, I here make no mention of my earlier work in the Royal Irish Academy, which I founded in 1786 and wherein I was destined to give Ireland many years of selfless labour in company with **O’Donovan and O’Curry, Reeves, Todd, Petrie, Stokes, McCullagh and Jellett**, great men all.)²²⁷

In a different article, under the heading of “Forgotten Man”, written under the different *persona* of George Knowall between 1960-66 in *the Nationalist and Leinster Times*, he is sorry for “the great Gaelic Scholar” John O’Donovan whose precious work, the *Annals of the Four Masters*, is not easily accessible.

I think I have already remarked here on the extraordinary fact that there is no memoir or biography in existence of John O’Donovan, the great Gaelic Scholar of the last century; worse, his books are long out of print and circulation and it is only in one or two central libraries that one can consult, say, his edition of the *Annals of the Four Masters*.²²⁸

²²⁵ John, M. Synge, “La Vieille Littérature Irlandaise”, *L’Européen*, 15 March 1902, in Robin Skelton, ed., J.M. Synge, *Collected Works II Prose*, (Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colyn Smythe, 1982), p. 352. “In the libraries of Trinity College Dublin and in the Irish Academy, there are such a great number of manuscripts as to require, if one wished to publish them, about 60.000 in-quarto pages, printed in small type.”

²²⁶ Eugene O’Curry, *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, W. K. Sullivan, ed., 3 vols., (London: Williams & Norgate, 1873).

²²⁷ Myles na Gopaleen, *The Hair of the Dogma*, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

²²⁸ Flann O’Brien, “Forgotten Man”, *Myles Away from Dublin: A Selection of the Earlier Writings of Brian O’Nolan*, John Wyse Jackson, ed., (London, Glasgow: Paladin Grafton Books, 1990), p. 43.

Further articles by O'Brien put his idiosyncrasies and preferences in perspective. In "Those decent folk - my friends" there is a frank admission of his hate for a revered exponent of the Irish Revival highly praised by Yeats. "Plain hatred is what I entertain for Samuel Ferguson. His *Lays of the Gael and Gall* is a disgusting anthology, a monument of home-made decay."²²⁹ His brother Ciaran recalls that as children they read extensively what was available in their father's library and Cathal G. Ó Háinle reports: "It seems that O'Brien had been "acquainted" with Sir Samuel Ferguson since his youth as "their father had a reasonably well-stocked library which contained ... Anglo-Irish poets such as Mangan and Ferguson"²³⁰ O'Brien's provocative pun on the title, on purpose, mixed *Lays of the Western Gael* by Ferguson with George's Sigerson's *Bards of the Gael and Gall*, both anthologies of poems translated from Irish highly praised by the Revivalists. His powerful assertion seems a direct response to Yeats's emotional appreciative article in 1886:

Sir Samuel Ferguson, I contend, is the greatest Irish poet, because his poems and legends embody more completely than in any other man's writings, the Irish Character. Its unflinching devotion to some single aim. Its passion ...this faithfulness to things tragic and bitter, to thoughts that wear one's life out and scatter one's joy, the Celt has above all others.²³¹

Ferguson was the only Revivalist who, having knowledge of the discoveries of the past passed through the antiquarian Revival and led it to the literary Revival, contributing with his works to set up a literature which was Irish with a history which was Irish. He started as a translator from Irish poems and proved sensitive to the sense of the Irish language and spirit of the poems; then inspired by the ancient Irish tales, he transposed them into poetry, in a strong vigorous cast. Yeats' appreciation was for these reasons and as he saw him as a Messiah who "went back to the Irish cycle, finding it... a fountain, that in the passage of centuries, was overgrown with weeds so that the very way to it was forgotten of the poets; but now that his feet have worn the pathway, many others will follow, and bring thence living waters for the healing of our nation."²³²

Although his poetry told about sorrowful Deirdre, Mesgedra and Congal, the Celtic tales he poetically transposed were updated and converted into a "highly idiosyncratic example of a typical Victorian genre".²³³ Vivian Mercier points out that his "lyrical gift was limited"²³⁴ and that he proved his ability in the translations and in a few poems. Sometimes he even altered the real sense of the Irish to make the text more acceptable to the Victorian turn of mind. He utterly misinterpreted Deirdre and Naosis's dialogue when she obliged him to elope with her.

²²⁹ "Some Other Friends", *ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

²³⁰ Cathal G. Ó Háinle, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

²³¹ William B. Yeats, *The Irish Fireside*, (9 October, 1886), pp. 52-3.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²³³ Vivian Mercier, *Modern Irish Literature, Sources and Founders*, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Keeping to O'Flanagan's translations, *Deirdre, or the Lamentable Fate of the Sons of Uisneach*,²³⁵ he translated the powerful metaphors of "heifers" and "bulls" into "damsels" and "youth", and Deirdre's very act of menacing Naoisi with shame and derision by grabbing his ears, lost its vigour.

"Fair", he said, "is the heifer that goes past me", "Heifers", "are bound to be big where bulls are not wont to be." "You have the bull of the province"..."namely the king of the Ulstermen. "I would choose ...and I would take a young bullock like you." "By no means" he said... Therewith she made a leap to him and grasped both ears on his head. "These are two ears of shame and derision", she said. "Unless you take me away with you."²³⁶

"Gentle is the damsel who passeth by", said Naoisi... "Damsels may well be gentle where there are no youths". The king of the province is betrothed to thee, oh damsel" he said..."I love him not", she replied ...I would rather love a youth like thee"... "Say not so, oh damsel", said he - Then plucking a rose from a briar she flung the flower to him...Now art thou ever disgraced if thou rejectest me"²³⁷

In the process, the original has lost its straightforward style, its primitive appeal. Although Ferguson, at the beginning of his career, had been moved by a sincere love for the neglected Irish culture by trying to create the great epic work of Irish literature he gradually dried up his true poetic vein. In the attempt to compose narrative poems by versifying and adapting translations of ancient tales, he often created, as in *Congal*, "a moralised or mythical narrative poem."²³⁸ O' Brien, who knew the original texts of the tales could not consent to Ferguson's adapting of Cú Chulainn to nineteenth-century Victorian models and to the romantic mythmaking of the epic Celtic warrior. Ferguson's 'manly' Celt,²³⁹ which had fascinated and inspired Yeats, could no longer maintain the same appeal.

A further contribution to the romantic spirit of the myth of Cú Chulainn is Eleanor Hull's edition of *The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature*²⁴⁰ dated 1898, which gained acknowledgement in Best's *Bibliography of Irish Philology 1913-41*. She edited a collection of translations of the Cú Chulainn Saga following the hero's life from his birth until his doomed end.

²³⁵ Theophilus O'Flanagan, *Deirdre, or the Lamentable Fate of the Sons of Uisneach*, op. cit.

²³⁶ Eleanor Hull, *The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature*, (London: David Nutt, 1898), p. 63.

²³⁷ Samuel Ferguson, *Dublin University Magazine*, (December, 1834), p. 670.

²³⁸ Vivian Mercier, *Modern Irish Literature, Sources and Founders*, op. cit., p. 87.

²³⁹ "'Manly' is one of Ferguson's favourite words and in this key word we see a trace of the moralistic strain that touches and disfigures some of his verse translations and adaptations", Robert Welch, *A History of Verse Translation from Irish 1789-1897*, (Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colyn Smythe, 1988), p. 99.

²⁴⁰ Eleanor Hull, *The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature: being a Collection of Stories relating to the Hero Cuchullin*, Compiled and edited with introduction and notes by Eleanor Hull, op. cit. It included "The birth of Conachar", adapted from the translation of Kuno Meyer; "How Conachar gained the kingship over Ulster", adapted from the translation of Eugene O'Curry; "The Origin of Cuchullin", from the French translation of M.L. Duvan; "Tragical death of the Sons of Usnach", from the translations of Whitley Stokes and T. O'Flanagan; Kuno Meyer; "The debility of the Ultonian Warriors" and "The appearance of the Morrighu to Cuchullin before the *Táin Bó Cúailgne*" from the German of Ernst Windisch; "The great defeat on the plain of Muirthemme before Cuchulainn's death" translated by Standish Hayes O'Grady; "The tragical death of Cuchullin", translated by Whitley Stokes. The book is provided with a map to follow the route of the *Táin Bó Cúailgne*.

Her work had a double register; she moved on scholarly grounds by tracking down the most reliable translations of the time, but she also had the aim of popularising the image of the most representative hero of the Ulster Cycle. Some of the most renowned names of Irish studies in her time appear in her edition. Together with the translations of D'Arbois de Jubainville, Thurneysen and Windisch, it includes "The Great Defeat of the Plain of Muirthemne" translated by Standish Hayes O'Grady and his study of the *Táin* with some passages translated from a modern MS.²⁴¹ Despite its "Cuchullin", it was recognised as a scholarly work. When she decided to make Cú Chulainn's heroic deeds known to a wider public she had to comply with late Victorian taste.

In her introduction (Literary qualities of the Saga, Historical aspect of the Saga, Mythology) she exposed her difficulties in trying to excuse the savagery of the Celtic customs: "Such myths and such naturalistic expressions, however, do not merit the reproach which belongs to intentional grossness of idea and of speech. They have nothing... in common with it; and ... we have thought it well, in a book intended for general reading, to omit a few passages that might wound modern susceptibilities..."²⁴² Violence and brutality could not be accepted by Victorian ethics and moral codes, warriors appearing "in full dress with the skulls of their conquered foes dangling from their waist-belts... noted champions [fighting] with sling-stones made from the brains of their enemies" could hardly be part of the gentlemanly heroism she advocated: "The Heroes are always gentlemen, their appeal is to noble motives; their chivalrous generosity to their enemies is only equalled by their devotion to their friends".²⁴³

Eleanor Hull's *The Cuchullin Saga* is not mentioned in O'Brien's "Bíoblagráf" to the MA thesis; he quotes instead Windisch's authoritative German translation of *Táin Bó Cúailgne*. But it is meaningful that a year after the publication of *ASTB* he paid tribute to S. H. O'Grady, the editor of *Silva Gadelica*, O'Grady's invaluable edition and translation of *Fiannaíocht* tales, which O'Brien substantially parodied in *ASTB*. On 16th October 1940 he wrote an appreciative and respectful anniversary obituary of Standish Hayes O'Grady. O'Grady would have been delighted himself to see that O'Brien started his piece by making a clear distinction between him and his "kinsman" Standish James O'Grady, known as a populariser of Celtic history and mythology, not a scholar at all.

Standish Hayes O'Grady died on this day 25 years ago. Most people, if asked what they knew of him, would mention *The Flight of the Eagle* or *The Coming of Cuchulainn*. This however would have annoyed the great man. 'Let me intimate', he once wrote, 'since I am often tantalised by having a kinsman's good work attributed to myself, that my trade mark (without which no goods are

²⁴¹ Standish Hayes O'Grady's analysis is made from an MS in the British Museum: Add. 18748, p.57. 1800, A. D., (copied from a MS of 1730). It coincides in the main outline of the events with the far earlier Book of Leinster Version, (1550, A.D.). Cf. Eleanor Hull, op. cit., p. 110.

²⁴² Ibid., p. XLII.

²⁴³ Ibid., pp. XLII-XLIII.

genuine) is either as on the title page of this book, or thus in full – Standish Hayes O’Grady. (*Irish Times*, 16 October, 1940)

In his translations from the *Táin*, O’Grady’s scholarly dignity was testified to by the fact that Cuchullin’s war-frenzy and distortions, which would obviously offend the Victorian canon of beauty, were described in detail in an entire paragraph. Despite the intentions the editor expressed in her introduction he could include his unexpurgated translations from the original MS:

Then it was that he suffered his *riastradh* or paroxysm, whereby he became a fearsome and multiform and wondrous and hitherto unknown being. All over him, from his crown to the ground, his flesh and every limb and joint and point and articulation of him quivered as does a tree, yea a bulrush, in mid-current. Within in his skin he put forth an unnatural effort of his body: his feet, his shins, and his knees shifted themselves and were behind him: his heels and calves and hams were displaced to the front of his leg-bones, in condition such that their knotted muscles stood up in lumps large as the clenched fist of a fighting man...Then his face underwent an extraordinary transformation: one eye became engulfed in his head...the other eye on the contrary protruded suddenly, and of itself so rested upon the cheek. His mouth was twisted awry till it met his ears. His lion’s gnashing caused flakes of fire...His ‘hero’s paroxysm’ projected itself out of his forehead, and showed longer...taller, thicker, more rigid, longer than the mast of a great ship was the perpendicular jet of dusky blood which out of his scalp’s very central point shot upwards and then was scattered to the four cardinal points...whereby was formed a magic mist of gloom resembling the smoky pall that drapes a regal dwelling, what time a king at night-fall of a winter’s day draws near to it.²⁴⁴

Eleanor Hull’s *The Cuchullin Saga* (1898) included Whitley Stokes’s “Cuchulainn’s Death”, published in the *Revue Celtique* (1877), which became an inexhaustible source for the Revival. It was Stokes who translated from Irish the iconic image of the dying Cú Chulainn being supported by his girdle strapped around a pillar-stone. This powerful image haunted the self-image of the Irish from Yeats through Pearse to the revolutionaries of the Easter Rising in 1916. Up to 1898 there was no complete edition of the epic of the *Táin*. In 1905 this important task was fulfilled. Windisch, who translated it into German, provided the first complete edition of the saga, then D’Arbois de Jubainville translated it into French in 1912. Whitley Stokes had thought of translating it, but in view of several difficulties changed his mind. The History of the translation of the *Táin* leaves a mark by its very absence. The fact that Stokes did not translate the *TBC* is significant in itself.²⁴⁵ It would have been impossible at that time to find a publisher ready to face the publication of the whole *Táin* without toning down the sexual components and the physical deformities of the hero. It was not until Kinsella’s *Táin* in 1969 that the edulcorated version of the brave warrior-knight, present in S. J. O’Grady and Lady Gregory, disappeared.

²⁴⁴ Eleanor Hull, op. cit., pp. 174-76.

²⁴⁵ Kuno Meyer said he was thinking about it, see Vivian Mercier, *Modern Irish Literature, Sources and Founders*, op. cit., p. 30.

From the end of the nineteenth century to the second decade of the twentieth the retrieval of ancient literary MSS and the study of the modern Irish language were promoted by a German scholar, Kuno Meyer, whose imprint on Irish cultural national growth can be defined as long lasting. His editions and translations, *The Vision of Mac Conglinne* (1892), *The Voyage of Bran* (1895-7), *King and Hermit* (1901), *Liadain and Cuirthir* (1902), *Cain of Adamnain* (1905), *The Fianaigeacht* (Todd Lecture Series, 1910), *Selection of Ancient Irish Poetry* (1911), (1913), as milestones in the History of Irish Literature, influenced generations of Irish students and writers from the Revival to O' Brien who found in Meyer's *Ancient Irish Poetry*²⁴⁶ a solid basis for his MA. His presence is still felt nowadays in his contribution to Irish studies, the Dublin School of Celtic Studies in Burlington Road, the continuation of the 'School for Irish Learning', "a worthy physical monument to his memory."²⁴⁷

Anticipating Douglas Hyde and the Gaelic League he felt the necessity to found a school where students interested in learning Irish could find a place where their needs for this specific knowledge could be met. To this end Meyer called the best Irish scholars to teach in the school, thus creating fertile ground for the process of revitalisation of the Irish National Movement. It is no coincidence that textbooks written for the School became required reading for the Irish courses at the then growing Irish University, "testifying to the durability of the work done by the school's professors"²⁴⁸

Strachan's *Stories from the Táin*, published in 1908-9 as a textbook for the lessons, is reported to have been used by O'Brien in his first years at University College Dublin.²⁴⁹ Kuno Meyer joined a love for ancient MSS with an interest in modern Irish, contributing to the establishment and growth of the philological analysis of ancient Irish texts as well the study of spoken language. His lecture at the Concert Hall of the Rotunda in 1903 advocating the birth of a school of Irish could be significantly held as effective as the lecture by Douglas Hyde "The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland":

The Gaelic revival, one of the most remarkable and unexpected national movements of our time, is an event of such recency that even the youngest amongst us can remember its beginnings. It is one of those almost elemental phenomena, the suddenness and force of which seems to carry everything before it, while it astonishes no one more, perhaps, than those who have started it. Now it is absolutely necessary, if there is to emanate from Ireland work of first-rate importance in history, philology, literature, archaeology, that there should be established a school in which the foundation for these studies would be laid by a study of the Irish language and literature. Without a knowledge of the Irish language...old Irish, middle Irish, modern Irish - no real advance in our knowledge...is possible, because the source, the documents, are written in Irish. I need not here again dwell on the

²⁴⁶ Nine titles of O'Brien's "Bioblagráf" belong to Kuno Meyer's production: *Ancient Irish Poetry*, *Irish Metrics*, *Bruchst ücke der Altern Lyrik Irlands*, *Anecdota ó LSS*, *Gaedhilge*, *Imtheachtái an Chumáinn Cymmrodorian*, 1895/6, *Otia Mersiana*, i, ii, iii., *Four Songs of Summer and Winter*, *Marban and the Hermit*, *Fianaigeacht*.

²⁴⁷ Seán Ó Lúing, *Kuno Meyer: 1858-1919, A Biography*, (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1991), p. 236.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64

²⁴⁹ See Cathal G. Ó Háinle, *op. cit.*, p. 18: "In the second year of their course, honours students of Modern Irish were required to attend lectures in Early and Medieval Irish and 'to obtain a certain percentage of fixed marks' in an examination, the text set for which was Strachan's *Stories from the Táin*".

wealth and variety of Irish literature in all branches, and reiterate...that no one is in a position to speak with authority of it as a whole.... But let us consider for one moment the magnitude of the task that has yet to be accomplished. Let me begin with the language. To trace the history of the language from the oldest available records to modern times...to date and locate every piece of prose or poetry with exactness these are some of the tasks which await the student of Irish philology. As to literature the amount and variety of the work to be done is even greater. Here is the oldest vernacular poetry and prose of Western Europe handed down in hundreds of manuscripts, very few of which have been edited, many of which have hardly been opened, while the majority have only been hastily glanced at. What a task for generations of students! This is a task essentially for Irishmen to perform.²⁵⁰

Yet the gap between scholarship and popularisation had long remained unbridged; readers of Irish myths and folk stories had little interest in the scholarly translations from manuscripts and the compilation of Gaelic dictionaries through records of everyday language that glottologists had been working on for years. The publication of Standish J. O'Grady's *History of Ireland: Heroic Period* in 1878 demonstrated that it was possible to combine popularisation and what at the time appeared to be scholarly work. Having a name similar to his relative, Standish Hayes O'Grady, made the diffusion of his book easier; he even got a good review by a well known Irish scholar, E. Müller who, in the *Revue Celtique*, simply lamented that the sources of the translations were missing.²⁵¹ Notwithstanding the good impact he had on the literary Revivalists, his work remains a literary forgery, a mix of careless history with appealing romantic narrative, presented as a real history of Ireland. His "Cuculain", the aspirate in whose name he consciously ignored, was romanticised and degraded to the point of losing the original primitive connotations. O'Grady's "Cuculain" became a must for younger generations. By handing the ancient tales down to contemporary and younger generations he created a symbol for the Irish people, heroic, manly and noble.

O'Grady's "Cuculain", revived by Yeats,²⁵² Pearse and McDonagh is ultimately responsible for the icon with which the insurrectionists of the Easter Uprising of 1916 identified. Paradoxically if O'Grady had not popularised the myth of Cú Chulainn to make it more accessible to the Victorian mind, such a hero would not have stirred the Irish consciences of those who attempted to make Ireland a republic.

Inspired by O' Halloran's *A General History of Ireland* (1778); John O'Donovan's *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616*; Keating's *History* translated by John Mahony and Eugene O'Curry's *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History* (1861), he undertook the major work of writing what he called the *History of Ireland: Heroic Period*. "Between 1878 and 1882 he published the works that were to become his most important contribution to the Irish Literary Revival"²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Seán Ó Lúing, op. cit., pp.243-44.

²⁵¹ Vivian Mercier, *Modern Irish Literature, Sources and Founders*, op. cit., p.98.

²⁵² Of the three Yeats knew no Irish, so had to resort to the work of popularisers or translators, as he could not read the original texts of the ancient Irish tales.

²⁵³ Edward A. Hagan, *High 'Nonsensical' Words: A Study of the Works of Standish James O'Grady*, (Troy, New York: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1986), p. 39. He published *History of Ireland: The Heroic Period* (1878), *Early*

Laying the basis for a Vindication of Ireland his source material highly influenced his vision of Irish History. Being educated in Protestant schools where history was taught from the point of view of the British colonisers he was sincerely shocked when he found in O'Halloran's volumes that the Irish had an heroic past which "ran back to an age when Greece was still in the cradle."

Enthusiastic about what he had discovered about his predecessors he mythologised the Irish past and historicised Irish myth with the aim of creating a national identity and a social consciousness among the Ascendancy whose predominant connotation had been "absenteeism". Cú Chulainn's legend and his single combats vehicled a new interest in the Irish roots of the Celtic Race.

O'Grady "was especially indebted to the translation of the *Tan-bo-Coolney*" by John O'Daly. This translation, deriving from a "wretched" MS in the Royal Irish Academy,²⁵⁴ is not acknowledged in the list of translations of the *Táin* provided by Best in his *Bibliography of Irish Philology*. O'Grady worked on his *History* with the clear intention of demonstrating the rise of a great civilisation. "Some of the stories in the sources about Cuculain did not contribute to the heroic image that O'Grady considered the correct image of Cuculain, so he dismissed them as not 'canonical'".²⁵⁵ Although O'Curry's *Manners and Customs* contained a Cú Chulainn who is not immaculate (he kills a king to elope with his wife; several times he is unfaithful to his wife), and Keating's *History* does not ignore Conchobor's incest with his mother and it even relates about cannibalism. O'Grady thought that sex, cowardice and humour had to be eliminated as they diverted the attention of the readers from the heroic deeds of Cú Chulainn's persona. This is clearly shown in O'Grady's rendition of Cú Chulainn's initiation rite when thirty naked women meet Cú Chulainn to calm his war-frenzy, drawn from O'Daly's translation.²⁵⁶ In O'Grady's text Cú Chulainn's sense of shame is soothed by reducing the number from thirty naked women to three. Compare the manuscript of the Royal Irish Academy (MS. 24.M. 39, pp. 90-92) with O'Grady's text:

...They came to the resolution to send forth to meet the youth thirty women, and they active and blushing naked, exposing their persons and their shame before him. And the youth hid his face...and turned his face towards the body of the chariot as soon as he perceived the nakedness and the shame of the women.

Bardic Literature, Ireland (1879), *History of Ireland: Cuculain and His Contemporaries* (1880), *History of Ireland: Critical and Philosophical* (1882).

²⁵⁴ Vivian Mercier, *Modern Irish Literature, Sources and Founders*, op. cit., p.101.

²⁵⁵ Edward A. Hagan, op. cit., p. 41.

²⁵⁶ Under the name of O'Daly was concealed the identity of another translator: Kelly. See Edward A. Hagan, op. cit., note 19, p. 58.

Cuculain, leaning forward, saw in the midst of the road ...three women standing together naked upon the bridge over which the chariot should pass, and their faces were turned to the warriors. Then ...the reins dropped from the hands of the boy and red shame suffused his neck and face...²⁵⁷

Nor could grotesque images be allowed by the epic glorification of the national hero; O'Grady could not conceive the idea of a Cú Chulainn sporting three-coloured hair on his head, a jet of dusky blood erupting from his head, a pupil with seven colours, and seven fingers or toes on each hand and foot. By complying with the idea of history as a didactic means he finally converted a pagan hero into a chivalrous knight whose code of honour definitely did not fit in the epic of the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*.

Specific aspects of narration are differently reinterpreted by O'Grady's romantic view. The Ulstermen's debility is charged with the mysterious overtones of an "enchantment". Under magic spell the Ulaid of the Province of the North experience the same predicament as the Anglo-Irish aristocracy in being reduced to impotence. O'Grady borrows the term from Carlyle's political vision of England and "enchanted" became his word to describe the incapacity of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy to take over the leadership of the Irish nation.²⁵⁸

The political understanding of Ireland to-day is under a spell and its will paralysed...The enchantment only changes its mode of action - it does not cease to act- from generation to generation and from year to year, in the night time and in the day time...knows no abatement of its power; it lies as heavy on the land to-day as in the decade that witnessed the great betrayal.

In his political pamphlet *All Ireland* he remarked that "the heroic age was not just a tradition but a prophecy; unfulfilled, but which is to be fulfilled." In his idealistic view he not only saw Cú Chulainn tied to the honour of the past, but also projected him as a heroic figure that would act for Ireland's future glory. The Ulstermen's "enchantment" could be broken by taking action; like Cú Chulainn in single combat the Irish people would beat their antagonists.

By evoking the deeds of warriors and exalting the Emania Corps, Standish J. O'Grady advocated militarism and violence as part of the ethic of the ruling class and projected the shadows of violent nationalist demands over the next generations.

Paradoxically it was to Cú Chulainn and his foster-brothers, to Finn and his Fianna, that Pearse and the Countess Markievicz likened the military corps of Volunteers and the special corps of scouts and that Connolly likened the military drills of the Irish Citizen Army before the Easter Rising. So it is not inexplicable that Yeats should have interrogated himself, even though he did not interrogate O'Grady, as to whether he had sent Irish youth to the massacre by asking them to follow Cathleen ni Houlihan... "Did that play of mine send

²⁵⁷ Standish J. O' Grady, *History of Ireland: the Heroic Period*, vol. I, 1978, (New York: Lemma rpt., 1970), p. 257.

²⁵⁸ Standish J. O' Grady, "The Great Enchantment I.", *Selected Essays and Passages*, (Dublin: The Talbot Press Ltd, n.d.), p. 174.

out/Certain men the English shot?"²⁵⁹ Likewise, he communicated his sense of guilt, his anxiety at the birth of a newly discovered identity and his fear of violent deeds, in the extremely effective oxymoron of "a terrible beauty" which he used to call his roll of honour for the martyrs of the rebellion. Yet the same violent deeds he and O'Grady had celebrated in shaping the outline of a romantic and fearless hero were now disturbing him, haunting him. What neither of them had foreseen was the weight of self-sacrifice.

We know their dream: enough
 To know they dreamed and are dead.²⁶⁰
 Hearts with one purpose alone
 Through summer and winter seem
 Enchanted to a stone²⁶¹

Using O'Grady's lexical item "enchanted" and referring to the dying Cú Chulainn Yeats himself is enchanted and bewildered by the "patrol of [foolish] fearless little Cuchulainns" who, defiantly marching towards certain defeat, had become the new Heroes of Ireland. He is confused by violence and yet this violence after a long process of guerrilla warfare gained the Irish freedom from the British.

Significantly the riots provoked by *The Playboy of the Western World* were also caused by a concealed reference to Cú Chulainn. Possibly very few people in the audience of 1907, if any, would have seen in Christy's exclamation the hidden connection with the *Táin*: "It's Pegeen I'm seeking only, and what'd I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself, maybe, from this place to the eastern world?"²⁶² The image suggested and the word uttered by Christy, "shift", which offended the Irish audience evokes, for the reader learned in the *Táin*, a daring image referring to the well-known episode of the *Táin* when thirty naked women were sent to confront Cú Chulainn to ease his war-foolly. Actually, the "Playboy of the Western World", pretending to have killed his father, disguised the mere killing as an epic; it represented an encouragement to violence, but only verbal, a parody of bloodletting heroism.

I just riz the loy and let fall the edge of it on the ridge of his skull, and he went down at my feet like an empty sack, and never let a grunt or groan from him at all. (*PW*, 69)

He gave a drive with the scythe, and I gave a leap to the east. Then I turned around with my back to the north, and I hit a blow on the ridge of his skull, laid him stretched out, and had split to the knob of his gullet. (*PW*, 79)

...the way they'd set their eyes upon a gallant orphan cleft his father with one blow to the breeches belt! (*PW*, 107-8)

²⁵⁹ W. B. Yeats, "The Man and the Echo", *Poems of W. B. Yeats*, (London: MacMillan, 1962), p. 181.

²⁶⁰ W. B. Yeats, "Easter 1916", *ibid.*, p. 93; Cf. also: "When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side/What stalked through the Post Office? [...]", "The Statues", *ibid.*, p. 174.

²⁶¹ W. B. Yeats, "Easter 1916", *ibid.*, p. 92.

²⁶² J. M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*, (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 160.

The tale of the killing is gradually inflated as time goes by and becomes bombastic, taking it up to a mythic plane. After some time the simple act of letting the ridge of the loy fall on his father's skull grows bigger and becomes the act of a giant. Their fight extends: with their feet they touch the cardinal points. The second time, with a simple blow he splits his father to the knob of his gullet; the next time to the belt of his breeches! Christy is heroicised through his words, not his acts: as an inverted Cú Chulainn he is celebrated for what he is thought to have done. As Pegeen states "there is a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed." (*PW*, 107-8) Advocating violence is not the same as performing violence. When Christy tries to kill his father on stage Pegeen and the whole community of violent peasants are horrified. The villagers are used to a certain degree of violence; they shelter someone who is reputed to have committed parricide, maim animals, accept the widow Quin, an uxoricide, into their community, and finally Pegeen shows her brutal savagery torturing Christy by scorching his leg with a lighted sod. It is peculiar therefore that they should be scandalised and hypocritically be shocked by violence being performed before their eyes.

Synge staged and predicted the hypocritical attitude the Irish intellectuals would have towards violence as a result of the Easter Rising after watching the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Irish Citizen Army engaging in combat like Cú Chulainn, but unfortunately leaving many of them slaughtered on the ground. Synge had read and studied Standish J. O'Grady's work and he too had been inflamed, but knowing Irish and being able to tap the original sources he did not need O'Grady's mediation. He could not accept the "Cuchullin" passed off by O'Grady as the true "historic" Cú Chulainn. Synge was thoroughly aware that, in the process of being brought to a greater number of readers, the original Irish texts had been and were being distorted and even exploited to literary, moral and political ends. Even when he reviewed Lady Gregory's translation *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, though fascinated by the style, he was particularly fastidious in keeping "translation" distinct from "literary rendition". He did not recommend the book to students as they might find several changes to the original manuscripts as regards grotesque and violent images:

For readers who take more than literary interest in these stories a word of warning may be needed: Lady Gregory has omitted certain barbarous features, such as the descriptions of the fury of Cuchulain, and, in consequence, some of her versions have a much less archaic aspect than the original texts. Students of mythology will read this book with interest, yet for their severer studies they must still turn to the works of German scholars, who translate without hesitation all that has come down to us in the Mss.²⁶³

²⁶³John M. Synge, "An Epic of Ulster", Alan Price, ed., *J. M. Synge. Collected Works, II Prose*, (Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colyn Smythe, 1982), p. 370.

Lady Gregory's *Cú Chulainn* also came from Victorian Ireland and was the product of a folk tale collector who knew Irish and a promoter of the Irish Literary Movement. She organised, translated and retold the epic of *Cú Chulainn* making him speak "Kiltartanese", the dialect spoken by the peasants of the Western part of Ireland around her residence at Coole Park. She attempted to logically reconstruct the narration of *Cú Chulainn's* story, drawing material from the original tales only partly studied, classified and translated by competent scholars. When her book was published it was saluted by Yeats as "the best that [had] ever come out of Ireland." Her translation, which deeply marked the Literary Revival, bears the signs of its cultural epoch, as did the *Táin* by Kinsella who, in the desire to respect its original Celtic roots, accentuated its primitive features.²⁶⁴

Even though she was criticised by Synge for her unscholarly approach she had nevertheless carefully studied how to assemble the tales of *Cú Chulainn*. She relied on several *rémscela* (preliminary tales) to make *Cú Chulainn's* story complete for the story's sake and set up her work by resourcefully tapping antefacts and parallel tales to clarify "why" and "how" events led to the final defeat of the Connacht army. Her aim, ambiguously voiced in her introduction, was to popularise the tale for the Irish peasants and for this reason she proclaimed her adherence and loyalty to the talk of the folk people. Unfortunately for her, none of her *protégés* could afford to buy or read her book: it was too far from their cultural horizons as they were deeply buried in their culture of hard work and survival. Lady Gregory's target readers were instead middle and upper class Anglo-Irish or British who could not tolerate any breaches of Victorian ethics. So her secret aim was to hand the riches of the language and tradition of Gaelic peasants down to them.

When the ancient myths were adapted for the theatre and Deirdre, Medb, *Cú Chulainn* became characters meant to walk the stage, Standish J. O'Grady, who had made the ancient legends popular, objected to the dramatic treatment of heroic literature, to rendering these myths too accessible. As *Æ* reported in a critical article, Standish J. O'Grady felt that:

The Red Branch ought not to be staged. That literature ought not to be produced for popular consumption, for the edification of the crowd... I say to you drop this thing at your peril.... You may succeed in degrading Irish ideals, and banishing the soul of the land... Leave the heroic cycles alone, and don't bring them down to the crowd.²⁶⁵

As *Æ* democratically put, O'Grady was, at this stage, worried that

²⁶⁴ See Joep Leersen, "Táin after Táin: The Mythical Past and the Anglo-Irish", Joris Duytschaever, Geert Lernout, eds., *History and Violence in Anglo-Irish Literature*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), pp. 29-46.

²⁶⁵ Quoted from *Æ*, *The Tower Press Booklets, Some Irish Essays*, (Dublin: The Tower Press, n. d.), p. 21. *Æ's* article was published in *Samhain*, (2), 1902, as a reply to O'Grady's review of *Æ's* play: "Deirdre".

The Red Branch cycle [would be] cast in dramatic form or given to the people; they are too great to be staged... He fears that many forbidden subjects will be themes for dramatic art, that Maeve with her many husbands will walk the stage, and the lusts of an earlier age be revived to please the lusts of to-day.²⁶⁶

In *Æ*'s words, once O'Grady had found "the Gaelic tradition like a neglected antique dun, [and he had] opened the barred doors... the wild rivers [had gone] forth to work their will."²⁶⁷ He should not have been surprised, as drama was the final step in the popularising of Irish epics he himself had commenced and could not be stopped!

In spite of O'Grady, in the following years the young, brave, spotless, chivalric hero of *Cú Chulainn* was still staged and performed, and he finally and dramatically acted the last scene of his play in the streets of Dublin under the pillars of the G.P.O., led by "a man called Pearse". Easter Tuesday April 25 was to be the opening date of the already famous one-act play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.²⁶⁸ At the head of the cast list appears Sean Connolly, as Peter Gillane, who on that evening instead of acting on the Abbey stage had already appeared in the streets of Dublin and had been caught by a sniper. Armed rebellion and the Irish cultural Renaissance were conforming to the same script, while being rehearsed on the stage of the Abbey *Cathleen ni Houlihan* provided the insurrectionists with the "material" for the 1916 rising; *Cathleen*'s insurrection inspired *Cú Chulainn*'s insurrection.

Cú Chulainn's last military undertaking had been evoked since the times of Standish J. O'Grady, who had highly praised the heroism of the young troops of Emania's corps, but the hero's valour had never been canonised. It was in St. Enda's and among the files of the Irish Citizen Army and Constance de Markievicz's groups of the Fianna boy scouts that a strong patriotic spirit bordering on violence was cultivated. *To the Boys of Ireland*, a manifesto of Na Fianna Eireann, represents an outspoken document of how the principles of violence were being circulated and mixed with game-like activities, like those of the scouts.

We of Na Fianna Eireann, at the beginning of this year 1914, a year which is likely to be momentous in the history of our country, address ourselves to the boys of Ireland and invite them to band themselves in a *knightly* service. We believe that the highest thing anyone can do is to serve well and truly, and we purpose to serve Ireland with all our fealty and with all our strength. Two occasions are spoken of in an ancient Irish story upon which Irish boys marched to the rescue of their country when it was sore beset - once when Cuchulainn and the boy-troop of Ulster held the frontier until the Ulster heroes rose, and again when the boys of Ireland kept the foreign invaders in check on the shores of Ventry until Fionn had rallied the Fianna: it may be that a similar tale shall have to record that the boys of Na Fianna Eireann stood in the *battle-gap* until the Volunteers armed.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁶⁸ Yeats had written *Cathleen ni Houlihan* to celebrate the 1798 Irish rebellion against the British.

²⁶⁹ Pearse, Patrick (?), "To the Boys of Ireland", *The Easter Rising: Dublin 1916*, *Jackdaw* 61, n. 1. (London: Jackdaw Publications London, 1969), *Jackdaw* is a collection of reprints of original documents relating to the Easter Rising reproduced by courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland.

Cú Chulainn served the cause! This group of boy scouts had been formed with the purpose of constituting a boy-troop like that of Cú Chulainn. Constance de Markievicz, who became their leader, had designed the flag, which recited the ancient motto: "Purity in our hearts-Strength in our arms-Truth on our lips". In 1914 the first Fianna handbook was issued and for its epic appeal and "the combination of high sentiment and practical information about drilling and rifle practice" was one of the most useful and widely read pieces of nationalist literature.²⁷⁰ Patrick Pearse contributed to the booklèt with an article about the inheritance of the Fianna.

Comparison between the part of the manifesto quoted above and the prospectus of Pearse's St. Enda's school shows a similar vein of glorification of nationalist ideals.

Our programme includes every element of a military training. We are not mere "Boy Scouts," although we teach and practice the art of scouting. Physical culture, infantry drill, marching, the routine of camp life, semaphore and Morse signalling, scouting in all its branches, elementary tactics, ambulance and first aid, swimming, hurling, and football, are all included in our scheme of training; and opportunity is given to the older boys for bayonet and rifle practice. This does not exhaust our programme, for we believe that mental culture should go hand in hand with physical culture, and we provide instruction in Irish History, lectures on historical and literary subjects, and musical and social entertainments as opportunities permit... Hence we endeavour to train our boys to be pure, truthful, honest, sober, kindly; clean in heart as well in body... We bear a very noble name and inherit very noble traditions...²⁷¹

The central purpose of the School will be not so much the imparting of knowledge...as the formation of its pupils' characters; the eliciting and development of the individual bents and traits of each; the kindling of their imaginations; the giving them an interest and an aim in life; the placing before them of a high standard of conduct and duty; ... the training up of those entrusted to its care to be, in the first place, strong and noble and useful men and in the second, devoted sons of their Motherland.²⁷²

The school's curriculum included religious training, Irish language teaching, modern languages and bilingual teaching in all subjects and also laid particular emphasis on drill and gymnastics:

Careful attention will be devoted to Physical Culture. All the boys will be taught Drill and the various exercises of the Gymnasium. The chief outdoor games will be Hurling, Gaelic Football, and Handball. Irish Dancing will form a part of the ordinary curriculum. The boys will be taught to prize bodily vigour, grace, and cleanliness, and the advantages of an active outdoor life will be constantly insisted on...²⁷³

The virtues these youths were to aim at were love and reverence for Christian virtues, purity, temperance, fortitude, truth, and loving-kindness. "A spirit of chivalry and self-sacrifice... The School Staff will direct earnest efforts towards the awakening of a spirit of patriotism and the

²⁷⁰ Cf. Jacqueline Van Voris, *Constance de Markievicz in the Cause of Ireland*, (Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1967), p. 145.

²⁷¹ *Jackdaw* 61, op. cit.

²⁷² *St. Enda's School*, Prospectus of the school of St. Enda, edited by the staff of the school, p. 1.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

formation of a sense of civic and social duty". It is evident that in between the lines Patrick Pearse's school aimed from the beginning to form a boy-troop, a *Macradh* for Ireland.

It was at St Enda's that Cú Chulainn was crowned as a Christ-like self-sacrificing hero - a painting of the hero was proudly displayed in the hall as Pearse's pupils reported- and Pearse elevated him to the altar as patron saint of the youth he brought up and educated. "Over Cullenswood House loomed the heroic figure of Cuchulainn, and its atmosphere was a Gaelic one. Cuchulainn moved with Sgoil Eanna to the Hermitage, but settled down and became an invisible member of the staff."²⁷⁴

The words Pearse pronounced at the end of the school year, after *Mac-Ghniomharta Chuculainn* (*The Boy-deeds of Cuchulainn*) was staged as a pageant: "We are anxious to crown our first year's work with something worthy and symbolic: anxious to send our boys home with the knightly image of Cuchulainn in their hearts and his knightly words ringing in their ears"²⁷⁵ still evidently propose a Cú Chulainn, who claims to be staged and passed down with the medieval connotations first circulated by O'Grady.

At St. Enda's the ideal of fosterage was practically experienced. At the same time the pupils were encouraged to become independent and even to run the school, setting up a committee of representatives appointed by the students themselves, which duplicated the roles of the organising staff of the school. "It was one of the dreams Pearse realised. A child Republic well describes the freedom the boys were allowed in shaping the internal government of the school."²⁷⁶

Cú Chulainn's pagan motto "I care not though I were to live but one day and night if only my fame and my deeds live after me" was joined with Colmcille's motto "If I die it will be from the excess of love that I bear the Gael"²⁷⁷ and thus paganism and Christianity were combined in a sanguinary self-sacrificing mysticism. Although Pearse finally assented to militarism and to overthrowing British rule by force, sending his own pupils to be massacred, he had not been a promoter of violence from the start. He had gone through different stages from language revivalist, journalist, literary critic, pamphleteer, modern headmaster, playwright and poet to warrior and martyr of the 1916 Easter Rebellion. Young and idealistic, often blinded by the good cause of reviving both the Irish language and culture, he did not hesitate to violently libel Synge's *Playboy* at first, ending up by defending it against his Gaelic

²⁷⁴ Desmond Ryan, *The Man Called Pearse*, (Dublin: Maunsel and Roberts, Ltd., 1923), p. 83. On the same page he goes on to report how the students were "indoctrinated". "He told his pupils the entire Cuchulainn and Fionn cycles and the main periods, movements, and men in Irish history..." "Pageants and open-air plays accustomed the boys to the Old World and very costumes of the antiquity of the sagas".

²⁷⁵ Ruth Dudley-Edwards, *Patrick Pearse, The Triumph of Failure*, (London: Victor Gallancz Ltd, 1977), p. 224.

²⁷⁶ Cf. Desmond Ryan, "A captain, officers, and committee were annually elected amidst tremendous excitement", op. cit., p. 82.

²⁷⁷ Quoted in Patrick H. Pearse, *The Murder Machine*, (Dublin, Cork: The Mercier Press, 1976), p. 22.

League companions as an outstanding masterpiece of Irish literature, even though it belonged to Anglo-Irish literature.

Two brief didactic stories by Pearse argued over the perennial disagreement of the language revivalists. The first tale “The Language that Was Nearing Extinction and the Professors” examined how to save a native language. Surveying the process which had led the Irish first to trace and study their language in manuscripts, then to discover it in its spoken state among the country people without agreeing on which dialect should be used, he satirically ended the fable with the death of the native language whose “epitaph was [ironically] written in the foreign tongue.”²⁷⁸ The second tale “The Learned Men who Tricked the Poor People” described what among the scholars was defined the “spelling debate”. As a solution the Learned Men suggested they “put the spelling of the language upside down so that people will take years to learn it”.²⁷⁹ They finally invented “the simple spelling”²⁸⁰ which was a far more difficult system than the previous one. These didactic satires, pointing at savage arguments over accents and spelling, published in 1912 in *An Barr Buadh*, preceded O’Brien’s endless parodic argument in *Comhthrom Féinne* and the *Irish Times* against the most conservative Gaelic Leaguers. O’Brien indulged in satirising those who thought Irish should be promoted at all costs; he ironically made the use of accents, *fada* and certain lexical forms vital issues for the survival of the Irish race.

O’Brien lived in the very Irish Free State Patrick Pearse founded and like him was much concerned with the fortunes of the Gaelic language. O’Brien could not approve of militarism, he could not agree with Pearse’s ideals as they inevitably led to De Valera’s Ireland, with nationalism taken to the extremes of cultural closure and bigotry. Fantasising himself as a Douglas Hyde-figure, a co-founder of the Gaelic Union, O’Brien thus sourly commented on its results.

This much I must make crystal clear, *my aim in founding the Gaelic Union* was a worthy one. I sought to preserve what was signified, urbane and adult in the remnants of the Gaelic civilisation then subsisting. *At no time did I authorise the revolting manifestations and exercises, which go by the name of ‘gaelicism’* today. Nothing was further from my thoughts than a ‘gaelic revival’ that connoted the atrophy of Irish intellects nor did I dream that the publication of a few old tales should become a pathogenic influence on the minds of the young and the innocent. I did not foresee that my labours should in due time lead grown men who were apparently sane to denounce many ideas and practices on the sole ground that they were ‘foreign’. I did not think that ever would come the day when young Irishmen, made from the incomparable salts and essences of the Irish soil, should permit their minds to decay to the putrescent flux that has made possible the sticking up on public buildings of the statement A Gaelic Ireland is a Prosperous Ireland! (*CL*, no date, *The Hair of the Dogma*, 8-9)

²⁷⁸ Raymond, J. Porter, *P.H.Pearse*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc, 1973), p.42.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-2.

²⁸⁰ Probably Pearse was referring to “Letiriú Shimplí, a system of spelling put forward in 1910 by Osborn Bergin and Shán Ó Cuív”. See Máirtín Ó Murchú, *The Irish Language*, (Dublin: Dept. Of Foreign Affairs, 1985), p. 64.

Unfortunately for Pearse, his revolutionary ideas were exploited after the Easter Rebellion to build the myth of a Gaelic Ireland, but neither the Minister of Education nor the political parties or the government took into account any of his innovative teaching methods such as bilingualism or more freedom for students, or his “socialist” ideals. His success in Irish schools followed a strange pattern; soon after his death “His stories, poems and editions of Gaelic texts appeared on the syllabi” and “his popularity with the Department of Education in the 1920s merely made the name of Pearse familiar to school-children, but with *Fianna Fail* in 1932, a new spirit possessed the educators.”²⁸¹

The teaching of the Irish itself is...not an end in itself...The aim is broader and more difficult. It is to restore, as far as is practicable, the characteristically Gaelic turn of mind and way of looking at life. That Gaelic attitude, of course, gives us our individuality as a nation, without it we become an amorphous or a hybrid people and in these modern days of foreign penetration by newspaper, book or cinema, the need for a vivid conception of our duty in this regard is more urgent than ever. [Italics added]

Its notes for teachers, which advised them to establish the “Gaelic outlook” and to fear the “foreign penetration”, explain why O’Brien, as “Myles”, “regretted having founded the Gaelic Union” as it had as a consequence ‘gaelicism’...a pathogenic influence on the minds of the young”, (*CL, The Hair of the Dogma*, 9) and constitutes a sound defeat for Pearse’s ideals. He had not only worked to create the culture of nationality among the Gaels, but had also laid the bases for renovating the Anglo-Irish school system by experimenting teaching at St. Enda’s.

Pearse had started his career by editing *An Claidheamh Soluis* (*The Sword of Light*): in its pages he had run his pro-Gaelic race, and his editorials had played a leading role in the promotion of Irish at all costs and everywhere; his attempts to found a new literary Irish tradition had made him try his hand with interesting specimens of literary works in modern spoken Irish to prove that his theories deserved credit. From *An Claidheamh Soluis* Pearse waged his anti-British war polemising against churchmen, politicians and men of letters who did not endorse his Gaelic faith, and from there the campaign against Synge’s *Playboy* was launched by encouraging Dubliners to boycott the play. In *An Claidheamh Soluis* Synge had at first been harshly criticised on account of his immorality. Then the Gaelic League, after having denied the “Irishness” of Synge’s works, readmitted his Anglo-Irish works into the canon of Irish tradition. After Synge’s death, on 30 April 1910, an unsigned article on the third page encouraged readers to see him as a great playwright, putting his work on the same level as the *Táin*

²⁸¹ Quoted in Ruth Dudley-Edwards, op. cit, p. 340.

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and Synge are of the same blood...If anyone ever came to know the secret of the faraway hills, that man is Synge...Aran meant more to him than Paris in France²⁸²

In 1913 Pearse, ex-editor of *An Claidheamh Soluis*, no longer opposed the playwright he had previously attacked; he praised the dramatist as

A man who spoke what he believed the truth...one of the two or three men who have in our time made Ireland considerable in the eyes of the world, uses strange symbols which we do not understand, we cry out that he has blasphemed and we proceed to crucify him.²⁸³

An Claidheamh Soluis, as the “Sword of Light”, connected in early literature with the coming of the Gaels to Ireland, was “represented” at the G.P.O. in the sword Pearse sported at the Easter Rising and left a heavy burden of violence and death behind.

In O’Brien’s opinion, *An Claidheamh Soluis* must have left a durable sign in Irish culture and society if in 1963 he still felt its presence as a poisonous powerful jet rising from the underground polluting Dublin, and thus he attacked this symbol with a mechanised version of the rhetoric connected with the Gaelic League’s propaganda.

Remember the sewer that went underground at T.C.D.? At a given signal a gaudy plume - or spew - of Inchicore sludge will leap into the sky from that hole, and by an electronic device will be ignited at an elevation of 50 feet. The flame is expected to be deep orange and the whole apparition will be known as the **Sword of Light**... Nobody will dare go near the sword. In fact its unearthly odour will accelerate traffic. Economic viability? Oh yes! In Central Dublin the E.S.B. will be told to pack up, and all the streets, shops, and private houses will be lit by sewer gas. It will be used in cinemas and theatres, and heaven help the person who permits an escape or leak. Can cooking be done by sewer gas? Very likely yes. A committee of chemical and mechanical engineers from the staff of T.C.D. is working on the design of the NEW ERA CORPORATION SLUDGE RANGE (*CL*, 20 November 1963).²⁸⁴

²⁸² See Declan Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, (London: MacMillan, 1979)., p 258.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p 259.

²⁸⁴ Quoted in Anne Clune, Tess Hurson, eds., *Conjuring Complexities*, (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen’s University of Belfast, 1997), p.115.

2.2 The “Circle N Ranch” Episode and the *Táin*

O’Brien emphatically did not make Cú Chulainn his dominant hero, but drew on the *Táin* tales²⁸⁵ and, as will be demonstrated, he finally decided to delete the parody of Cú Chulainn’s birth that he had maintained in the text until December 1938.²⁸⁶ To explain how O’Brien inserted the *Táin*²⁸⁷ into the intricate texture of his narration, I need a different methodology from the one employed in analysing *Buile Suibhne* in its interconnections with *ASTB*. The way the *Táin* is dealt with by O’Brien baffles any definite classification as it is used on different levels of narration and is often closely connected with other Irish historical and literary texts, which offered thematic links. The most significant section of *ASTB* where references to the *Táin* occur is the highly concentrated passage of “cowboyese”, *Circle N Ranch*²⁸⁸ (henceforward referred to as CNR) where cowboys, Indians and the Dublin Police interact staging an improbable cattle-raid in the streets of Dublin.

The *Táin* is also referred to in the part in which the Pooka and the Good Fairy are on a pilgrimage to the new-born Orlick and they meet the cowboys, Jem Casey and Sweeny.

A feature of the heroic life of Cú Chulainn is his triple birth celebrated in *Compert Con Culainn*. His awkward nature, neither totally human nor divine, offered O’Brien a structural solution for *ASTB*. In fact at a secondary level of narration, meta-narration, the *Táin* and *Compert Con Culainn* work as a source for the main plot of *ASTB*, the Deichtine-Conchobor-

²⁸⁵ The *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Cattle Raid of Cooley) is the prominent tale among the *Tána* tales and tells how “Medb, Queen of Connacht, makes a raid on the Ulaid (Ulstermen) to carry off the Donn (Brown) Cuailnge, a great bull from Cooley in Co. Louth, so that she can rival her husband, Ailill, who possesses a comparable bull called Finnbhennac (Whitehorned). At first she tries to acquire the Donn peacefully, sending emissaries to its owner Dáire, but they wax boastful in drink, saying that the bull would have been taken away... Dáire refuses her and the *Táin* begins. When the Connacht army reaches Ard Cuillenn they find the first sign of Cú Chulainn... an oak sapling bent into a hoop and carved with ogam, on a standing stone... When Ailill asks who has done this, Fergus recounts Cú Chulainn’s boyhood deeds. Now 17, he defends Ulster alone since the Ulstermen are suffering a debility laid on them by Macha for compelling her to race while pregnant. Cú Chulainn attacks the Connacht army in a series of devastating night raids... killing hundreds... Fergus makes an agreement with Cú Chulainn, committing him to a bout of single combat each day. After several single combats where Cú Chulainn is the winner. He fights the Morrigan, but in the end her wounds heal. A troop of boys attack Medb and are killed. Cú Chulainn enraged goes into the “warp-spasm” and makes a great slaughter. Then Cú Chulainn and his fosterbrother Ferdia fight for three days and nights and Ferdia is finally killed by means of Cú Chulainn’s gaebolga. When the final battle is engaged the Connacht forces retreat, but Medb has sent the Donn... to safety in Cruachain. During the retreat she menstruates... Cú Chulainn agrees to allow her forces back to Connacht where they foregather to witness the bull-combat that concludes the *Táin*. After killing the rival bull in a fierce struggle the Donn drops dead.” Cf. Robert Welch, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 551.

²⁸⁶ Cf. letter to A. M. Heath & Co., 3rd October, 1938, Robert Hogan and Gordon Henderson, eds., *The Journal of Irish Literature*, III, 1 (January 1974), p. 67.

²⁸⁷ “The *Táin* belongs to the body of literature known as the Ulster cycle. [The epic is made of a group of different tales], a collection of roughly 80 heroic sagas, poems and shorter pieces which deal primarily with the ancient Ulaid... Although the *Táin* is found in numerous MSS only three main versions are distinguished... All of these ultimately derive from the First Recension. The First Recension is obviously a compilation, shows different linguistic strata and is marked by many inconsistencies and doublets.” See Ruairí O’ hUiginn, “The background and development of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*”, in J.P. Mallory, ed., *Aspects of the Táin*, (Belfast: December Publication, 1992), p. 29.

²⁸⁸ This particular section is inserted in the second-level-plot. The student-narrator creates Trellis a character-writer who writes a novel against sin. Trellis uses different characters, some are even imported from the narration of a cowboy writer

Lugh relationship and Cú Chulainn's birth providing a model for Sheila Lamont's rape by Trellis and Orlick's birth. Consequently O'Brien establishes the "character-writer" relationship on the same level as the human-divine connection which gave life to the hero Cú Chulainn. As a result Trellis, the novelist who writes a book as part of a crusade against sin, and who is unable to resist his own character Sheila, generates Orlick Trellis, a "semi-character-semi-writer" offspring.²⁸⁹

This hypothesis, which sees the structural construction of the second level of *ASTB* as based on *Compert con Culainn*, is confirmed by the fact that *Compert Con Culainn* also appears in a fragment, "Memoir on the Pooka's grandfather, the Crack MacPhellimey" present in both MSS of *ASTB* but excised from the published novel.

Finding a specimen which is so rich in references to *Compert con Culainn* outside the pages of the official text reveals that at a certain stage of composition of *ASTB* the *Táin* must have been in O'Brien's mind. So O'Brien made up his *rémscela* (preliminary tales) to explain the Pooka's birth and disguised and travestied the first of Cú Chulainn's births in a passage where Fergus MacPhellimey, the Pooka, a prominent character in *ASTB*, is born.

The reading of the "Circle N Ranch" episode, a surrealistic *tour de force* in Ringsend, will be supplemented by an analysis of the corresponding episode in the MSS. As a result of comparison between *ASTB* and the suppressed passages from the excised MSS, it is possible to deduce where O'Brien stands in the dispute between the romantic heroic stance and a realistic view of contemporary society.

On this basis it can be demonstrated that O'Brien was selective; he did not make his parodies at random, but had a critical purpose. He effectively reduced the scale of the great Ulster epic, dignified by the Irish intelligentsia as a national myth, to give it a more human dimension; juxtaposed with modern journalese and its myths and with cowboy fiction, the old myth loses its aura and becomes anachronistic and comic, compromising with "the now".

Due to the intricacy of the matter and the length of the comment needed to decode the different ways the *Táin* is used in the text, the analysis will start directly from the text itself. The philological-historical background will be considered when necessary because the degree of pastiche and travesty O'Brien achieves in the "Cowboyese" section of the "Circle N Ranch" reduces the possibility of tracing a specific version of the *Táin* as a textual reference for his verbal games. The *Táin* does not emerge through the fabric of the episode at a surface level; the impression one gets at first is that Flann O'Brien is making a parody of the cowboy and Indian stories which were a common staple of popular culture in the '20s and '30s.

William Tracy. Characters such as Paul Shanahan, Slug Willard and Shorty Andrews, live a cowpunching adventure in Dublin, modern counterparts of the cattle-raiders of Irish tradition.

²⁸⁹ Orlick is in fact the son of a writer-character (Trellis who is a character of the student-narrator and is himself a writer) and of the character of a character (Sheila who is Trellis's character).

The C N Ranch episode runs through Paul Shanahan's reports of his cow-punching experience in Dublin when he was employed by his creator, the novelist William Tracy. He recalls that while he and his pals were having porter in the bunkhouse, their cattle and their negro maids were raided, stolen. A cowboy adventure, complete with its jargon and imagery, is hence developed and set in Ringsend. The main outline of the CNR episode sees Paul Shanahan being summoned by William Tracy; he goes with Shorty to get his orders but is told that it is a false alarm: nobody has called him. So they go back to their place and drink beer with black maids, taking their porter from a chiffonier. While they are assembled having good fun listening to improbable music in a cowboy scenario, (Phil the Flutter, Ave Maria etc), their cattle, their steer and their negro skivvies are captured and taken away. So they set out on a mission to re-conquer their property. They finally get to Red Kiersay's Ranch after having called into action the Dublin Metropolitan Police and some Indians camping in Phoenix Park who are also characters in Tracy's novels. Red Kiersay comes out of the ranch and "stands out for king and country". He stops a tram, crashes its windows and a battle starts in the town streets with snipers and trenches. When the battle is over Red Kiersay is in his tent "doing the Brian Boru" (*ASTB*, 58) and Shanahan cannot kill him, recalling Hamlet with his uncle Claudius. The street-fighters are called to court and sent "to seven days' hard labour without the option of a fine" "on charges of riotous assembly and malicious damage." (*ASTB*, 59)

The CNR episode is structurally composed of four different "Excerpts from the Press" (an obituary, a police discovery, part of a sightseeing tour, a Court report) and the oral tale of Mr. Shanahan who recalls his past when he was working as a cow-puncher in Dublin for the novelist William Tracy for whom the obituary was written.

In AMS the Excerpts from the Press are five, including a scientific report of experiments being effected to give life to a perfect being of emerald green colour, and a few more of Shanahan's memories are included. Comparison between AMS and the published novel shows that the CNR episode was originally longer, less condensed but still chaotic and surreal. It emerges that three passages were completely eliminated from the final draft and some details were omitted from the fragments eventually included. There is an even greater mixture and parody of different literary genres and conventions.

In the CNR fragment of AMS there are no traces of the *Táin*; among the parts first drafted, then eliminated, there is no mention or reference to Fergus, Medb or Cú Chulainn.

But underneath the image of the cowboys running wild in Dublin streets there appears the shadow of the ancient heroes raiding the Irish territories. The *Táin* as a national epic is perceived by readers at a deeper level; O'Brien gave details, factual elements, which remind the reader of the cultural import of the mythic work of Cú Chulainn's world. It is possible to infer that O'Brien did not apply his rewriting of the original tale exclusively to one of the extant manuscripts of the *Táin*;²⁹⁰ he probably referred to the MSS analysed in Recension I by

²⁹⁰ *Táin Bó Cuailnge* has been preserved in three Recensions: *Recension I* is generally called the Lu-version, as Lebor na hUidre (LU) is the oldest manuscript (ed. by Best and Bergin) which contains part of it. This recension is also found in Egerton 1782 (W) and in the *Yellow Book of Lecan*. None of the 3 MSS is copied from the other, none is complete. Two main scribes have been distinguished; a third erased some passages and inserted many interpolations. *Recension II* is the version contained in the *Book of Leinster* (LL). The text is complete except for one page. *Recension II* is also represented

Cecile O'Rahilly: *Lebor na hUidre*, *The Yellow Book of Lecan* and Egerton 1782, or else he might simply have tapped the sources circulated by the popularisers Lady Gregory and Eleanor Hull.²⁹¹ Specifically the passage he made a parody of in the *Circle N Ranch*, which will be examined later, occurs both in Recension I (*TBC*, R I, 154-55) and in *Cu Culain of Muirthemne* by Lady Gregory. (*COM*, 156-7).

There has been great debate about the oral or written origin and meaning of the *Táin*²⁹² but nowadays it is interpreted as a written text recorded in the seventh-eighth century, possibly in a monastic scriptorium²⁹³. It certainly has a mythical source and Queen Medb originally embodied the sovereignty of the land. Throughout the text a sexual dispute for predominance is at work and an accentuated misogynistic tone²⁹⁴ is perceivable, for instance in the Bull *Finnbhennac* not accepting the idea of being in a woman's herd and in Fergus's several remarks about being misled by a woman.²⁹⁵ It may be that the *Táin* reflects the cultural change that was operating in Christianised Ireland. Privileges and prestige could no longer be granted to the Goddess of sovereignty if that meant that she had to yield to several lovers. Central to the epic is the custom of raiding cattle²⁹⁶, but here the cattle-raid, common enough in historic Ireland to be numbered in the annals over centuries²⁹⁷ takes on a mythic connotation. In fact the cattle raid of Cooley was carried out not to appropriate a great quantity of cattle, the main issue determining any *Tána*, and not even to show the greatness of a chief²⁹⁸ as they were

in the expansion and modernisation known as the *Stowe Version*. See Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cuailnge from The Book of Leinster*, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1984).

²⁹¹ During his university studies it is certain that he read the *Táin* in the Strachan edition, *Stories from the Táin* (Dublin, 1908), later revised by Osborn Bergin, Second ed., Dublin 1928. Ns.158-67. This edition, which drew on *Lebor na hUidre* and the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, mainly concentrates on Cú Chulainn's boyhood deeds and his single combat during the cattle-raid. It does not mention episodes connected with Fergus and Medb as the one adopted by O'Brien in his parody.

²⁹² "*Táin Bó Cuailnge*...belongs to the category called *Tána* or cattle-raids. The word *Táin*, a verbal noun formed from the verb "*do-aig*" means literally a "driving off" and has been translated into English variously as a cattle-raid, a cow-spoil and a cow-plunder. Although the word *Táin* seems to leave open the option of driving away whatever species of creatures lets itself be driven, the Irish stories are without exception *tána bó*: driving of cows." Cf. Vincent Dunn, *Cattle-raids and Courtships, Medieval Narratives in a Traditional Context*, (New York, London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989), p. 23, pp. 35-67. For the definition of 'cattle-raiding' See Proinsias McCana in Vincent Dunn, op. cit., p. 29. See also A.T. Lucas, *Cattle in Ancient Ireland*, (Kilkenny: Boetkins Press, 1989), pp. 125-27.

²⁹³ For the dating of *Táin Bó Cuailnge* and its oral/written origin, see Ruairi O' hUiginn, who makes a report of the different views on the topic (Carney, Kelleher, Greene) in G. P. Mallory ed., *Aspects of the Táin*, Belfast, 1992, pp. 20-33; 57-59, see also James Carney "Early Irish Literature: The State of Research" in *Proceedings of the 6th International Congress of Celtic Studies, Galway, 6-13 July, 1979*, (DIAS, 1983), pp. 113-118. A further perspective is given by the hypothesis of considering the *Táin* a tale archaising the past. See Patricia Kelly in G. P. Mallory, *Aspects of the Táin*, op. cit. p. 76.

²⁹⁴ Compared to other cattle-raids the *Táin* presents an anomalous inversion of sexual roles. "It is not the dispatching parent to send his son to raid cattle but a woman seeking a bull." See Vincent Dunn, op. cit. pp. 56-63.

²⁹⁵ 'That is what usually happens,' said Fergus, 'to a herd of horses led by a mare. Their substance is taken and carried off and guarded as they follow a woman who has misled them.' (*TBC*, RI, 237).

²⁹⁶ "As a reflex of ...universal preoccupation with cows, cow-raiding is the theme of the greatest of the Irish epic tales, the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*...which is the most famous, was only one of a series of tales centred on the same subject: *Táin Bó Fraich*, *Táin BóRegamain*, *Táin BóDartada* and *Táin BóFlidais*", A. T. Lucas, op. cit., p. 4.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4, "Nothing in Irish society is better documented over so long a period. It is the most typical and abiding event recorded in the annals down the centuries and it pervades almost every branch of literature".

²⁹⁸ Cf. Proinsias McCana in Vincent Dunn, op. cit., p. 29: "For the Celts the successful cattle-raid was an assertion of integrity of the tribal community vis-à-vis its neighbours and vindication of its leader's claim to primacy, ever an important part of King's initiation." Cf. also A. T. Lucas, op. cit., p. 146: "A further indication of the cattle-raid as a

generally meant to. This time a great army is mobilised to conquer a single bull, a mythical bull. Such a departure from the codified laws of *Tána* discloses a secret cosmological meaning, by now lost, which finds validation in the final struggle of the two bulls which give rise to the physical features of Ireland.²⁹⁹ So the *Táin*, in the opinion of some scholars a cosmological legend and an archaistic rendering of the past celebrating the battle of Connacht and Ulster, has taken on a multi-layered meaning, and has become the national epic for the Irish self-image. O'Brien could not resist parodying what had become a cultural cliché.

An outline of the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, the prominent tale in the Ulster Cycle, is essential to recognise the areas in which O'Brien operated and borrowed from the *Táin* re-cycling it in the "Circle N Ranch" episode:

The story opens with the episode of **the pillow talk**, a conversation between Medb, queen of Connacht and Ailill her husband, which ends in a dispute as to which of them is the richest. They finally find that in point of wealth they are much the same, but there is **one great bull called Finnbheannach or White-horned, who was really calved by one of Medb's cows, considered it disgraceful to be under a woman, and so had gone over to Ailill's herds.** Medb finds out that there is in the district of Cuailnge a most celebrated bull, the Dun Bull of Cuailnge. As she cannot have it in peace she gathers her armies and moves war on Ulster. **Among the Ulstermen the only person who is able to fight is Cú Chulainn as the rest of his people are stricken with birth pangs.** Medb has on her side a self-exiled Ulsterman, Fergus Mac Roich. Cú Chulainn slays hundreds of Medb's warriors until it is decided by Cú Chulainn and Fergus to continue the fight by means of single combat. **Fergus, one of Cú Chulainn's fosterfathers³⁰⁰ plays an ambiguous role in the *Táin* and actually in a way betrays Queen Medb and Connacht.** He resorts to several ruses to protect his native province and in particular his fosterson Cú Chulainn. **He is known for the possession of a great sword but it is stolen from him by Medb's husband after his informer Ferloga or Cuillius found the queen making love with Fergus.** He only has his sword back before the final battle. It is there that being faced by Cú Chulainn he **turns his back on him and withdraws with his men** as he had previously agreed with his *protégé*. But after the battle the two bulls Donn of Cuailnge and Finnbhennac fight each other originating with parts of their bodies scattered during the struggle, places, hills, mountains and valleys, and finally die. The hero is doomed and the Morrighu foretells his death. He dies at the age of twenty-seven still proving his heroic nature by dying in an upright position.

In *ASTB, A Relevant Excerpt from the Press* puts Liza Roberts, the youngest of the black maids, Shorty Andrews and Detective Officer Snodgrass in direct correspondence with Queen

social institution is the fact that it was customary for the newly inaugurated king to signal the occasion and prove his mettle by a raid into the territory...of enemies".

²⁹⁹ Cf. Ruairi O'hUiginn, in G. P. Mallory, op. cit., p. 61: "David Greene suggested that the original tale simply comprised the fight of the two bulls, and that other episodes, including much of the material about Cú Chulainn, were added to this or developed in the course of time. But as I have suggested the original material of the *Táin* lay in the rivalry between the divine bulls, with which the story still begins and ends."

³⁰⁰ At the end of *Compert con Culainn*, when Cú Chulainn was finally born "the men of Ulster were assembled in Emain Macha ...and they began arguing over which of them should rear the boy" Cf. Thomas Kinsella, *The Táin*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 23, "it was decided that: "He should be given to Conchobar...Sencha can teach him

In *ASTB*, *A Relevant Excerpt from the Press* puts Liza Roberts, the youngest of the black maids, Shorty Andrews and Detective Officer Snodgrass in direct correspondence with Queen Medb, Fergus Mac Roch and Ferloga, Ailill's charioteer. As this specific episode is only to be found in *Táin Bó Cuailnge* Recension I it is better to compare the *ASTB* section with a similar passage taken from *Táin Bó Cuailnge* Recension I and *Cuchulainn of Muirthemne* which offer enough material to deduce O' Brien's reworking of it:

An examination of the galley and servants' sleeping-quarters revealed no trace of the negro maids. They had been offered lucrative inducements to come from the United States and had at no time expressed themselves as being dissatisfied with their conditions of service. Detective-Officer-Snodgrass found a pearl-handled shooting iron under the pillow in the bed of Liza Roberts, the youngest of the maids. **No great importance is attached by the police to this discovery, however** as ownership has been traced to Peter (Shorty) Andrews, a cowboy, who states that though at a loss to explain the presence of his property in the maid's bed, it is possible that she appropriated the article in order to clean it in her spare time in bed (she was an industrious girl) or in order to play a joke. **It is stated that the former explanation is the more likely of the two as there is no intercourse of a social character between the men and the scullery-maids. A number of minor clues have been found and an arrest is expected in the near future. Conclusion of excerpt. (*ASTB*, 54-55)**

At that time, a suspicion came on Ailell, that there was some understanding between Maeve and Fergus, and he bade Ferloga to keep a watch on them. After a while, Ferloga saw that Maeve and Fergus had stopped in a wood.... and he followed after them quietly, the way they would not hear him, and there he found Fergus's sword lying on the ground. So he took the sword out of the sheath, and he cut a wooden sword and shaped it, and put it into the sheath in its place, and he brought Fergus's sword back to Ailell, and told him how he had found it, and Ailell bade him hide it in his chariot. When Fergus saw that his sword was gone and a wooden sword was put in its place, there was great confusion on him; but Ailell said nothing of it when they met, but asked him to come and play a game of chess with him. And at the game they quarrelled, and Ailell said sharp words of blame to Fergus and to Maeve...and Fergus bade him give him up his sword. But Ailell said he would never give it to him until the day of the great battle would come, between the men of Ireland and the men of Ulster. (*Cuchulainn of Muirthemne*, 157-8)

Then Ailill said to Cuillius, his charioteer:
'Spy for me today on Medb and Fergus. I do not know what has brought them thus together. I shall be glad if you can bring me a proof.' Cuillius arrived when they were in Cuichri. The lovers remained behind while the warriors went on ahead. Cuillius came to where they were, but they did not hear the spy. Fergus's sword happened to be beside him and Cuillius drew it out of its scabbard, leaving the scabbard empty. **Then he came back to Ailill.**
'Well?' said Ailill. 'Well indeed' said Cuillius 'Here is a proof for you'...'As you thought', said Cuillius, 'I found them both lying together.' **'She is right (to behave thus).'** **said Ailill.** **'She did it to help in the cattle-driving. Make sure that the sword remains in good condition. Now keep the sword in order. Put it under your seat in the chariot, wrapped in a linen cloth.'**
Then Fergus rose up to look for his sword.
'Alas' he cried.
'What ails you?' asked Medb.
'I have wronged Ailill,' said he. 'Wait here until I come out of the wood, and do not wonder if it is a long time until I return.'
Now in fact Medb did not know of the loss of the sword. **Fergus went off; taking his charioteer's sword in his hand.** In the wood he cut a wooden sword. (*TBC, Recension I*, 154-55)

Here the author enters the texture of an episode of the *Táin* by appointing Detective-Officer Snodgrass like Ferloga-Cuillius to spy on the youngest of the maids Liza Roberts-

the youngest of the maids” reminds us of Medb and Ailill’s pillow talk which triggers off the subsequent Cattle-raid and the chariot seat under which, wrapped in a linen cloth, the sword was hidden. Peter (Shorty) Andrews who loses a pearl-handled weapon suggests the poor Fergus mac Roich deprived of his sword.³⁰² Both Recension I and YBL stress that Fergus had lost his beloved weapon. As is known the name of Fergus meant virility, his patronymic “ró-ech” meant ‘great stallion’³⁰³ and his sword “caladhcolg” designated the phallic sign of the mythical king’s virility. His sword was hidden away and substituted with a wooden one. Only at the final battle between Connacht and Ulster did Ailill give it back to its legitimate owner, Fergus. From the *Táin* to the Dublin environment, Ailill’s words: “Now keep the sword in order. Put it under your chariot-seat with a piece of linen around it” are transmuted into the ironical appropriating of the article on the part of Liza Roberts “in order to clean it in her spare time in bed (she was an industrious girl) or in order to play a joke” (*ASTB*, 55). Cuillius’s inspection has been taken over by the more official detective Officer Snodgrass. Ailill’s approval of Medb’s behaviour, “She is right (to behave thus)...She did it to help in the cattle-driving.” (*TBC, RI*, 155) is ironically emphasised in a sexual innuendo within brackets (she was an industrious girl) on the part of the journalist. While the Police report, “No great importance is attached by the Police to this discovery”, reinforces the image of Ailill not caring much about Medb’s love affair.

With his double entendre O’ Brien directly refers to the free sexual behaviour of Queen Medb. It is amusing that in this case it is not Ferloga-Cuillius who makes the sword disappear but the maid who appropriates it. The ancient fertility goddess, the symbol of Sovereignty, whose sexual activity is directly related to the fertilisation and safety of the land has here acquired the connotation of a licentious maid, of an irresponsible sex-ridden maid. It is possible to infer that O’Brien by transforming a goddess into an immoral maid was perfectly conscious of the change that the fertility goddess had experienced as time went by and new generations imposed their cultural interpretation of the same archetype. As Rosalind Clark states.³⁰⁴

This change is one of the most important in the image of sovereignty in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In pagan days it was desirable for a goddess such as Medb to have as many lovers as possible: it proved her power as a fertility goddess and, by extension, gave fertility to the land.

³⁰² It may be significant to note that this passage is absent from Strachan’s edition of the *Táin* and from Douglas Hyde’s retelling of the *Táin* in his *Irish Literary History*. It is only present in Thurneysen, Lady Gregory and Kinsella. As Lady Gregory herself said, she based her translation on the *Book of Leinster*, but this episode is not included there. So she must have collated it from *The Book of Dun Cow* or *The Yellow Book of Lecan*.

³⁰³ See Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, op. cit., p. 195

³⁰⁴ Cf. Rosalind Clark, *The Great Queens*, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), p. 170. “In the medieval tales it was important that she be the spouse of a whole line of kings. In the twelfth-century *Táin*, Medb retains her sexual freedom but is ridiculed for it by the author. Christian morals prevail. By the eighteenth century it is customary for the poet to rebuke Ireland for her harlotry a natural image since she is seen as a woman betrothed to one prince but possessed by another.” Thus she exposed the development of the same myth taken up by O’Brien in a humorous way.

In the AMS of *ASTB*, attached to the passage about Liza Roberts and her spare time activities, there is a further line added which attests to the discovery of female underclothing behind a bush in the country. Cheeky sexual allusions are underscored in the *Relevant Excerpt from the Press*. The published version ends with the reassuring line that confirms that: "there is no intercourse of a social character between the men and the scullery-maids...and an arrest is expected..." The Manuscript reports other finds, of a different nature: "(A stained corset and another) Article of /female/ underclothing have been retrieved from a shrubbery and are being forwarded /for examination/ to the Department of Pathology, University College. Conclusion of excerpt."³⁰⁵ (AMS, p. 75) Further on, references to female underclothes are also one of the main concerns of Trellis, who asks his hired character Shanahan if he knows anything about ladies' underwear. Brassieres, corsets... However, Trellis's questions are neatly crossed out from the AMS.³⁰⁶

The passage quoted above about Liza Roberts is intersected by another set of references that project "the youngest of the maids" to the wider horizons of the American prairies. Here O'Brien is probably alluding to the most prolific and famous cowboy-writer of the twentieth century whose unusual name was Pearl Zane Grey.³⁰⁷ O'Brien might be referring to him because, besides being the writer who established the genre of western novels he informed his stories with a strange blend of sex and gun shooting. "In the thirties he had achieved great popularity and more than one hundred movies were based on his best sellers. His novels were labelled as adolescent fantasies set in a never-land of romance and adventure...and [had] a vast popularity with working people."³⁰⁸ In his narrative, wild-looking often foul-mouthed, violent cowboys and beautiful sensual heroines expressed rebellion against sexual constriction and a free instinct in contact with wild nature.

Two references in "Cruiskeen-Lawn", Monday, 7 July, 1958 and 2 July, 1942, confirm the hypothesis that Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage*, recurring in his column, represented the book which in O'Brien's opinion, like *An t-Oileánach*, or *A Portrait* was the most successful in its genre and deserved to be parodied:

³⁰⁵ Deleted parts are indicated between brackets, added parts between slashes.

³⁰⁶ References to sexual matters were crossed out throughout the AMS, probably in deference to the Publishers, as is clearly stated in one of the last letters O'Brien sent to Longmans on 3 October 1938. "Coarse words and references have been deleted or watered down and made innocuous." Cf. Anthony Cronin, op. cit., p.95.

³⁰⁷ See Buck Rainey, *The Reel Cowboy: Essays on the Myth in Movies and Literature*, (Jefferson, London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1996), pp. 38-65.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Only Americans can write like this, and the title pages remind me that it is published originally by Northwestern University, so I suppose there must be cowboys lurking in the purple sage, though by that term I must not be taken as referring to the apoplectic author. (CL, 7 July, 1958)³⁰⁹

Riders of the Purple Sage, Æ's intimate friends (CL, 2 July, 1942)

The *Circle N Ranch* section might have been Cú Chulainn's natural setting in the novel as it is the only place where the *Táin* can be traced and pinned down with a certain degree of accuracy. What, however, happens in the episode is that the prototype of the brave, valiant warrior gives room to another archetype, that of the cowboy. What makes this aspect of the novel outlandish is that the cowboys are recruited to ply their trade in Dublin, in the district of Ringsend.

The idea of the cowboy working in Dublin germinated in O'Brien as early as his university years. A brief passage in *The Romance of Blather*, "Your ignoramus of a son? What of his future? For that matter, what of his past?"³¹⁰ "is seemingly the forerunner of the incredible adventure of cattle-rustling in Dublin"³¹¹:

A lucrative but somewhat overcrowded profession. Candidates must be able to throw a sombrero in the air and riddle it with a six-shooter, give the slip to the sheriff's posse and leap the Grand Canyon on a Shetland mare. *Cowboys can always get a living punching steers in Ringsend*, or holding up the Tullamore stage at Tyrrellspass. In time of trouble, a cowboy must know how to make for the badlands huh! Cowboys who wish to practise rustling cattle can do so by rustling silk in the privacy of their bedrooms, (*Blather*, I, 5, Jan. 1935).

The following parody will play on the double meaning of rustle.³¹² O'Brien's linguistic pedantry could not avoid noticing the flexibility offered by the lexical term and exploited it until the performance of a cattle-raid in Dublin exhausted even its "alliterative" possibilities.

When we got the length, be damned but wasn't the half of our steers *rustled* across the border in Irishtown by Red Kiersay's gang of thieving ruffians... we're going ridin' tonight. Where? Says Slug. Right over to them to that *rustlers' roost*,³¹³ before Tracy finds out and skins us. (*ASTB*, 54)

An article by Flann O'Brien in *Comhthrom Féinne* offers a similar interesting example of the prototype of the cowboy, which will recur both in the *Circle N Ranch* episode and in the

³⁰⁹ Tony Gray, a colleague at the *Irish Times*, in a memory of his experience with the staff of the *Irish Times*, reports that O'Brien drew material from the stories of Zane Grey for *ASTB*. Cf. "At *Swim-Two-Birds* consists of a selection of extracts from all the various books involved in this extravagant exercise. The characters were drawn from ancient Irish legends, history, imagination and works of writers including Wild West novelists like Zane Grey...", *Mr Smillye, Sir*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1991), pp. 165-166.

³¹⁰ Cf. Flann O'Brien, *Myles Before Myles*, op. cit., pp. 158-162.

³¹¹ Caoimhghín Ó Broalcháin, "Comparatively Untapped Sources" in Anne Clune, Tess Hurson, op. cit., p. 11.

³¹² Rustle: to make a soft, whispering sound, as silk, straw...; (U.S) to stir about... Rustler: one who, or that which rustles: (US) an active fellow: a cattle thief. *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, (Edinburgh, London: W. & R. Chambers, 1948), p. 829.

³¹³ O'Brien is probably playing on the alliterative title of a novel by Zane Grey: *Robbers' Roost*, (New York: Harper and Bros., 1932) which later became a film and was released by Fox on January 1, 1933. See Buck Rainey, op. cit., p. 61.

MSS. In the article 'The West's Awake', a play written by Mr. Samuel Hall, is presented. The stage directions recite:

"This time it is the Muse of Tragedy that speaks."

Peter, a Poor Idiot Boy, lives with his mother, a widow in a whitewashed cottage in North Carolina. "The door of a small ante-room is ajar, revealing the room filled with back numbers of Buffalo Bill to a height of six feet. Even the hen-house is "crammed to bursting-point with the same literature" and can be inspected by the audience if wishing to. Pete is voraciously reading the current number of Buffalo Bill. After a brief dialogic exchange the mother asks Pete to skin potatoes. Pete answers: (with the outmost scorn) skin potatoes indeed! (Proudly) I'm going away to scalp Indians!

...I'm going away to a place where men are men, where every-one is bow-legged from riding horses, where people shoot straight and live crooked; where everyone has a marvellous physique and an iron constitution that even hard drinking can't destroy; where the moon is a shield of silver in the sky, and the sun a gold metal on the bosom of the heavens; where the wind ploughs waves in the prairy grass, where the buffulo [sic] and the an'elope play, where the leaves *rustle* in the breeze, and *rustlers rustle* beeves, and where it's Springtime in the Rockies far away. ...Good bye. When I get there I'll *rustle* a couple of thousand cattle and send them to you as a present. (*Comhthrom Féinne*, V, 4 May 1933)

"The West is Awake", contained a glorious accumulation of clichés derived mainly from cowboy romances. Behind this apology for the archetype of the cowboy lies a simple ironical theorem: Irish heroes, once well-known cattle-raiders, finally emigrated to America (or moved to Dublin) to become famous cowboys, that is, to become yet another heroic image of cattle-raiders.

In O'Brien's cattle-raid in the CNR episode the metaphor of Red Indians and cowboys is dilated. The mythic theme of the frontier, first exploited when Shanahan realises that "the half of [their] steers [was] *rustled* across the border in Irishtown" takes on new connotations when across the divide are displayed Indians, cowboys and policemen. A great escalation of violence is celebrated. "Shorty and myself behind a sack of potatoes picking off the snipers like be damned. On raged the scrap for half an hour, the lot of us giving back more than we got." (*ASTB*, 58) Suddenly from the Far West we are projected into the scenario of the 1916 Easter Rising. Snipers, trenches, shells and machine guns find their place in the street fights of Dublin. This is how the *Irish Times* article "The Outbreak", Tuesday, April 25, 1916 described, the event:

This newspaper has never been published in stranger circumstances than those which obtain today. An attempt has been made to overthrow the constitutional government of Ireland. It began yesterday morning in Dublin - at present we can speak for no other part of Ireland...In the very centre of the city a party of the rebel volunteers took possession of St. Stephen's Green where as we write they are still entrenched...Fierce fighting has taken place between the soldiers and the rebels in various parts of the city, and there is reason to fear that many lives have been lost.

A suggestion that O'Brien is referring to the Easter Rising is reinforced by the people commenting on the actions of the insurrectionists. With a journalist's eye, O'Brien records this odd aspect of the insurrection, pointed out by the *Irish Times* as "remarkable":

Nothing in all yesterday's remarkable scenes was more remarkable than the quietness and courage with which the people of Dublin accepted the sudden and widespread danger. In the very neighbourhood of the fiercest fighting the streets were full of cheerful or indifferent spectators. (*Irish Times*, 25 April, 1916, p. 4)

In no time wasn't there a crowd around the battlefield and them cheering and calling and asking...O you'll always get those boys to gather. Sneeze in the street and they 're all around you (*ASTB*, 58)

The idea of the people in the street behaving as an audience in a theatre, "as indifferent spectators" looking on to the scene of the fighting³¹⁴ is a common aspect noticed by the commentators of the Easter Rising which was held as a tragicomic representation of the Irish destiny.

Days before the outbreak rumours were spread of an oncoming insurrection, but nobody believed them. The Volunteers' parade through Dublin and their drills were seen as innocuous as children's games. James Stephens' reporting on the rumours he heard in the streets is evidence that the rebels were not feared:

I did hear people say in the streets that two days before the rising they knew it was to come; they invariably added that they had not believed the news, and had laughed at it. A priest said the same thing in my hearing, and it may be that the rumour was widely spread, and that everybody, including the authorities, looked upon it as a joke.³¹⁵

But trenches were dug in Stephen's Green and the motor boat *Helga* threw shells from the Liffey, destroyed Liberty Hall and part of Sackville Street was burnt down. In *ASTB* there is reference to a real war, which raged in the streets of Dublin with a great show of violence. "Now is your chance to lead your men over the top and capture the enemy's stronghold for good and all" (*ASTB*, 58) Shanahan and his gang of policemen, Indians and cowboys finally defeat their enemy. However, Shanahan cannot beat Red Kiersay as he is, like Brian Boru, praying in his tent. Like Hamlet ready to take his revenge and kill his uncle, he feels impotent because his enemy is on his knees praying, "doing the Brian Boru". (*ASTB*, 58).

The highly emphasised battle of the *Táin*, which actually ended with the withdrawal of the Connacht army with Medb, Ailill and Fergus leading it, deflates its warlike potentialities.

³¹⁴ "...the number of people who would speak was few, and one regarded the noncommittal folk who were so smiling and polite, and so prepared to talk, with much curiosity, seeking to read in their eyes, in their bearing, even in the cut of their clothes what might be the secret movements and cogitations of their minds." James Stephens, *The Insurrection in Dublin*, (Dublin and London: Maunsel & Company, Ltd., 1916), p. 57.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

That the scope of the narration of the *Táin* was not the final battle³¹⁶ between Connacht and Ulster is proved by the fact that limited space is reserved for the description of the battle. A description of the military uniforms and weapons of the participants is preferred to the carnage. In *ASTB* what started as an episode of youngster hooliganism degenerates and becomes war, juvenile games lead to final destruction. The myth of heroism and the insurrection are suddenly deprived of heroic glamour. Those who had imagined they were living a cowboy adventure in Dublin are taken down to realistic dimensions and are sentenced to a week of hard labour without the option of a fine.

Relevant Excerpt from the Press: A number of men, stated to be labourers, were arraigned before Mr. Lamphall in the District Court yesterday morning on charges of malicious damage. Accused were described as a gang of **corner boys** whose horseplay in the streets was the curse of the Ringsend district"(*ASTB*, 59)

The Rising ends in a week's time, the Volunteers surrender and are made prisoners. What is relevant, and O'Brien noticed, it is the way the press reported the event, minimising it. "The *Irish Times* published an edition which contained nothing but an official proclamation that evilly-disposed persons had disturbed the peace, and that the situation was well in hand. The news stated that there was a Sinn Fein rising in Dublin, and that the rest of the country was quiet..."³¹⁷ It is really amusing to see how O'Brien converted what the Press had defined "evilly-disposed persons (who) had disturbed the peace"³¹⁸ into "a number of men (charged) with riotous assembly and (especially) malicious damage" (*ASTB*, 59) and how the whole event of the Easter Rising passing through the sieve of the Press has become: "the last escapade (in which) two windows were broken in a tram-car..." (*ASTB*, 59).

Complaints as to their conduct were frequently being received from residents in the area. On the occasion of the last escapade, two windows were broken in a tram-car the property of the Dublin United Tram Company... (*ASTB*, 59)

The Relevant Excerpt from the Press puts an end to the extreme tour de force O'Brien has pushed his readers through in this section of the *Circle N Ranch*. After his plundering from the *Táin*, *Brian Boru*, and the Easter Rising he finally decides that the guys deserving seven days' hard labour should be defined **playboys of the boulevards**, unequivocal "foster-brothers" of the *Playboy of the Western World*.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ "The march of the Companies is recorded in about 12 pages (220-231), while the actual battle is developed in about four pages (233-236). Cf. Cecile O'Rahilly, *Recension I*, op. cit.

³¹⁷ James Stephens, op. cit., p. 21.

³¹⁸ Ibid, p. 21.

³¹⁹ O'Brien's dislike of Synge as the inventor of the cliché of the "peasant" is evident from other quotations from "Cruiskeen Lawn". "Cornerboy of the Western World is my name for that fellow" (*CL*, 12 Nov. 1955). "He claimed that Synge was a 'moneyed dilettante coming straight from Paris to study the peasants of Aran'. From Aran he came

And even in the excised part of the AMS there is a final brief part which does not appear in *ASTB* when, after mentioning Shorty and Shanahan and the narrator who are picking off the snipers, it is reported that “the enemy mounted two pieces of cannon on the motorman’s platform and gave [them] a bloody shell on the buckboard that sent two of the wheelspokes halfway across the prairy”. (AMS, 83) It is clear that after the isolated fight between Red Flanagan and the cowboys the dimensions have enlarged: a cruel war is being waged by the enemies if they mount cannons and send bloody shells against harmless buckboards.

Subsequently, while doing the Brian Boru, Red Flanagan encourages Shanahan and his pals to take their steers back. But a strange scene opens up before their eyes. Their steers are stone dead, killed on the ground. “But damn me if the lot weren’t killed stone dead by the flying bullets and the flaming arrows, 2000 heaps of cold beef lying there on the prairy. I’m telling you it was sorrowful three punchers that rode home to Ringsend that night”. (AMS, 84) This final overturning of the happy ending, this “healthy” vision of massacred bodies, 2000 heaps of cold beef lying on the prairy, frustrates the initial desire of the cowboys to fight to recover the stolen steers and the black skivvies. The final result of the *Táin* is unequivocal: the two bulls fight to death and in the struggle the brown bull scatters Finbhennac’s spoils throughout Ireland.³²⁰ In a country, where cattle raiding was endemic and where it had something of the character of a national sport, the subverted logic of the winning *Táin* was that of 2000 heaps of dead steers. What often was the consequence of a cattle-raid if not the likely death of the rustled animals?

back to Dublin ‘to pour forth a deluge of home-made jargon all over the Abbey Stage’. He referred to Synge as “an ignorant and affected interloper in an uniquely decent stable and civilised community” (*CL*, 4 Oct. 1954). See Anne Clissman, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-5.

³²⁰ Cf. “Setting off in pursuit of stolen cattle was a usual custom for the Irish who often killed their enemies’ cattle in retaliation if they had been victims of cattle raids or pursued their cattle with the aim of reconquering what had been snatched from them and rustled away.”, A. T. Lucas, *op. cit.*, p.159.

2.3 The 2nd Level Plot

O'Brien also employs the *Táin* in other areas of *ASTB*.³²¹ It is not only confined to the passages of the *Circle N Ranch* episode, but influences the development of the second-level plot of *ASTB*. Specifically as a hypo-text (included at a metanarrative level)³²² the *Táin*, and in particular *Compert con Culainn (The Conception of CuChulainn)*,³²³ work as a source for the main plot, as mentioned previously. To confirm this hypothesis a fragment, "The Memoir on the Pooka's Father, the Crack MacPhellimey" from the excised MSS,³²⁴ will be examined and will provide unexpected evidence.

For the intricacy of the intertextual play to be clear, an example of the multilevel plot conceived by the student-narrator of *ASTB* is necessary. This will demonstrate how the *Táin* underlies *ASTB* and will identify the point of intersection where O'Brien grafts his parody:

*Synopsis, being a summary of what has gone before, FOR THE BENEFIT OF NEW READERS: DERMOT TRELIS, an eccentric author, conceives the project of writing a salutary book on the consequences which follow wrong-doing and creates for the purpose... SHEILA LAMONT, whose brother ANTHONY LAMONT he has already hired so that there will be somebody to demand satisfaction off John Furriskey for betraying her - all this being provided for in the plot. **Trellis creates Miss Lamont in his own bedroom and he is so blinded by her beauty...that he so far forgets himself as to assault her himself...**(*ASTB*, 61)*

The rape which establishes the connection of the novelist Trellis with the appetising "fruit" of his literary creation, his character Sheila, is not only a result of O'Brien's imaginative mind, but derives from Cú Chulainn's threefold conception as outlined in *Compert Con Culainn*.³²⁵

³²¹ It is quoted on p. 18. "then the tale of the Bull of Cooley" as a tale that might be told by Finn, but he declines this invitation. Furthermore it is alluded to by Shorty Andrews and Slug Willard "You didn't happen to see a steer anywhere, did you, Sir? We are searching our legs off looking for a lost steer..."(*ASTB*, 115) in the section of the journey of the Pooka and the Good Fairy to the Red Swan Hotel to celebrate Orlick's birth.

³²² Where the student-narrator, the first level writer, while writing his book after creating Dermot Trellis and other characters has difficulty in describing the birth of a new character, illegitimate son of Trellis and Sheila Lamont, Trellis's character. Cf. "The task of rendering and describing the birth of Mr Trellis's illegitimate offspring I found one fraught with obstacles and difficulties of a technical, constructional, or literary character..."(*ASTB*, 144)

³²³ *Rémscela* (preliminary tales) to the *Táin*.

³²⁴ The fragment was published by Sue Asbee in a collection of O'Brien's early writings, *Myles Before Myles*. op. cit. edited by John Wyse Jackson in 1989. This piece, no longer than a page and a half, titled *Memoir on the Pooka's Father, the Crack Macphellimey*, is part of the MSS present in the Harry Ransom Research Centre in Austin Texas University. It is present as "Memoir on the Pooka's grandfather, the Crack MacPhellimey" in AMS (insert "B", p, 284) and as: "Memoir on the Pooka's grandfather, the Crack" in TMS (pp. 327-330).

³²⁵ Perhaps O'Brien drew directly from A. G. Van Hamel: *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories*, op. cit.

In Douglas Hyde's words Cú Chulainn himself, the incarnation of Irish "aristeia" (heroism), is according to certain authorities the son of the god Lugh the Long-handed.³²⁶ The following passage taken from Kinsella's translation of *Compert Con Culainn* will provide the background for an analysis of an interesting part of *ASTB*: the *Note on Constructional or Argumentative Difficulty*, written by the student-narrator (the first-level writer) when he has to describe the new-born Orlick Trellis, Trellis's bastard son.

Conchobor and the nobles of Ulster were at Emain. A flock of birds came to Emain Plain and ate all the plants and grasses out of the ground, and the very roots. The men of Ulster grew angry seeing their land ruined, and got nine chariots ready the same day to chase them away – they were practised hunters of birds. Conchobor mounted the chariot with his sister... Deichtine; she drove the chariot for her brother...

The men of Ulster pressed on until they reached Brug on the Boann river, and night overtook them there. It snowed heavily upon them, and Conchobor told his people to unyoke their chariots and start looking for a shelter. Conall and Bricriu searched about and found a solitary house... They went up to it and found a couple there and were made welcome...

Later the man of the house told them his wife was in her birth pangs in the storeroom. Deichtine went in to her and helped her bear a son. At the same time a mare at the door of the house gave birth to two foals. The Ulstermen took charge of the baby boy and gave him the foals as a present, and Deichtine nursed him.

When morning came **there was nothing to be seen** eastward of the Brug - no house, no birds - only their own horses, **the baby and the foals**. They went back to Emain and reared the baby until he was a boy.

He caught an illness then, and died. And they made a lamentation for him, and Deichtine's grief was great at the loss of her foster-son. **She came home from lamenting him and grew thirsty and asked for a drink, and the drink was brought in a cup. She set it to her lips to drink from it and a tiny creature slipped into her mouth with the liquid.** As she took the cup from her lips she swallowed the creature and it vanished.

She slept that night and dreamed that a man came toward her and spoke to her, saying she would bear a child by him, that it was he who had brought her to the Brug to sleep with her there, **that the boy she had reared was his**, that he was again planted in her womb and was to be called Sétanta, that **he himself was Lug mac Ethnenn**, and that **the foals should be reared with the boy**.

The woman grew heavy with a child, and the people of Ulster made much of not knowing its father, saying it might have been Conchobor himself, in his drunkenness that night she had stayed with him at the Brug.

Then Conchobor gave his sister in marriage to Sualdaim mac Roich. **She was ashamed to go pregnant to bed with her husband, and got sick when she reached the bedstead. The living thing spilled away in the sickness, and so she was made virgin and whole** and went to her husband. She grew pregnant again and bore a son, and called him Sétanta.³²⁷ (*The Tain*, Kinsella, 23)

O' Cathasaigh's comment on Cú Chulainn's nature and specifically the awkward structural sequence of his births can explain why O' Brien had an interest in such a specimen of mythological grammar.³²⁸

³²⁶ See *Compert Conculainn*, by Windisch in *Irische Texte*, 1, pp. 134-45, and Jubainville's "*Epopée Celtique en Irlande*," p. 22.

³²⁷ For another account of the tale see Alwyn and Brinsley Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, (Thames and Hudson, 1990), pp. 217-218.

³²⁸ This definition is from Elizabeth Gray, "Lug and Cúchulainn: King and Warrior, God and Man", *Studia Celtica*, XXIV/XXV, 1989-90, pp. 38-52, p. 39.

Cuchulain shares with mythical personages like Conaire, the characteristic of dual paternity: **he is at once the son of a god and of a human father** (Sualdaim). What is remarkable in the case of Cuchulain is that **he is conceived three times ... The number three is generally invested with symbolic significance** and triplicity of gods and heroes is a singularly common theme in Irish mythology. Cuchulain's threefold conception is one of the many expressions of this notion. But perhaps **the most striking aspect of the threefold conception in *Compert con Culainn* is the structural sequence**. The boy is first begotten in the otherworld by Lug upon his otherworld consort, then at Emain Macha by Lug upon Deichtine, and finally by Sualdaim upon Deichtine. **Thus, we have a god/god, god-human, human/human relationship.**³²⁹

The double origin, human and divine, is mediated by the birth of Cú Chulainn, a human-divine being. Delayed three times, it allows Deichtine to remove the suspicion of incest with her brother Conchobor and foreshadows Sheila Lamont's rape by her creator and the birth of the literary offspring, Orlick, who is thereby paralleled with the heroic figure of Cú Chulainn.

In *ASTB* the structural sequence differs from the threefold conception. Trellis, instead of assaulting Sheila Lamont himself, had intended to give her to Mr Furriskey as his potential victim; in *Compert con Culainn*, Conchobor stays with Deichtine at the brugh, then gives her in marriage to Sualdaim. The factual borrowing from the Ulster tale is manifest and results in the union of a writer-character with a character.

The *Note on Constructional or Argumentative Difficulty*, an exemplary metafictional specimen, where the student-narrator faces a great obstacle when setting up the plot of his book, will show his solution to the difficulty of introducing the new character Orlick. The student-narrator having abandoned "a passage extending over the length of eleven pages touching on the arrival of the son (Orlick) and his sad dialogue with his wan mother on the subject of his father, the passage being, by general agreement, a piece of undoubted mediocrity" shows a different "technical, constructional, or literary" way to solve the problem.

Note on Constructional or Argumentative Difficulty: The task of rendering and describing the birth of Mr Trellis's illegitimate offspring I found one fraught with obstacles and difficulties of a technical, constructional, or literary character...The passage however, served to provoke a number of discussions with my friends and acquaintances on the subject of aestho-psycho-eugenics and **the general chaos which would result if all the authors were disposed to seduce their female characters and bring into being, as a result, offspring of the quasi-illusory type. It was asked why Trellis did not require the expectant mother to make a violent end of herself**³³⁰ **and the trouble she was causing by the means of drinking a bottle of disinfectant fluid** usually to be found in bathrooms...(ASTB, 144-45)

A comparison of this "argumentative difficulty" of the student-writer with the passage

³²⁹ Cf. Tomás O' Cathasáigh, "Between God and Man: The Hero of Irish Tradition", *The Crane Bag*, vol. 11, 1978, pp.72-79; see also "The Sister's Son in Early Irish Literature", *Peritia*, 5, 1986, pp. 128-60.

³³⁰ In the AMS, in a holograph fragment called "F", a later interpolation, there is evidence of a different suggestion: "It was asked why Trellis did not require the expectant mother to take the morning train to Galway, thence to stately Cliff of Moher in the county Clare, and then to put an end to herself and all the trouble she was making by jumping far into the sea" (AMS, 78).

belonging to the *rémscela* to the *Táin, Compert con Culainn*, will highlight many details which will show that O'Brien's apparently neutral expressions are a cover for structural and factual borrowings from the *Táin*.

In the student's words: "The general chaos which would result if all the authors were disposed to seduce the female characters and bring into being, offspring of the quasi-illusory type" derives from the episode of Lugh begetting a semi-god upon the unaware Deichtine in her sleep. But what strikingly demonstrates the provenance of this passage is the student's suggestion to let Sheila Lamont "drink(ing) a bottle of disinfectant fluid" (*ASTB*, 145). In this very thought we actually see Deichtine drinking from a cup, the little being slipping into her mouth, her dream and revelation by Lugh, and her finally vomiting out the intrusive creature. The events characterising the second conception of Cú Chulainn are thus implied in a single sentence in *ASTB*.

In the desire to get rid of a semi-literary being, O'Brien is also hinting at the feeling of shame Sheila (like Deichtine) must have felt when she realised she was pregnant and that she could not explain how and by whom³³¹ she had been impregnated. In *ASTB*, it is eventually inferred from a Synopsis that Sheila Lamont's shame drove her to commit suicide.³³²

*Synopsis, being a summary of what has gone before, for the benefit of new readers: A PLAN. One day in Furriskey's sitting-room they discover what appear to be some pages of manuscript of a high-class story...On investigation they find that Orlick has inherited his father's gift for literary composition. Greatly excited, they suggest that he utilize his gift...to compose a story on the subject of Trellis, a fitting punishment...Smouldering with resentment at the stigma of his own bastardy, the dishonour and death of his mother, and incited by the subversive teachings of the Pooka he agrees (*ASTB*, 164)*

Sheila's shame is also documented by Orlick Trellis after his birth:

...I must say I was very surprised that my father was not present here to welcome me. One expects that, you know, somehow. My mother blushed when I asked about it and changed the subject. It is all very puzzling. I shall have to make some inquiries... (*ASTB*, 147)

The reference to the "half-writer, half-character" nature of Orlick Trellis is reminiscent of Cú Chulainn who was half-god and half-human. O'Brien's outlandish example of "argumentative difficulty" in describing such a being prompts this surrealistic proposal:

³³¹ For the same issue of unwanted pregnancy See *Athenian Oracle* in *ASTB*, p. 102-3, an eighteenth century Almanac, from which O'Brien drew verbatim. (As Sue Asbee told me in a personal communication copies of the *Athenian Oracle* are housed at the University Library, Cambridge and at the British Library, London).

³³² In the final version she died of puerperal sepsis as his brother tells at Trellis's trial. "Yes, she was violently assaulted by the accused about an hour after she was born and died indirectly from the effects of the assault some time later. The proximate cause of her death was puerperal sepsis." (*ASTB*, 206)

It may be usefully mentioned here that I had carefully considered giving an outward indication of the son's semihumanity by furnishing him with only the half of a body. Here I encountered further difficulties. If given the upper half only, it would be necessary to provide a sedan chair or litter with at least two runners or scullion-boys to operate it...(ASTB, 145)

Having the character provided only with an upper half, and being compelled to use a "sedan chair" manoeuvred by scullion boys is a clear reference to Cú Chulainn's war-chariot and charioteer. The other solution, of endowing the character with a bottom half -only, jokingly limits Orlick "virtually to walking, running, kneeling and kicking football". Probably here O'Brien is comically alluding to Cú Chulainn's boyhood deeds when the infant hero surprised everybody with his feats. In *Penultimum Continued*, where O'Brien goes on with the description of the new-born Orlick-Cú Chulainn, the author gives a parodic image of Cú Chulainn. His three moles of beauty have become "pimples on his forehead to the size of sixpence" (ASTB, 145) his energetic warp-spasm has been converted into "an air of slowness and weariness and infinite sleep...like a cloak" (ASTB, 145), the last detail being possibly an allusion to Cú Chulainn's cloak of concealment, a special gift from his father Lugh.

What is fascinating in this hypothesis, which sees the structural construction of the second level of *ASTB* as based on *Compert con Culainn*, is the fact that *Compert con Culainn* also appears as a source in a fragment, "*Memoir on the Pooka's grandfather, the Crack Macphellimey*", present in the MSS of *ASTB* but excised from the published novel.³³³

Finding such a specimen rich in references to *Compert Con Culainn* outside the pages of the official text has great significance if it is considered that at the surface level the *Táin* is widely employed in the *Circle N Ranch* episode, which like a large digression bypasses and does not affect the central development of *ASTB*. The *Memoir on the Pooka's grandfather, the Crack Macphellimey*, easily confirms that at a certain stage of composition of *ASTB* the *Táin* must have been in O'Brien's mind. In the fragment O'Brien disguised and travestied the first of Cú Chulainn's births in a passage where Fergus Mac Phellimey, the Pooka, a prominent character in *ASTB*, is born. A synthesis from this text will highlight the borrowings from *Compert con Culainn*:

It happened that **Fergus** was born in a deserted piggery early in the morning. A country-gentleman passing by on horse-back chanced to look and noticed a hoof and a hair-tail protruding from a heap of soiled straw. Dismounting he approached and **woke** the Crack MacPhellimey, who **was asleep in an upright posture at a nearby wall** ³³⁴...**The gentleman**, who was one of a far-seeing and provident disposition, produced his costly wash-leather purse and **offered two and fourpence for the foal, explaining that his wife was with child and that he would require a horse for his son in about six**

³³³ See Sue Asbee, *Myles Before Myles*, op. cit., p.182. In the letter to the editor we have already discussed (December 3, 1938) O'Brien proposes to take out "the Memoir", but says he might keep it if the Editor and Longmans do not mind.

³³⁴ The whole phrase: "asleep in an upright posture at a nearby wall" recalls "The Tragic Death of Cuchulinn" when the hero decides to die standing, secured by his girdle to a pillar-stone. Cf. Whitley Stokes "and he put his breast-girdle round it that he might not die seated nor lying down, but that he might die standing", Eleanor Hull, op. cit., p. 260.

or seven years' time. Perceiving that the offer was a generous one inasmuch as he did not own a foal the Crack accepted it courteously...It was only when he withdrew the straw that **he discovered that his wife had given him a son:** a creature of human form covered with a soft yellowish down similar to that worn by chickens of the Rhode Island breed. **The Crack then became subject to the Pangs and Pride of parenthood.**³³⁵

Thanks to the density of references embedded in this fragment the passage reveals several interesting elements of whose provenance and "pedigree" there can be no doubt. First of all the name Fergus, which recalls a well-known presence in the *Táin*, that of the exiled Ulster hero who leads Medb and Ailill's army and cannot refuse to acknowledge the ties with his foster-son Cú Chulainn. Another key word repeated twice, "foal", is a direct borrowing from *Compert Con Culainn*. The gentleman's offer to buy a horse in case he should need it "in six or seven years' time" humorously conceals Lugh's revelation to Deichtine announcing that she will have a son by him and that the two foals born at the brugh will have to be reared with his son. The Crack MacPhellimey being woken up by the gentleman and being subject to the "Pangs and Pride of parenthood" operates on two meanings. While it underlines the Crack's joy in becoming a father, at the same time it hilariously focuses on the Ulstermen's disability. Similarly the Crack's odd sleeping position cannot belong to anyone but Cú Chulainn himself who, feeling that he was dying, bravely chose to face death standing.³³⁶

It is no coincidence then that, though the whole passage of the birth of Crack MacPhellimey's son was excised from *ASTB*, there still remains a Fergus as a representative of the *Táin* to testify to other meaningful traces of the Ulster epic. In the development of *ASTB* he becomes a Pooka, Fergus MacPhellimey is his full name, and competes with the Good Fairy to become Cú Chulainn-Orlick's foster-father, thus perfectly embodying a role familiar to him in the *Táin*.³³⁷ As a matter of fact Cú Chulainn, as is documented in the *Táin*, ended up having many foster-fathers in addition to a God-father, Lugh, and a terrestrial father, Súaldaim. Orlick is instead only educated by the Pooka who, consistently with another God-Father figure, "sow(s) in his heart...the seeds of evil, revolt, and non-serviam." (*ASTB*, 150)

The Pooka's teachings soon reveal their subversive meaning and Orlick, just like Cú Chulainn, becomes the pride and the defender of his community. Cú Chulainn-Orlick, instead of engaging in single combat to defend his mother's kindred, chooses another militant activity, steps into his father's shoes and starts to write a book to take revenge on his father. Unlike Cú Chulainn who cannot compete with a real God and has to meet with his mortality,

³³⁵ Sue Asbee, op. cit. p. 182.

³³⁶ The image of the hero dying in this upright posture, tied up by his girdle to a stone is familiar to anyone who walks into the G.P.O. in Dublin and sees the statue of Cú Chulainn by Oliver Sheppard.

³³⁷ He actually competed with other Ulster nobles to have the right to become Cú Chulainn's fosterfather and become one of them. Cf. Thomas Kinsella, op. cit., p. 23.

Orlick can use writing as a weapon to disrupt the laws governing the father-son relationship and even kill his father to defend his mother and his honour.

A Cú Chulainn-Orlick, whose foster-father is the Pooka, Fergus asserts his ability not by showing his salmon leap and feats with the *gaebolga*, but by saying he will transfix Trellis with a pluperfect.

The high density of distinctive references to the *Táin* found in the excised fragment represents further evidence to prove that the Ulster epic, together with other early and middle Irish texts such as *Buile Suibhne*, *Acallamh na Sénorach*, must have substantially counted in the initial stages of the composition of *ASTB* and as a source of inspiration in the structuring of the second-level plot.

The fragment is a rare if not unique example³³⁸ in O'Brien's production, as, in a self-contained passage, references to different tales from the Cú Chulainn saga are easily detectable.

O'Brien did not give the same space to Cú Chulainn as to Suibhne. Even though traces of the *Táin* or rather its *rémscela* (preliminary tales) are present they are not extensive and are to be attributed to marginal episodes with respect to the main tale. He parodied the episode of Fergus and Medb making love behind a bush, which constitutes a peripheral passage compared with the core of the cattle-raid and with Cú Chulainn's single combat.

Even though he probably used Cú Chulainn's triple birth as a paradigm on which Orlick's birth is modelled, O'Brien finally decided to have a few hermetic elements testifying to the presence of the *Táin*. The reasons for this were cultural and political. He could not have based his 1939 novel on the myth to which the Revivalists had laid claim. The importance of Cú Chulainn had been overemphasised by the antiquarians, translators, popularisers, poets and writers of the nineteenth century and the hero had even raised the spirit and inspired the courageous rebels of the Easter Rising.

Unquestionably O'Brien recognised the evocative power of the ancient myth, nevertheless he could not grant him enough room to engage in single combat on the pages of his novel.

Realistically he had perceived that in contemporary Ireland the Celtic hero had to give way to the archetype of the cowboy. Cowboy literature and films seemed to have filled a space, the space left by chivalrous stories. In less than 20-30 years cowboys had supplanted

³³⁸ The Pooka fragment strongly recalls similar passages on Cú Chulainn in Eimar O'Duffy's *King Goshawk & The Birds*, (London: MacMillan, 1926). There O'Duffy (1893-1935) made up short passages describing Cú Chulainn's life, filling them with references to the actual Irish Tales of the Ulster Cycle, mixing a contemporary Cú Chulainn with the one fixed in immortal pages of his heroic existence.

Cú Chulainn and his world of heroic adventures. The Antient Concert Rooms, the place where Yeats and Edward Martyn presented the first plays of the Irish Dramatic Movement, is mentioned by the narrating cowboy of the CNR episode and it has become a cinema. "That place" Shanahan says dropping a casual "of course" "is a picture-house now of course, plenty of cowboy stuff there. The Palace Cinema. Pearse Street."

So the fact that prairies and trams, cowboys and policemen are not only to be found in the AMS but were also granted citizenship in the CNR episode reveals O'Brien's chaotic intention of making unexpected contemporary new myths like cowboy heroism "stampede from such Irish themes as the cattle-raid."³³⁹ Furthermore, even Suibhne, to whom O'Brien devoted great attention in *ASTB*, is finally compelled to measure up to the contemporary reality of the Dubliners in shabby digs, the cowboys, the Pooka and the Good Fairy.

Another reason for not emphasising the myth of Cú Chulainn is that Eimar O'Duffy had previously made a revisited Cú Chulainn live in shabby digs in Dublin in *King Goshawk and the Birds* (1926), part of the Cuandine trilogy. His satirical fantasy mixed communism with heroic Celtic mythology. There references to the *Táin* and Cú Chulainn are consistently woven into the satire of the capitalistic world but are recycled in an urban environment where for example Cú Chulainn's valour is shown in a tennis match. As a coincidence the passage of the Pooka's Memoir, the one which was finally edited out of *ASTB*, stylistically shares the same pattern as several other passages of Eimar O'Duffy's narrative of Cuandine's trilogy. In a short passage a number of highly concentrated references to the *Táin* tales are present, to underline its origin. This is an unusual procedure for O'Brien as he frequently parodied texts without making the referential objects obvious. This could explain why he did not finally leave the parody of *Compert Con Culainn* among the other parodies about Cú Chulainn in *ASTB*.

³³⁹ Hugh Kenner, "The Fourth Policeman", in Anne Clune, Tess Hurson, eds., op. cit., p. 66.

Chapter III

3. *At Swim-Two-Birds* and Joyce

“Pluterperfect Imperturbability”

As I have already said in the introduction to this thesis, tracing consistent textual references in *ASTB* proved a difficult task because O’Brien often made a pastiche of Joyce’s styles. So my analysis has been confined to the works O’Brien quoted and parodied in *ASTB* or elsewhere (short stories, “Cruiskeen Lawn” etc...) or those which proved to have been used and recycled in the AMS even though it was not finally published.

To introduce the chapter on Joyce I would like to quote a passage embedded in *ASTB* and see its final motto as paradigmatic of O’Brien’s relationship with Joyce and at the same time of the reader’s attitude to *ASTB*:

The tense of the body is the present indicative; but the soul has a memory and a present and a future. I have conceived some extremely recondite pains for Mr Trellis. I will pierce him with a pluperfect. Pluperfect is all right, of course, said Shanahan, anybody that takes exception to that was never very much at the bee-double-o-kay-ess. I wouldn’t hear a word against it. But do you know, this tack of yours is too high up in the blooming clouds. It’s all right for you, you know, but the rest of us will want a ladder. Eh, Mr Furriskey?

A forty-foot ladder, said Furriskey. (*ASTB*, 168-69)

Piercing Trellis with a pluperfect represents the extreme refinement a writer could achieve. It requires great literary skill as Orlick is, with O’Brien’s help, decoding and borrowing “pluterperfect imperturbability” from *Ulysses*. This phrase occurs in “Nestor” and is included in Mr Deasy’s letter about the possibility of treating foot and mouth disease and so making the cattle trade to England possible. “Pluterperfect”³⁴⁰ being a pun on the Italian “più che perfetto”, has two meanings: it is the absolute superlative, and spelled as “piuccheperfetto” means pluperfect, the definition of past preterite in Latin grammar. So it also implies a conception belonging to the remote past and therefore ultraconservative at heart.” Melchiori traced the same quote in an article in Italian published by *Il Piccolo della Sera*, where Joyce refers to Parnell and qualifies him as il “più che perfetto statista”, but O’Brien could not possibly have read it as this article was only made accessible to the Anglo-American world after the publication of *The Critical Writings of James Joyce* in 1959. O’Brien then only catches on the “pluterperfect imperturbability” ironically used by Joyce in *Ulysses*. But what makes the act of piercing a writer with his own weapons more effective and consistent, is Mr Furriskey’s final quip: “It’s all right for you, you know, but the rest of us will want a ladder. Eh, Mr Furriskey? A forty-foot ladder, said Furriskey.” (*ASTB*, 168-69). The “Forty-foot” is one of the *topoi* of *Ulysses*. It is mentioned in the opening chapter as the place where Buck Mulligan has a swim, it used to be for generations an exclusive bathing place for men.³⁴¹ Reading

³⁴⁰ For the relevance of this phrase to *Ulysses* see Giorgio Melchiori, “Two Notes on “Nestor”, *James Joyce Quarterly*, 22, 4, (Summer, 1985), pp. 414-19.

³⁴¹ “Gogarty used to swim two or three times daily in the forty-foot bathing-pool which was directly below the Tower...Joyce, though he hardly hints at this in *Ulysses*, was quite an adequate swimmer and sometimes accompanied Gogarty on his swimming trips.” Cf. Ulick O’Connor, “Joyce and Gogarty”, John Ryan, ed., *A Bash in the Tunnel* op. cit.

this quote as metafictional helps us to interpret O'Brien's attitude to Joyce. Like other intellectual Dubliners of his time, O'Brien claimed that he had a forty-foot ladder! At University he had, with his colleagues, practised "Joyceology", a painstaking exegetic exercise. Having perceived his genius he was enthusiastic about J. A. J and relished going under the skin of his works. He transposed the same fun to pinning down Joyce's quotes and idiosyncrasies and imported them into the composition of *ASTB* and what had been sheer fun became a literary activity. His first ventures in the juvenile *Comhthrom Féinne* and *Blather* reveal his incessant pastime. When critical studies on Joyce's *oeuvre* multiplied, O'Brien became louder, angry and finally exasperated. How could non-native critics, even resorting to the most updated critical theories, interpret Joyce's texts if they did not have the most elementary knowledge of Irish culture, language or religion and if, more than everything, they did not know Dublin?

Dublin, a world to itself, was O'Brien friends' guide to read Joyce. At first they thought they had discovered Joyce and they owned Joyce because they were among the few in Ireland who realised his incomparable genius. But they were not aware that in the rest of Europe and the States a similar phenomenon was taking place and several scholars and critics were contributing to make Joyce a myth. These feelings are well synthesised in an article, unusually with a title³⁴² "Ourselves, A LOAN" in "Cruiskeen Lawn", December 23, 1942, where O'Brien conveyed the idea that the Irish have been deprived of their identity (Cleveland, Ohio and Boston, Massachusetts happen to be incorporated into the Irish nation) and robbed of "their" Joyce who had lost his nationality and had become European. Paradoxically even "Doobleen" ends up being invented by the Swiss poet:

I remember once in the old days when I was teaching languages in Zurich, I asked a native person what Irish cities did he know...Ah yes he said, Cleefelantohigo, Bostonmasschoost. Gently I asked did he ever hear of Dublin: Ah, Doobleen he said...Dobleen...Yes, I know her well. She was invented by our great Swiss poet, Monsieur Joyce.

I do rayully ectly think that our contribution to European culture is...rawtha...negative, We don't export enough writers, concentrate far too much on cattle. (CL, 23 Dec. 1942, p. 3)

It is no coincidence that some of O'Brien's colleagues and friends left interesting and illuminating critical essays on Joyce.³⁴³ The first James Joyce Symposium held in Dublin in 1967, and Maurice Harmon's opening paragraph in the introduction well establish the points at issue: "the charge is sometimes made that for the Irish James Joyce is a local joke that outsiders take seriously.

p. 94. The Forty-Foot has now become an inescapable landmark on the Bloom's Day route through Dublin and surroundings.

³⁴² The articles in "Cruiskeen Lawn" rarely had a title, and when there is one it needs to be mentioned and emphasised as O'Brien certainly meant it to be.

³⁴³ Niall Montgomery took part in the Joyce Symposium in Dublin in 1962 and wrote an article for the special number on Joyce of *Envoy* (1951), whose guest editor was O'Brien. John Garvin, O'Brien's senior Officer in the Civil Service, published, under the pseudonym of Andrew Cass, an essay in the *Irish Times*, also included in *Envoy* (1951), where he identified Shem the penman with Joyce and Sean the Post with Eamon De Valera. In Dublin, this insight gave him the reputation of brilliant "exegetist" of *Finnegans Wake*. Later, in the '70s, he wrote a book *Joyce's Disunited Kingdom* and interpreted Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* from the point of view of an Irish reader who had investigated the textual connections with the Irish reality. In this number of *Envoy*, both Niall Montgomery and Denis Johnston favourably referred to Andrew Cass's insight as ingenious.

While there is some truth in that assertion and some evidence of native impatience with Joycean scholarship, it must also be observed that Joyce is seriously regarded as the originator of the Irish prose tradition.³⁴⁴ O'Brien's friend Niall Montgomery, the student-narrator's Kerrigan in *ASTB*, recreates the atmosphere and gives the coordinates of *Ulysses*' reception in Ireland:

...the publication in Paris of *Ulysses* seemed to be everything that was most exotic, most unrelated to our middle-class life in Ireland... and it must be said that we Irish, on the one hand, and the most intellectual followers of Mr Joyce, on the other, have been at pains to stress not the resemblances, but the differences... And that was the achievement of Joyce... the great thing that he did; he expressed our lives, the culture of Ireland, he made the Irish Literary Revival look like a lot of old rope... His was the exposition, the true expression of the life of the Irish in the early twentieth century and his work is very much part of our cultural heritage, very much part of our richness and our treasures.³⁴⁵

As Anthony Cronin clearly showed, the cultural snobbery of an "acquaintance with *Ulysses* and the feeling of being part of a select circle"³⁴⁶ was provoked by myopic booksellers who did the work of the censors by inhibiting its sale. Donagh MacDonagh, who possessed a Swiss edition in two volumes, passed eagerly from hand to hand (until O'Brien eventually appropriated it), was held responsible by O'Brien for putting him in touch with the notorious book. MacDonagh reported the fatal encounter as follows: "He stole the first volume and as the second was of no use to me I gave it to him. He never forgave me."³⁴⁷

From then onwards Joyce became a focus of O'Brien's interest and *ASTB*, his first novel, shows clear signs of this. The whole "Biographical Reminiscence" section, the first-level plot with the student-narrator designing his book, is modelled on *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the book he still considered in the '60s "truly one of the great autobiographies in English" ("Enigma", *CL*, Sat., 16 June, 1962) of all times, and as will be demonstrated in the present chapter, in *ASTB* there are clear references and imports from *Dubliners*, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. "Paralysis is a nice cup of tea" (*ASTB*, 159) is paramount in the characters' conversation at Mr Furriskey's. Their idle conversation touching on the banal and futile exchange of ordinary people in Dublin reproduces the meanness of Dublin life that Joyce had stubbornly and successfully attempted to recreate in *Dubliners*. As he had written to the publisher Grant Richards, paralysis informed his collection of short stories: "My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis."³⁴⁸ But O'Brien went a lot deeper in the metafictional use of Joyce's works, as will be clear from the recycling

³⁴⁴ Maurice Harmon, ed., *The Celtic Master*, (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1969), p. 7.

³⁴⁵ Niall Montgomery, "A Context for Mr. Joyce's Work", *ibid.*, pp. 9-16.

³⁴⁶ Anthony Cronin, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³⁴⁷ Donagh MacDonagh, *Creation*, (October, 1967), quoted in Anthony Cronin, *ibid.*, p. 54.

³⁴⁸ James Joyce, *The Letters of James Joyce*, vol. II, III, Richard Ellmann, ed., (London: Faber, New York: Viking, 1966), p. 134.

of "A Painful Case" both in the "Circle N" Ranch in *ASTB* and in "John Duffy's Brother", and of "An Encounter" in the same section of *ASTB*.

Later, in "Cruiskeen Lawn", in the '40s, he constantly referred to Joyce (as will be shown later), often fantasising about having ventures together, sometimes challenging him, sometimes pulling his leg. In 1943 he also published *Faustus Kelly*, which is openly reminiscent of *Ulysses*. As Anthony Cronin rightly saw, "Kelly's speech to Captain Shaw about the English is uncomfortably close to the Citizen's famous speech"³⁴⁹ (also referred to in *ASTB*). But I cannot completely endorse the following comment that "The derivation may have been unconscious, but in 1943 Joyce was still the property of a very small coterie in Dublin and so the coincidence passed unnoticed."³⁵⁰ I am sure that at this stage O'Brien willingly and openly plagiarised from Joyce as a snobbish practice knowing that he was using a shared secret code that only an élite in Dublin could understand, but when he became aware that his ingenious work was often seen to be largely derivative of Joyce, mostly by people who failed to see that by doing so he was innovating Irish literature, he developed a personal ambivalent love-hate relationship.

Again in 1956, in "Cruiskeen Lawn", in an article titled "Censorship", O'Brien was discussing *Ulysses* "recently openly on sale" and advising the Smut Board (as he called the Censorship Board) to buy a big new bottle of ink to mark "*Ulysses*". He delighted in realising that they would have to read the whole book. His final statement reveals, in a moment of sincerity, far from the polemics against Joyce which involved Dublin intellectuals of the '30s, his critical opinion of *Ulysses*: "I disagree with the people who think that "*Ulysses*" is a difficult or obscure work, but its mental ingestion in full calls for intelligence, maturity, and some knowledge of life as well as letters." (*CL*, 9 Feb. 1956).

In his "Diary", in the special number of *Envoy* on Joyce, Patrick Kavanagh confessed that he read *Ulysses* late and that it was his second-best bedside book. In stating his position he confessed that he had a different approach and for this reason his vision was unbiased.

I have one advantage over certain others: I was never an original admirer of Joyce and so have not had the normal reaction, that readjusting of one's values which is common in regard to one's enthusiasms. It often happens in the case of a person with whom we were in love. We react violently to right the balance.³⁵¹

And this is how O'Brien felt as soon as he realised that his work was not considered original, but largely derivative of Joyce. He had been madly in love with Joyce to the extent of stealing *Ulysses* from a friend. Initially O'Brien had made a parody of his works pretending to

³⁴⁹ Anthony Cronin, op. cit., p.149.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Patrick Kavanagh, "Diary", *Envoy*, op. cit., p. 70.

have written pieces jointly, but later he felt he had to right the balance and his obsession was not assuaged until he made Joyce himself a character in his fiction, in the *Dalkey Archive*.

“John Duffy’s Brother”,³⁵² with which I am introducing the chapter about *ASTB* and Joyce, has a peculiar history of its own and, even though it does surface in *ASTB*, it seems to leave no lasting textual consequences in the novel. As stated by Shea³⁵³, it was first written in 1938 as the typescript kept at the Southern Illinois University demonstrates,³⁵⁴ but a different version was later published in 1941. Some parts were added, specifically the metafictional introduction which was added to the text later. Shea’s article, while proving that O’Brien’s parody alludes to Keats³⁵⁵, lightly dismisses references to “A Painful Case” and argues: “To be sure there are some similarities between O’Brien’s story and Joyce’s, but what I find so disturbing is how the assertion of affinities actually interferes with, and often precludes, the thoughtful investigation of O’Brien’s texts.”³⁵⁶ References to the sonnet “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer” coexist with “A Painful Case”. As often happens, O’Brien’s parodies intertextually link more than one text. Through a skilful retexturing of terms from the poem [John Duffy’s brother with his father’s spy glass, ranging the valley with an eagle eye like Keats’s “stout Cortez” who “with eagle eye stared at the Pacific...”; “Darren”, “ken”], and the image of John Duffy’s brother’s “thumbing a book of Homer with delight” O’Brien subjects the risks of imaginative power and exploration to his parody. The liberating force of unlimited imagination is confined within a self-conscious being who delights in being a train, but at the same time is scared of being a train and eventually stands rooted at a railroad crossing, “silent, so to speak, upon a peak in Darren”. Thus O’Brien finally gives the image of unreined imagination and the sense of revealed paralysis and impotence. The desire to explore new worlds by means of books and knowledge (Keats), to give power to the imagination and be free (*JDB*) is something one must pay for, and feel guilty about. This is what O’Brien seems to imply subverting the message of freedom implicit in Keats’s poem.

It is significant that according to Shea the first version of *John Duffy’s Brother* of 1938 ended with John Duffy’s brother amicably chatting with his clerks Mr. Hodge and Mr.

³⁵² Flann O’Brien, “John Duffy’s Brother”, *Story*, XIX: 90, (July-August, 1941), pp. 65-68.

³⁵³ See Thomas Shea, “Flann O’Brien and John Keats: ‘John Duffy’s Brother’ and Train Allusions”, *Eire-Ireland*, XXIV, 2, (Summer 1989), pp. 109-120.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, note n. 1, p. 110: “The earliest typescript of the story of which I am aware can be found in the ‘O’Nolan Collection’, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University. The title page reads “ ‘John Duffy’s Brother,’ by Flann O’Brien, 1,000 words, 2.12.1938.” This version is only half the length of the completed story first published in *Story Magazine*, New York, July-August, 1941, vol. XIX, n° 90.”

³⁵⁵ He makes references to “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”, see John Keats, *The Complete Poems*, Miriam Allot, ed., (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 60-62.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Cranberry. This means that the sense of guilt unknown in Keats's poem was added as an afterthought following the publication of *ASTB*.

It seems to me, however, that the Joycean similarities and dissimilarities should be further investigated, as they prove to be significant, especially if seen in perspective with *ASTB*. If, in fact, we consider the time of the compositional process of "John Duffy's Brother", December 1938, which more or less coincides with the moment when O'Brien was giving the final touches to his novel to meet the publishers' suggestions³⁵⁷, and the idea that "A Painful Case" is included in the CNR section and that the short story was finally published with some additions in 1941, I would say that JDB was mainly used to telescope "A Painful Case", creating a different story, drawing on the concept of guilt and punishment which was relevant for the *ASTB* section it was linked with and ever present in O'Brien's macrotext, as *The Third Policeman* well exemplifies. Therefore, after the publication of *ASTB*, having mastered the technique of meta-narration, O'Brien inserted the Introduction. The subsequent edition of 1941, in which the borrowings from Keats are more evident, still devotes room to Joycean references. After all, O'Brien is capable of many forms of parody, from the near-faithful translation of *Buile Suibhne* to much more lightly allusive writing. He diverged, superimposing his ironical reading of works acknowledged by the literary canon. As we have often seen, Flann O'Brien privileged stratifying references from different semiotic worlds while building up the unity of his final text.

"John Duffy's Brother"

Reference to "A Painful Case" is first made in its brilliant parody in "John Duffy's Brother", which stresses an apparently insignificant detail to describe the protagonist's neurosis and sense of gnawing guilt. As Joyce had made James Duffy feel that trains would rhythmically repeat Mrs Sinico's name endlessly, O'Brien's remake presents Mr Duffy's brother, who surrealistically becomes a train and one day steams into his office. This resemblance was first seen by Anne Clissmann, who, in a note to her critical study of O'Brien's writings, said that the story was probably inspired by Joyce's "A Painful Case", *Dubliners*; there are many similarities between the two tales".³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ A letter written by O'Brien (October 3, 1939) on the matter gives details about his concerns (eliminating coarse words, removing any suggestion of the mock-religious, deleting the "Memoir", which was our subject of discussion in the previous chapter and extending and clarifying of the Trellis ending (penultimate), which proves that the section of the "Third Rewriting" was rethought and organised at this late stage of composition. So until 3rd of October O'Brien was still making structural changes to his novel.

³⁵⁸ Anne Clissmann, op. cit., p. 351.

O'Brien's parody of the short story is intricate; he constructs his cross-referential work on two different levels, one with a thematic relevance, the other relying on marginal details, which nevertheless add consistency and coherence to the eventual text.

"A Painful Case" revolves around the idea of death, death is pervasive throughout. Death is a constant feature of James Duffy's existence, he is an emotionally dead man incapable of an effectively communicative relationship with other human beings, who finally deprives Mrs Sinico of her life. "Why had he withheld life from her?" (*D*, 113).

The story centres on two focal points: 1. James Duffy, his meeting with Mrs Sinico and 2. Her death and his final self-revelation. In his narrative, Joyce makes her "apparently" dead. Commenting on his discovery of Mrs Sinico's body the police officer states that: "when he arrived he found the deceased lady lying on the platform apparently dead" (*D*, 113), thus "attaching" to the woman, who is undoubtedly dead, qualities more pertaining to John Duffy's brother.

O'Brien basically concentrates on the final nucleus of the story when Duffy has his epiphany, where he clearly realises that he might have caused Mrs Sinico's depression and misdemeanour. O'Brien's reaction to her death leads him to create a diverging story, that of a man turned into a train, which runs regular services into town, into his office to be precise. James Duffy's identical daily route from his room in Chapelizod to the private Bank in Baggot Street, then lunch at Don Burke's and dinner in George's Street, suggest John Duffy's brother's fixed route as a train. In his bedroom John Duffy's brother works up steam, then he goes and arrives "dead on time". He actually arrives "dead on time" twice. In O'Brien's text the sentence "train arrived dead on time at its destination" (*JDB*, 94) again conveys the sense of death being the inevitable end of its journey. Reaching its destination, the train coincides with Mrs Sinico's appointment with death that cannot be delayed.

James Duffy's habits in relation to the living "he had neither companion nor friends..." and the dead "without any communion with others, visiting his relatives at Christmas and escorting them to the cemetery when they died...[performing his] social duties for old dignity" establish him as his own ghost.³⁵⁹

Thus the James Duffy who feels uneasy both in the realm of living and non-living beings makes the transition into O'Brien's text and is seen as a ghost-figure himself. John Duffy's brother "never left his house, never left his bed, never talked to any body in his life and was never seen by more than one man." (*JDB*, 90). He was only seen by his doctor, Gumley, when he was born and when he died, an hour later. Joyce's Duffy finally longs for physical contact, he even wishes to feel the touch of Mrs Sinico's dead fingers on his hand. "She seemed to be near him in the darkness. At moments he seemed to feel her voice touch his ear, her hand touch his." (*D*, 114)

O'Brien's John Duffy's brother looks into other people's lives through a spy glass, his father's spy glass, and indeed establishes a very distant communication with other people, regularly

³⁵⁹ See Bernard Benstock, *Narrative Con/Texts in Dubliners*, (London: MacMillan, 1997), p. 38.

observing “the figure of a man hurrying across the uplands of the Park and disappearing from view in the direction of the Magazine Fort.” (*JDB*, 92) And what a disappointment when he sees that he is not carrying what looks to him like a weapon but a walking stick. James Duffy’s “stout hazel stick”, connotating him as a poet,³⁶⁰ finds its way into O’Brien’s narrative in an apparently irrelevant part of the story. The man captured in the glass by the protagonist may well be his own image projected onto the background, as in Flemish paintings which show in little mirrors the other side of the image painted in the foreground. Here O’Brien, visually putting the original James Duffy into perspective when observed in action by John Duffy’s brother, is deliberately working on the metafictional level as well as literally importing material from “A Painful Case”. Having already published *ASTB*, and perfected his experiment, he is now able to produce another meta-fictional work. The novel-within-the-novel technique has often been defined as a *mise en abyme* technique and now O’Brien may well be referring to the “ars est [non] celare artem” (*ASTB*, 216), which has by now become the manifesto of metafiction. Here Flann O’Brien is at the same time referring to Joyce’s Mr Duffy and Stephen Daedalus, both owners of distinctive walking-sticks and to his personal macrotext (John Duffy’s Brother looking back at Mr Duffy through the medium of the page), synthetically rendering it in a single visual image.

In Joyce’s story, the theme of death is connected to the “goods train” which provokes the moment of revelation in James Duffy, but it is too late for him to do anything about it. In O’Brien the adoption of the “goods train” is turned into a “good” train and John Duffy’s brother knows which qualities should be the prerogative of a good train: “a good train is equally punctual in departure as in arrival.” (*JDB*, 94) That Mrs Sinico should be met “dead on time” on arrival, sounds strikingly ironic. John Duffy’s brother’s denial that he belongs to a lower category: “I am not a goods train, said Mr Duffy acidly” (*JDB*, 95) bridges “John Duffy’s Brother” with “A Painful Case” as it is a goods train which kills Mrs Sinico and it seems as though O’Brien’s character were trying to get rid of the hypothetical culpability he might be charged with.

O’Brien must have been impressed by Joyce’s use of the news article, and the use of capitalised letters (*D*, 109)

DEATH OF A LADY AT SYDNEY PARADE A PAINFUL CASE

but more likely by the way the accident was euphemistically rendered by a pitying reporter and the Deputy Coroner “a most painful case.” (*D*, 111) The final verdict “No blame attached to anyone” (*D*, 111), confirms that the real true story cannot be told, that responsibilities will not be made clear.

³⁶⁰ Cf. “a stout hazel: a walking stick, one traditionally carried by Irish poets...” John Wyse Jackson, Bernard McGinley, *James Joyce’s Dubliners, Annotated Edition*, (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1993), p. 96.

Similarly O'Brien sets up the incredible story of a story that cannot be told or written.

Strictly speaking, this story should not be written or told at all. To write it or to tell it is to spoil it. This is because the man who had the strange experience we are going to talk about never mentioned it to anybody, and the fact that he kept his secret and sealed it up completely in his memory is the whole point of the story. Thus we must admit that handicap at the beginning – that it is absurd for us to tell the story, absurd for anybody to listen to it and unthinkable that anybody should believe it. (*JDB*, 91)

From the beginning Flann O'Brien's story already contains the seeds of instability in stating the terms of the question: the narrator is going to tell the fact contravening what seemingly had been agreed on. His literary contract with the reader assumes that both writer and reader are set on the level of the absurd. In both cases the story cannot be told, the painful case must be left unrevealed. Joyce also suggests the way "DEATH OF A LADY AT SIDNEY PARADE - A PAINFUL CASE" is to be read: like a priest reading the *Secreto*³⁶¹.

One evening, when the main character is having his usual meal in George's Street, he sees a paragraph in the paper announcing Mrs Sinico's death, has a few morsels of his dinner, leaves his food standing on the plate, starts walking home quickly, then slackens his pace, "his breath issuing irregularly almost with a sighing sound". This expression might have suggested to O'Brien the image of John Duffy's brother turning into a train emitting steam and gradually becoming aware that he has acted like a train, as the train which actually killed her, "steamrollicked over her", in the accident. Directing his interest to Joyce's denouement of "A Painful Case", O'Brien parodies the "goods train winding out of Kingsbridge Station like a worm with a fiery head winding through the darkness obstinately and laboriously" (*D*, 113) and transfuses the phallic implication into his text by making his Duffy/train appear "long, thunderous and immense, with white steam escaping noisily from his feet and depthroated bellows coming rhythmically from where his funnel was."

"A Painful Case" is, as noticed by Bernard Benstock, "the only story in *Dubliners* where the word 'blame' appears - and it does so four times. The setting up of a legal tribunal necessitates dealing with guilt and innocence, the process of indicting or exonerating."³⁶² Apparently nobody seems to deserve blame: "No blame attached to anyone" ironically informs the whole texture of the story. James Duffy, who is the first to blame for the painful accident, is not even called to bear witness. The which at first makes him initially condemn her - "she had degraded herself; she had degraded him. He saw the squalid tract of her vice, miserable and malodorous." (*D*, 111) - but later makes him feel responsible for her death, does not lead in O'Brien's text to final destruction. Being a train, O'Brien ironically hints, does not necessarily entail committing crimes.

Inch by inch he went back over his morning. So far as he could recall he had killed no one, shouted no bad language, broken no windows. He had only talked to Cranberry and Hodge. Down in the roadway there was no dark van arriving with uniformed men infesting it. (*JDB*, 96)

³⁶¹ "He read it not aloud, but moving his lips as a priest does when he reads the prayers *Secreto*. (*D*, 109).

³⁶² Bernard Benstock, op. cit. p. 5.

This climactic moment of the story is especially emphasised by O'Brien who wanted to focus all the reader's attention on a fictional device which "backgrounds" James Duffy's moment of self-revelation. " We now approach the really important part of the plot, the accident/ [incident, at a meta-fictional level] which gives the whole story its significance. In the middle of his lunch John Duffy's brother

felt something important, something queer, momentous and magical taking place inside his brain, an immense tension relaxing, clean light flooding a place which had been dark... He dropped his knife and fork and sat there for a time wild-eyed, a filling of potatoes unattended in his mouth. Then he swallowed, rose weakly from the table and walked to the window... He gazed out into the day, no longer a train, but a badly-frightened man... (*JDB*, 96)

O'Brien seems to have carefully reworked all the thematic implications of "A Painful Case"; his parody covers all the points a critical study of the short story should make, and he could therefore not have neglected Joyce's careful analysis of Dublin's petty bourgeois middle class. O'Brien is even fastidious about it. James Duffy holds a senior and highly responsible position in a private bank in Baggot Street. John Duffy's brother also holds a senior position, in the office of Messrs Polter and Polter, Solicitors, Commissioners for Oaths, and he has two clerks taking orders from him even though the number of people working for him does not amount to a high position, (he is still only a senior clerk). John Duffy's brother preserves the same sense of fastidious superiority as James Duffy who gave up going to the meetings of the Irish Socialist Party on account of the fact that

were too timorous; the interest they took in the question of wages was inordinate. He felt that they were hard-featured realists and that they resented an exactitude which was the product of a leisure not within their reach." He also disregarded "an obtuse middle class which entrusted its morality to policemen." (*D*, 107)

James Duffy's sense of social superiority has made his transition into O'Brien's story under different guises. John Duffy's brother, "possessed of the strange idea that he was a train", after his shunting manoeuvre in his office, affirms his superiority:

'Any cheap excursions sir?' he asked.
'No,' Mr Duffy replied..."(*JDB*, 95)

'Third class and first class, I suppose, sir?'
'No', said Mr Duffy. 'In deference to the views of Herr Marx, all class distinctions in the passenger rolling-stock have been abolished.'...
'That's communism,' said Mr Hodge.
'He means,' said Mr Cranberry, 'that it is now first-class only.'
'How many wheels has your engine?' asked Mr Hodge.
'Three big ones?'
'I am not a goods train,' said Mr Duffy acidly..." (*JDB*, 95)

James Duffy's visit to the pub where, to widen the distance, Joyce's eye punctiliously annotates that five or six working men are drinking from their huge pint tumblers while he has his hot punch, is ironically subverted in the small side episode of "John Duffy's Brother" which describes John Duffy's brother's "non-meeting" with a retired stationary-engine driver when they "once stood side by side with at the counter of a public house...Mr Smullen's call was whiskey, Mr Duffy's stout." (*JDB*, 93). Even the theme of alcohol, which caused the downfall of Mrs Sinico (Sin-ico), is carefully re-textured in the story. John Duffy's brother finds courage in whiskey and feels authorised to sink his sense of guilt in alcohol. "When he left his office that night, his heart was lighter and he thought he had a good excuse for buying more liquor. Nobody knew his secret but himself and nobody else would ever know." (*JDB*, 97)

What seems to be a complete cure turns out to be insufficient. Our John Duffy startles whenever he hears "the rumble of a train in the Liffey tunnel and stands rooted to the road when he comes suddenly on a level crossing..." (*JDB*, 97)

John Duffy's brother does not need a catastrophe to make a parody of Joyce's "A Painful Case". The names and toponyms Joyce used in his short story are recycled and as in the case of the title of the story overemphasised. Joyce's sense of guilt, shame and secrecy, Mrs Sinico's awareness of being different and therefore commendable, James Duffy's class-consciousness and incapacity for communication, find their way into O'Brien's text; they all converge in the metallic image of a train. How better than in a train's course could O'Brien have converted James Duffy's fixed route, which Joyce himself derisively deconstructs when he says: "He had no difficulty now in approving of the course he had taken." (*D*, 112)

Significantly there is mention of her name and reference to the place where it all happened in a list: "Mrs. Sinico, Sydney J. Parayd" (*CL*, 5 June, 1941) in "Cruiskeen Lawn"; there on another occasion O'Brien was still "story-webbing" and spinning on the main icon he had drawn out of Joyce's short story. The protagonist, moving in an area familiar to John Duffy's brother, Inchicore, recollects his past:

my whole life welled up in retrospect, the life of a steam man of the last generation... [While walking] an irresistible urge came upon me to slip down the side of the bridge and walk the road. My conviction is that the Irish roads are not adequately walked, if in fact they are walked at all. I would be sorry to think that the road from Ballyfermot into Inchicore yards had been walked in recent years by any decent steam man because "bleeding" and "rolling" could be observed at every step. Approaching Inchicore I gave a facetious hoot and after a short delay was accepted by the signal cabin. I steamed into a siding, reflecting that I had been entered up on the charts as a train. (*CL*, 16 April, 1943)

In this article the protagonist certainly partakes of the joy of being a train: like John Duffy's brother who emitted "shrill" and "piercing whistle[s]" he delighted in giving his "facetious" hoot.

But unlike James Duffy he finds recognition, he does not have to hide his secrets, he is not tormented by "the laborious drone of the engine reiterating the syllables of her [Mrs Sin-i-co's] name" (*D*, 113); thanks to the transition through "John Duffy's Brother", he has acquired the status of a "good" train, he is finally acknowledged and entered up on the charts as a train.

The “Circle N Ranch” episode, “A Painful Case”, “An Encounter”

Coincidentally, as I mentioned in the introduction, the area of *ASTB* where references to Joyce’s works are traceable is the same passage which is the subject of the intertextual analysis in the second chapter: the “Circle N Ranch”. This coincidence came to light during the last stage of the research and I think it must be emphasised that in the general economy of *ASTB*’s intertextual scheme, the references to early Irish and middle Irish works and the references to Joyce’s macrotext here coalesce. As if the “Circle N Ranch” were a microcosm of *ASTB*, it reveals unexpected consistency and coherence in the general plan of *ASTB*.

So the CNR episode, as we have seen not only refers to the *Táin* and draws on cowboy cattle-raid themes, but also develops by connecting and building up a wealth of allusions to Joyce’s works.

The episode starts with the obituary of a well-known novelist of western literature which is followed by a court comment on the bravadoes of young hooligans looking for adventure in Ringsend. I shall argue that O’Brien’s cavalcade runs through and accumulates details from *Dubliners*, *Ulysses* and *Work in Progress*.

We regret to announce the passing of Mr Tracy, the eminent novelist, which occurred yesterday under painful circumstances...Early in the afternoon, deceased was knocked down in Weavers’ Square by a tandem cycle proceeding towards the city (*ASTB*, 53)

This introduction to the CNR episode evokes and is a *pastiche* of the style of Mrs Sinico’s death by suicide in “A Painful Case” which I have previously discussed.³⁶³ “The evidence showed that the deceased lady, while attempting to cross the line, was knocked down by the engine of the ten o’clock slow train from Kingstown...” (*D*, 100) O’Brien changes a “painful case” to “painful circumstances” from a significant paragraph of the short story in which it is hinted that Mrs Sinico had become an alcoholic:

The deceased had been in the habit of crossing the lines late at night from platform to platform and, in view of certain other *circumstances of the case*, he did not think the railway officials were to blame. (*D*, 110)

³⁶³ Cf. “To-day at the City of Dublin Hospital the Deputy Coroner ... held an inquest on the body of Mrs. Emily Sinico, aged forty-three years, who was killed at Sydney Parade Station yesterday evening. The evidence showed that the deceased lady, while attempting to cross the line, was knocked down by the engine of the ten o’clock slow train from Kingstown, thereby sustaining injuries of the head and right side which led to her death.” (*D*, 100)

Significantly both passages contain an obituary; the whole Circle N Ranch episode starts with one, while “A Painful Case” reproduces a specimen with its meaningful, capitalised title “Death Of A Lady At Sidney Parade – A Painful Case”.

The fact that O’Brien made reference to this short story might have a bearing on the notion of writing: Mr Tracy is an eminent novelist, James Duffy is an intellectual, a translator and a would-be writer and often thinks of himself as a character. Conceiving of himself in literary terms, “He had an odd autobiographical habit which led him to compose in his mind from time to time a short *sentence* about himself containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in the past tense...” (D, 104) he leads a pre-ordered existence according to a moral and social code. Only if certain *circumstances* occurred might he become a criminal: “he would rob his bank but, as these *circumstances* never arose, his life rolled out evenly – *an adventureless tale.*” (D, 105). This depends on the randomness of the “adventureless” ingredients of his life, which, as in a tale, can be disrupted by unexpected events.

The whole story is centred on the world of writing and the act of writing itself is often referred to: “He wrote seldom in the sheaf of papers which lay in his desk. One of his sentences, written two months after his last interview with Mrs Sinico, read ‘Love between man and woman is impossible’” (D, 108).

She asked him why did he not write out his thoughts. For what, he asked her, with careful scorn. To compete with phrasemongers, incapable of thinking consecutively for sixty seconds? To submit himself to the criticisms of an obtuse middle class which entrusted its morality to policemen and its fine arts to impresarios? (D, 107)

“Why had he sentenced her to death?” The metaphoric use of “writing” demonstrates that by using “sentences” Mr Duffy, like a writer had condemned her, written her out of existence, had “withheld life from her” (D, 113) and determined her final destiny.

O’Brien might have noticed that Joyce skilfully inserted into the text the idea of specific circumstances, a metaphoric euphemism to mask temptation or having fallen into moral disgrace. With his methodical acts and gestures Mr Duffy “writes” his own life until something unexpected turns his set of rules upside down. His monotonous tale unravels, precipitates, and the “painful case” explodes in his mind.

William Tracy’s dropping dead on the landing happens ironically at the age of 59, (the same age as Joyce)³⁶⁴, and the article in memory of his literary achievements foreshadows the real obituary O’Brien wrote in Irish in his column “Cruiskeen Lawn”, one of the few serious

³⁶⁴ O’Brien could not know at what age Joyce would die, as *ASTB* was published in 1939, two years before the actual death of the great writer.

lines written on the subject of James Joyce witnessing his thorough admiration of the distinguished Irishman.

The death of the great Irish literary figure James Joyce is a matter of deep regret. His death leaves an unfillable gap in [our] artistic life. In his own way, he made the whole world aware of this country's literary talent and tradition. His work could have been written by nobody but an Irish person, and so the writings he leaves behind him are more Gaelic than many of the works of people who understood noEnglish. The passage of time will increase the writer's fame, and he will be more appreciated in this country as people understand better what literature is... (CL, 25 Jan., 1941)
³⁶⁵

We regret to announce the passing of Mr Tracy, the eminent novelist, which occurred yesterday under painful circumstances...A man of culture and old-world courtesy, his passing will be regretted by all without distinction of creed or class and in particular by the world of letters, which he adorned with distinction for many years. He was the first man in Europe to exhibit twenty-nine lions in a cage at the same time and the only writer to demonstrate that cow-punching could be economically carried on in Ringsend... Deceased was fifty-nine. (ASTB, 53)

As will be seen in the CNR episode, which uses Joycean references alongside the *Táin*, the myths of Ireland and the Easter Rebellion, Joyce's geography, history and topography of Ireland could not be escaped; Joyce's view of Ireland, his insight into the world of Dublin's paralysis, frame the Conscience of Ireland just as Irish ancient myths had done for centuries.

The stories from *Dubliners* O'Brien parodied do not follow a parallel course but diverge. The first, which sets out as an "adventureless tale" concludes with a tragic suicide "by accident"; whereas in the other story the two young characters, wanting to live real adventures, having tasted the bitter flavour of life, afraid of going beyond the reassuring boundaries of school and family, finally retreat into routine.

In its apparently straightforward development of the story of two schoolboys planning a trip to Ringsend, "An Encounter" contains essential elements illustrating the "inanimation" of Irish society. The two boys decide to play truant and so they defy the orderly life of the Jesuits' school. The boys want to escape from that society (school, family) which looks down on students whose favourite occupation is reading popular western culture, mimicking sieges and playing Cowboys and Indians. "An Encounter" is a story of attempted independence, an initiation into reality, in itself a story of failure.

The "day's miching" on the part of the two young boys, their incursion into Ringsend and their final defeat and return home, counterpoint the CNR episode. To appreciate the constant linguistic and thematic transfusion from "An Encounter" into this section of *ASTB* it is necessary to recall the gist of the story.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ The obituary was originally published in Irish and it is given in English here thanks to Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin who kindly translated it for me.

³⁶⁶ Joe Dillon has introduced the Wild West to a group of boys. His brother and the protagonist mime Indian battles in Joe Dillon's back garden. He is older than the rest of the group and more aggressive. It is a surprise for all when they learn that he has become a priest. The boys dream of real adventures. One day they decide to play truant, they collect some money and agree to meet on the Canal Bridge at ten. Joe Dillon does not turn up, so the protagonist and Mahony set out

It was Joe Dillon who introduced the Wild West to us. He had a little library made up of old numbers of *The Union Jack*, *Pluck* and *The Halfpenny Marvel*.³⁶⁷ Every evening after school we met in his back garden and **arranged Indian battles**. He and his fat young brother Leo the idler held the loft of the stable while we tried to carry it by storm; or we fought a pitched battle on the grass. But however well we fought, **we never won siege** or battle and all our bouts ended with Joe Dillon's war dance of victory...He played too fiercely for us who were younger...**He looked like...an Indian** when he capered round the garden, an old tea-cosy on his head, beating a tin with his fist and yelling: -Ya!! yaka, yaka, yaka!
Everyone was incredulous when it was reported that he had a vocation for the priesthood. Nevertheless it was true. (D,11)

This tale offered O'Brien possible thematic links between the *Táin*'s cattle raid and this incursion into enemy territory on the part of the two boys. Writing a book about Red Indians, and setting them in Phoenix Park, William Tracy recalls Joe Dillon arranging Indian battles in his back garden. The whole concept of opposing cultures, the classic power-centred culture of the Romans³⁶⁸ mirrored in *The Apache Chief*,³⁶⁹ a publication of the *Halfpenny Marvel*, animates the first part of the story. Both rely on dreams of conquests, but the latter lends the young reader means of escape.

The adventures related in the literature of the Wild West were remote from my nature but, at least, they opened doors of escape. I liked better some American detective stories which were traversed from time to time by unkempt fierce and beautiful girls. (D, 11-12)

In Joyce's story the Roman imperialistic wars are part of the culture promoted by the Jesuits: by endorsing them, they implicitly accept those of the British who with a similar violent system subjugated Ireland. Joyce's questioning of the violent stereotype is received by O'Brien and projected on the debunking of the heroics of the *Táin* through the contemporary mythical characters of cowboys.

At school during the history lesson, through the comment of Father Butler, popular literature faces the critical view of the institutionalised canon of highbrow culture.

One day when Father Butler was hearing the four pages of Roman History, clumsy Leo was discovered with a copy of *The Halfpenny Marvel*...What is this rubbish? Is this what you read instead of studying your Roman History? Let me not find any more of this wretched stuff... The man who wrote it. I suppose, was some wretched scribbler who writes these things for a drink. (D, 13)

for their adventure. They decide to spend Joe Dillon's tanner as well and go towards the ferry. Mahony begins to play the Indian chasing some poor girls who are defended by other boys. In the end the protagonist and Leo Dillon decide to leave them. They finally get the ferry and cross the Liffey. They eventually meet a strange individual who indulges in telling them how he would punish and whip young boys. Scared by him, the protagonist joins his friend and goes home.

³⁶⁷ Popular magazines for boys, published in England by the Irish-born editor-publisher, Alfred C. Harmsworth...They were advertised as reform magazines that would replace sensational trash with good, clean, instructive stories of adventure. They featured stories of American Indians, explorers, prospectors, sailors...See Don Gifford, Robert Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 34.

³⁶⁸ The lesson Father Butler is going to hear is a translation from *De Bello Gallico*, "the war report" from Gaul by such a privileged observer as Julius Caesar himself!

³⁶⁹ Apache: the word is also French slang for an urban hooligan or street Arab. See John Wyse Jackson and Bernard McGinley, op. cit., p. 13.

Father Butler's student, however, "hunger[s] [all the same] for wild sensations," for the escape which those "chroniclers of disorder", as he himself defines them, "alone seemed to offer [him]. The mimic warfare of the evening became at last as wearisome [...] as the routine of school... because [he] wanted real adventures to happen to [him]" (*D*, 13).

As, according to the boy's suggestion, real adventures cannot be lived through bookish emotions, Flann O'Brien's "eminent" novelist of cowboy books introduces the Wild West into Dublin by employing Shanahan and his friends as characters to live an adventure of cattle-raid in Ringsend. William Tracy's *Red Flanagan's Last Throw*, *Flower of the Prairie* and *Jake's Last Ride*, subcultural products of western literature mimic *The Union Jack*, *Pluck* and *The Halfpenny Marvel* quoted in "An Encounter".

By combining the economic and dreamlike realities *The Halfpenny Marvel* projects them onto cow punching which, as William Tracy successfully demonstrated, "could be economically carried on in Ringsend". Joyce's ambiguity, implicit in "But real adventures, I reflected, do not happen to people who remain at home: they must be sought abroad" (*D*, 13), is reflected in the setting itself and the exotic adventures fixed by O'Brien in a familiar landscape.

The boys' journey on their prematurely attempted initiation to life passes through Ringsend and Irishtown. Their wandering becomes a planned military expedition. The stages through which the boys move from pre-ruled existence to real life traces a topography similar to that drawn by the circuit of O'Brien's cowboys, as will be later explained in more detail. According to the critical theory proposed by Fritz Senn, the route they take becomes symbolically "a set course as they enact a pilgrimage through significant placenames which evoke areas of defeat in Irish History".³⁷⁰ What has been romanticised, even the harshest disasters of Irish military failures, is recalled through the simple mention of certain placenames in keeping with the function of the tradition of *Dinnsenchas*, (the lore of placenames). In this context the way Joyce made use of Ringsend acquires value within O'Brien's parody in *ASTB*. The term Ringsend³⁷¹ resounds with the din of Cromwell's

³⁷⁰ See Fritz Senn, "An Encounter", in Clive Hart, ed., *James Joyce's Dubliners, Critical Essays*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), pp. 26-38, who in this illuminating article gives a detailed semantic analysis of Joyce's story. In the two stories literariness and life are opposed and the way they are opposed determines different results. The students in their military pre-scheduled expedition long for venturesome experiences. They would go on the first ship abroad: "it would be right skit to run away to sea on one of those big ships and even I, looking at the high masts, saw, or imagined, the geography which had been scantily dosed to me at school gradually taking substance under my eyes." (*D*, 15).

³⁷¹ A maritime village two miles east from the General Post Office. Some scholars attribute the name to *an rinn* which means a point; thus the point of the tide, but a more likely interpretation would be the end of a point of land. See Douglas Bennet, *Encyclopaedia of Dublin*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991), p. 172. Cf. J.W. De Courcy, *The Liffey in Dublin*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996), pp. 324-325 "there would for 1,000 years be arguments as to why Ringsend was so named, some saying that it represented the end of the series of mooring rings built into Rogerson Quay, and one individual in the 19th century insisting that the true name was 'Wringsand'. Today we call it An Rinn, the point...The

soldiers and the recurrent floodings of the area. Phonologically it reveals ambiguity as it suggests the end of a ring, whereas its Irish etymology “an rinn” defines it as “a point” of the land, or “the point of the tide”, a “turning point”.³⁷² “The name itself, bringing to mind circular confinement and the inability to escape”³⁷³ suggests mobility and the suffused idea of immobility while moving round and round.

Ringsend was also the final place of embarkation from Dublin to England or the Continent from Dublin³⁷⁴ and notoriously connected with the memory of Cromwell³⁷⁵ “who landed his army there”³⁷⁶ in 1649. The dreamt-of door of escape, once ruthlessly violated, marked the beginning of the irreparable downfall into captivity of the Irish in their own land.

In the attempt to gain their autonomy, their independence, “the two boys are, on a very small scale”³⁷⁷, re-living the great discomfiting defeats which marred the evolution of the Irish nation towards freedom. “Following the North Strand Road and then the Wharf Road, the boys also trace the line of the Battle of Clontarf, a famous Irish victory over the Norsemen, yet also a Pyrrhic one in the loss of Brian Boru.”³⁷⁸ This reference to Brian Boru acquires further value as O’Brien specifically refers to it at the end of the CNR section: when the final battle is over Red Kiersay is found in his tent praying just like Brian Boru before being killed.

The language with which their wandering has been described so far suddenly appears charged with military weight; since the beginning of the day’s “miching” Mahony has been carrying a small catapult by means of which he has laid siege to the ragged boys, thus translating the initial mimic war they had experimented in Dillon’s back garden into a real street battle. As they go on, the apparent spirit of unruliness develops into war strategy and follows a set of agreed rules which entail self-assertion and the conquest of independence.³⁷⁹

name Ringsend is then, an Anglo-Irish hybrid, and it may be that it did not come into use until the Normans were well established, perhaps in the 14th century.”

³⁷² The name is a mixture of Dan. and Eng; reen, Dan. “a spit of land” See Louis O. Mink *A Finnegans Wake Gazetteer*: (Bloomington, London: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 464. And see also reference to Ringsend in the seventeenth century when it was called Ring’s End “The greatest of these sea ports was Dublin, which in size and wealth far exceeded any other city or town of Ireland... As a port indeed, it had little to commend it. The approach was blocked by a bar; and large ships, even when they had crossed the bar, could not reach the quay, but must lie at Ring’s End, where they were exposed to dangerous storms.” Cf. J. C. Beckett, “Ireland in the Early Seventeenth Century”, *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 30.

³⁷³ Fritz Senn, op. cit., p. 34.

³⁷⁴ By the time of writing the short story it had lost its escapist power, as the passage to the Continent was no longer offered there, it had found a different pier.

³⁷⁵ “In 1649... Oliver Cromwell and his highly disciplined and fanatically Protestant troops (“Ironsides”) undertook to reduce the pro-Stuart resistance in Ireland. His campaign began with the reduction of Drogheda... The Ironsides massacred 2,800 men of the garrison...” Cf. Don Gifford, Robert Seidman, op. cit., p. 365. See also for his impact on the Irish mind “The merciless nature of his nine-month campaign in Ireland in the year 1649 left a deep imprint on Irish feeling, “the curse of Cromwell”... is regarded as an imprecation of the worst kind...” Cf. Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, op. cit. pp. 128-9.

³⁷⁶ Fritz Senn, op. cit., p. 34.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

³⁷⁸ Cf. Donald T. Torchiana: “James Joyce’s Method in Dubliners”, *The Irish Short Story*, Peter Raftoidi, Terence Brown, eds., (Presses Universitaires de Lille, Gerrards Cross: Colyn Smythe), 1979, p. 132.

³⁷⁹ As in the CNR expedition, they proceed along their itinerary as in a military manoeuvre carrying weapons, planning all the moves, and the track to be followed, catering for provisions and calculating times of departure and arrival. In Mahony’s house where they seem to be preparing for their training, one group “held the loft of the stable”, another group

This fictitious reality goes on until they finally decide to go and test their strategy. Mahony “[begins] to play the Indian... [chases] a crowd of ragged girls, brandishing his unloaded catapult, he [proposes]...to charge them. They “[arrange] a siege; but it [is] a failure.” When they finally have a rest Mahony “[chases]” and “[pursues]” a cat who, with a military term, [escalades]³⁸⁰ a wall.

Unfortunately their excursion never gets to the planned target of the Pigeon House³⁸¹ and loses its initial sense of defiance and conquest as they end up loafing about, the sense of a military expedition having utterly lost its former purpose. Having staged and acted out the adventures they had read and dreamt about in *The Halfpenny Marvel*, after the unexpected encounter with the pervert, they go home with a sense of dismal impotence, suffering a defeat; they even have to get a train at Lansdowne Station to avoid being detected,³⁸² (this marks the measure of their failure as it means that they are not able to go home by marching back to the point of departure).

They would fight to win freedom, but they know from the start that they are going back home. They only risk being punished and stigmatised by the community for their unruly behaviour.

In the CNR passage what had been magnified to the proportions of an insurrection is labelled as hooligans’ “feats” and gains “seven days’ hard labour without the option of a fine” (*ASTB*, 59). The violent warfare waged in the streets during the Easter Rising is played down to an aimless immature boy’s game by the reference to “Woolworth bows”. “... the braves galloping like red hell on their Arab ponies, screaming and shrieking and waving their bloody scalp-hatchets and firing flaming bloody barbs into the house from their Woolworth bows.”(*AMS*, 82), implying toy weapons, cheap and popular Christmas gifts habitually purchased by parents at Woolworth’s.

If the place names of the CNR episode are compared with those of “An Encounter” it will be manifest that a circular route is intended throughout the story. Leaving from North

tried to “carry it by storm”; they also fought in pitched battle, but Dillon who played too fiercely and looked like an Indian and screamed “Ya yaka, yaka, yaka” did not let them win “siege or battle” and always ended with his “war dance of victory”. In the house hovered the “peaceful odour” of Mrs Dillon. The children banded themselves together “some boldly...some in fear”. Verbs connected with organisation and planning recur too: “we arranged to go...”, “we were making the last arrangements”, “we were to meet at ten...” “Mahony’s big sister was to write an excuse...” The protagonist, bringing “the first stage of the *plot* to an end”, indicates that he was fulfilling a “complicated scheme for mischievous purpose and conspiracy” but also hints that he was inventing a plot of which he is a character, thus obeying the double referentiality of the term “plot”, a “chain of incidents which are gradually unfolded in a story” The troop’s excursion has Mahony clamber up a bridge. “He brought out the catapult...” originally an ancient war engine, “and explained some improvements which he had made in it.”

³⁸⁰ The scaling of the walls of a fortress by means of ladders, *Twentieth Century Dictionary*, (Edinburgh, London: Chambers, Ltd., 1901), p. 316. “What seems and is Latinist preciousness is also accurate military jargon, in keeping with the battle/siege motif.” (The journey is to the Pigeon House Fort.) John Wyse Jackson, Bernard McGinley, op. cit., p. 18.

³⁸¹ “The Pigeon House must be reckoned the military dock it was at the date of the sale, (1897)” See notes to “An Encounter” in *Dubliners*, Terence Brown, ed., (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 248.

³⁸² “I had to suggest going home by train before he regained any cheerfulness.” They have wandered so far into Irishtown that they are close to Lansdowne Road Station, whence regular trains went to Amiens Street Station...See John Wyse Jackson Bernard McGinley, op. cit. p. 16, n. b.

Strand Road at the end of their adventure, the characters, even though it is not clearly stated in the text, are supposed to get a train from Lansdowne Road Station pulling into Amiens Street Station thus going back close to the initial area of provenance. The same happens in *ASTB*: starting from Ringsend the cowboys are summoned by Tracy to go to Drumcondra then go back to Ringsend across the border in Irishtown, then move to CNR, to Lad Lane and then in the AMS back to Ringsend Saloon³⁸³. So circularity is achieved.

In the story, Joyce, like the protagonist, muses on this implicit concept while reflecting on the words and behaviour of the pervert encountered by the boys in Ringsend³⁸⁴ “He gave me the impression that he was repeating something which he had learned by heart or that, magnetised by some words of his own speech, his mind was slowly *circling round and round* in the same orbit.” “His mind, as if magnetised again by his speech, seemed to *circle* slowly *round and round* its new centre.” [Italics added] Put to the test O’Brien’s intertextuality links the circularity of Ringsend in “An Encounter” with the Circle N Ranch which betrays the initials of an important thoroughfare of Dublin, the “North Circular Road.”

Joyce’s circularity indicates perversion, the going round and round a centre which leads nowhere, suggesting once again Dublin’s immobility. O’Brien’s ludic plan does not necessarily hint at the corruption of the elderly man but alludes to Dublin’s topography.

³⁸³ The AMS has a more complex trajectory: Shanahan is originally out in Finglas, then is employed by Tracy cow-punching in Ringsend. Apparently called by him for further orders he goes to Mountjoy Sq., Rutland Square. But it is a false alarm and when he goes back with his friends he finds that their steers have been rustled away across an imaginary boundary between Ringsend and Irishtown. They go there to recover their cattle but are taken prisoners by Red Flanagan. Description of the “green being”, of the CN ranch. Slug sets them free and they go to the Police in Store St. They find out that in Phoenix Park there are Indians employed by Tracy. They divide into three groups and go to the CN Ranch, surround it and send flaming arrows into it. Red Flanagan comes out and attacks them. They finally engage in a street-battle. They win. The defeated gang is taken down to Store St. Red Flanagan cannot be taken as he is doing the Brian Boru praying in his tent. They try to recover their steers but they are all dead on the prairie. They go back to Ringsend and the hooligans are taken to the District court. When they come out of jail the fun starts all over again. They are recommended by Tracy and are employed by Trellis.

³⁸⁴ “Ringsend”, a celebrated poem by Oliver St. John Gogarty which he wrote in his later years: “I will live in Ringsend with a red-headed whore” captures the quality of the early brothel poems (an experience he shared with Joyce in the Kips) in a more general and universal way. For a comment on this poem and Gogarty’s relationship with Joyce, see Ulick

The “Circle N Ranch” episode and AMS

Comparing the CNR episode with the AMS it emerges that many parts which were later edited out of *ASTB* occur in this section of the manuscript. Three passages were completely eliminated from the final draft and some of the details omitted from the fragments eventually included can be best read in connection with Irish myth and nationalism.

The excluded components can be classified as follows: part of Liza Robert’s *Táin* passage and sexual allusions; a reference to the Gap of Danger (a phrase from the national anthem); the prototype of the “green being”, the encounter and dialogue between a G-Man and a person pretending he only speaks Irish; a passage about the dead stolen steers with 2000 heaps of beef; topographical changes in the names of the Dublin streets where the cattle-raid takes place.

The third passage eliminated is introduced by a title to which O’Brien’s readers are by now accustomed, “Relevant Excerpt from the Press”, and reports the scientific results obtained by “Mr Michael (‘Red’) Flanagan...the *genial* Landlord of the CN”, the villain who has become Red Kiersay in *ASTB*. Turning from botany to anthropology,

having successfully achieved a *black rose* last year by a process of grafting, (*the blood*, preserved, is on loan at the moment to the Museum of Montreal) he is now engaged in the difficult task of producing a human being green in colour, the sex of which is left with safety to fall into one or other of the conventional categories. Researches are carried forward night and day in the ranch’s extensive dormitories where a comprehensively inter-racial stud has been established. (AMS, 79)

The specific product should be the effect of the inter-racial mating of Irish, Indian and Arab cowpunchers with American girls from Kentucky. The aim to be reached is a particular shade of green, emerald green. Up to now only the experiments have been recorded, but not the final results.

The creation of a vegetable prototype has the unmistakable signs of a parodic revisitation of a national symbol: *Róisín Dubh*, an anonymous Irish poem. The small dark rose stemmed from the tradition of the 18th century *aisling* poetry³⁸⁵ and in James Clarence

O’Connor, “Joyce and Gogarty Royal and Ancient, Two Hangers-On”, in *James Joyce The Artist and the Labyrinth*, (London: Ryan Publishing, 1990), p. 352.

³⁸⁵ Cf. “*Aisling* (vision or dream), a Gaelic literary genre, primarily associated with a political poetry of the 18th century though having roots in early Irish literary texts dealing both with love and sovereignty.” The poet has the vision of a beautiful woman... “She identifies herself with Ireland, forsaken by her legitimate spouse.” [She finally] declaims a prophecy of [the triumph of the Gaelic and Catholic order].” Robert Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

Mangan's free translation³⁸⁶ became a "mantric evocation of the female spirit of Ireland"³⁸⁷ This particular species is one of the most famous images of Sovereignty, of the motherland, and has dwelled in the Irish nationalist mind together with Banba and Cathleen Ní Hoolihan, the latter in Brother Barnabas's opinion being of dubious morality: " Poor Caitlín was no angel! She changed her name fully twenty times and we have two aliases, Róisín Dhubh and Niamh Chinn Oir..."³⁸⁸

Mangan's "Dark Rosaleen" composed in the tragic year of the Famine, 1846, reads in part:

O! The Erne shall run red
With redundance of blood,
The earth shall rock beneath our tread,
And flames wrap hill and wood,
And gun-peal, and slogan cry,

Wake many a glen serene,
Ere you shall fade, ere you shall die,
 My Dark Rosaleen!
 My Dark Rosaleen!

.....

Over hills and through dales
Have I roamed for your sake;
All yesterday I sailed with sails
On river and on lake.
The Erne at its highest flood
I dashed across unseen,
For there was lightning in my blood
 MyDark Rosaleen!
 My Dark Rosaleen!
Oh there was lightning in my blood,
Red lightning lightened through my blood,
 My Dark Rosaleen!³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶ The most famous translation is James Clarence Mangan's. Rosaleen the object of the speaker's love and devotion is a personification of Ireland. Mangan was a famous poet and translator and had a solitary and difficult life, "he was educated in Saul's Court by a Fr. Graham from whom he learned something of several European languages. His wide and eclectic reading ranged from contemporary German, French, and Spanish authors to Persian, Ottoman, Hungarian, and Icelandic poetry of all periods." For this quotation and following information see Robert Welch, *ibid.* pp. 354-6. He was a regular contributor to the *Dublin University Magazine* and collaborated with George Petrie, John O'Donovan and Eugene O'Curry with the intention of helping to preserve old Irish literature. To this end he poetically reworked the versions of Irish literary material provided by them. His version of Dark Rosaleen is based on an accurate prose translation by Ferguson. Joyce had great consideration for the neglected Irish poet and celebrated his artistry and imagination in two lectures given at the University of Trieste in 1902 and 1907. It could be relevant to point out that Mangan is quoted in the "Cyclops" chapter several times and Dark Rosaleen in the catalogue of the heroes but is contiguous with unreal heroes like "Brian Confucius or Murtagh Gutenberg or Captain Nemo". See Don Gifford, Robert J. Seidman, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

³⁸⁷ For this definition see Robert Welch, *A History of Verse Translation from the Irish 1789-1897*, (Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colyn Smythe, 1988), p. 9. Cf. Aubrey De Vere, "The Little Black Rose", "The Little Black Rose shall be red at last;/what made it black but the March wind dry, / And the tear of the widow that fell on it fast? It shall redden the hills when June is nigh!", quoted in Thomas McDonagh, "Poems of the Irish Mode", *Literature in Ireland*, (Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1916), p. 172. See also Yeats's "The Rose Tree" for a continuation of the use of this symbol.

³⁸⁸ Flann O'Brien, "A Brass Hat in Bannow Strand" in *Myles before Myles*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

³⁸⁹ Robert Welch, *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-15.

Undoubtedly O'Brien, who here is dramatising the "bloody" content of the poem, which is momentarily on loan and can be viewed at a Museum in Montreal, knew the Irish original³⁹⁰ and so was conscious of Mangan's different rendition of the source. Nationalist energy had filtered through the Gaelic original with "redundancy of blood" and "lightning blood lightened" through the verses with strong alliterative accents.

The erotic love imagery, as in

I'd kiss the young girl who would grant me her maidenhead
And do deeds behind the *lios* with my Róisín Dubh!,

and the lexis of the lover to the beloved was converted into the encoded language of militarism incited by strong passion. But Mangan's cry for blood and sacrifice verging on a patriotic hymn was "a tryout of nationalist rhetorics" and more convincing as it "appear [ed] to move close to being a poem about the need for violent insurrection."³⁹¹ O'Brien, aware of the double linguistic register operating in the poem, satirised the highly clichéd, feminine image of Ireland which demanded sacrifice and focused on rhetoric in the service of militarism.

The nationalistic backdrop is particularly appropriate in the context as what is being pursued is an odd genetic human breed of a very distinguished colour. As we have already seen in O'Brien's MA thesis he was not particularly fond of *aisling* poems which with Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabhán had become stereotyped as a heap of clichés, highly repetitive formulae singing the beauty of the beloved while hoping for political liberation from the oppressor.

The whole passage has significant similarities with another two well-known pages of *ASTB*, both focusing on Trellis. 1) Trellis is saluted as the inventor of "immaculate conception" later in *ASTB*, aestho-autogamy, the art of giving birth to well-grown characters without them undergoing the process of birth, childhood and youth, thus enabling their parents to save money on their upkeep. 2) Trellis is cheated by the light and convinced that he is reading only green-covered books, which guarantee that a book is traditionally Irish. Instead he finds that he has been reading a blue book (this might allude to *Ulysses* whose cover was blue) and feels deeply frustrated at the discovery.

The green being produced in the inter-racial stud derives from both ideas, from an experiment conducted to create a strange prototype with specific characteristics which stems from genetic issues and from the idea of "Irishness" pinned on the colour green. "In deference to national sentiment, an emerald green has been decided on and experiments will be carried

³⁹⁰ " [O'Brien's] father had a reasonably well-stocked library which contained apart from the standard English authors and the Latin and Greek classics, Anglo-Irish poets such as Mangan and Ferguson, Douglas Hyde's *A literary History of Ireland* and a small collection...of editions of seventeenth and eighteenth century Irish poetry." Cf. Cathal G. Ó Háinle, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

³⁹¹ Robert Welch, *A History of Verse Translation from the Irish 1789-1897*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

forward until such time as the desired shade has been achieved.” (AMS, 79) Apart from the colour green, a transparent symbol of Ireland, O’ Brien’s, not Mangan’s, rhetorical game is on display, and the manipulation of human genetics in the ranch admits a definitive critical interpretation of ideas of racial and cultural purity. The idea is that the offspring will be the effect of the blending of colonised peoples: from the genetic mixture of the colours pertaining to different races, from the Irish, Indians and Arabs pure emerald green, a pure post-colonial emerald green, will result.

Unfortunately the “emerald green being” did not survive O’Brien’s final revision. It might have been relevant to the critical assessment of the novel as, in a well-constructed logical fantasy, Flann O’Brien synthetically satirises controversial racial issues, discussed in Ireland before and after the Treaty. After jokingly evoking Dark Rosaleen and exotic references to Mangan’s poetic translations from Arab and Oriental poems, he joins literary and socio-cultural cross-references in his intertextual linkage.

Since Elizabethan times the Irish had been variously compared with Negroes, apes, Celtic-Negroes, being victims of stereotyping until the twentieth century.³⁹² By inviting the colonised Irish, Arabs, Indians and Americans to contribute to the production of the green being, O’Brien seems to support the regressive ideology of racialising the Irishman as Luke Gibbons has demonstrated as regards Ireland and America: “This type of comparison between the subject populations of both colonies ... established a network of affinities that was to recur in descriptions of both the Irish and the Indians...”³⁹³

O’ Brien’s critique of stereotyping Irish people surfaced again in “Cruiskeen Lawn” four years after the publication of *ASTB*.

The *Irish Times* has been full of grand news these days. “The Maoris,” I read “are sometimes called ‘the brown Irish’ because they are always smiling and happy.” Fancy! New Zealand I do not know, but strange that it should be the seat of so monstrous a sarcasm. I know that we are morose, crypt-faced, inclined to view that life is a serious disorder which ultimately proves fatal. But why should these antipodean britishers see fit to send this sneer to us three thousand miles across the sea in the middle of a world war? (*CL*, 18 October 1943, Monday, p. 3)

His reaction to the “brown Irish” reveals the same interest in a sociological approach to the relevance of self image, to the awareness of how the racial image is perceived by other nations and particularly by the British, or “britishers”. Race and racialising became a fairly consolidated category by the end of the Victorian age and it was a judging parameter shared by the early Joyce.

³⁹² Vincent J. Cheng, “White Negroes”, *Joyce, Race, and Empire*, (Cambridge: C.U.P, 1995), pp. 19-41.

³⁹³ Luke Gibbons, *Race against Time*, p. 98, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 84.

“Race” often recurs in Joyce’s *A Portrait*³⁹⁴ and seals its ending “I go to encounter...and to forge ... the uncreated conscience of my race”. Paradoxically Joyce himself who had wondered how to save his race, which language to use - the one of the oppressors or that of the oppressed and had opted for that of the colonizers- was victim of this discriminating criterion. as the Unionist Provost Mahaffy once asserted that “James Joyce is a living argument in favour of my contention that it was a mistake to establish a separate university for the aborigenes of this island – for the corner boys who spit in the Liffey ”.³⁹⁵

Flann O’Brien might have partly drawn his idea of the green being from *A Portrait* when Stephen designs in his mind a green rose to escape the binary logic of the War of the Roses³⁹⁶ in which he was forced to take part at Clongowes: “White roses and red roses: those were beautiful colours to think of... But you could not have a green rose. But perhaps somewhere in the world you could” (*AP*, 12)

From the clichés of the colonized Irish Dark Rosaleen and the green rose, O’Brien produced a new Irish post-colonial green being. He too was caught and felt uneasy in the national linguistic dichotomy and wanted to overcome the gap between colonial and post-colonial. He too felt the urge to show the way to his fellow countrymen; he, like Joyce had asked himself if he could recreate what believed to be the “uncreated conscience” of his race.

The concentration of Irish topics in this section might resemble nationalist prose writing, the kind of writing too overtly Irish O’Brien was trying to avoid. This section of the AMS manuscript, together with the other three, presents a high percentage of peculiar “Irish” elements, highly overstressed and recognisable as such. The “Polismen”, with the more anglicised form “policemen” in *ASTB*, are finally referred to as Peelers (a nick-name for members of the Irish Constabulary, established in 1812-18 by Sir Robert Peel)³⁹⁷ whereas in the published version of the CNR episode there are only policemen, policemen who get stuck drinking stout, but still policemen. Considering the number of passages and references taken out, the process of de-Irishising or Anglicising the text is revealed. What appears from the fragments is O’Brien’s determination to delete all references to extra-linguistic referents which may inevitably connote these passages as “too Irish”. When talking about Ringsend he takes out the B. and I liners, the British and Irish Steam boats which linked Dublin with England.

³⁹⁴ “Joyce himself used the word “race” eleven times in *A Portrait*: “We are an unfortunate priestridden race”, p. 37, “A priestridden Godforsaken race!”, “a priestridden race”... “the uncreated conscience of my race...”, *ibid.* p. 17

³⁹⁵ Luke Gibbons quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

³⁹⁶ The students at Clongowes had to choose between York and Lancaster that are symbolised by white and red roses. Stephen prefers the York side because the Irish had backed York against Lancaster, see *ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁹⁷ Peeler, n. a policeman, from Sir Robert Peel, who established the Irish Police (1812-18) and improved those in Britain (1828-30). See *Chambers’s Twentieth Century Dictionary*, *op. cit.*, p. 673. Cf. also: “During his term as chief secretary of Ireland (1812-18) Peel was responsible for a major modernising of the police system in this country”, Jim Herlihy, *The Royal Irish Constabulary*, (Dublin: The Four Courts Press, 1997), p. 29.

The cowboys reach it by cantering up Mountjoy Square in *ASTB*, whereas in the AMS O'Brien refers to Rutland Square which was already called Parnell Square. He definitely avoided all references to a nationalist and politicised Ireland. By crossing out the emerald green creature not yet achieved, but constantly aimed at, O'Brien entrusts his readers with an emasculated Ireland, a devitalised Ireland devoid of its most recognisable cultural synthesis. Nevertheless his criticism risked making the whole operation over-exposed.

His satire of Irishness had to be concealed. Hugh Kenner noticed the same phenomenon being applied more extensively to *The Third Policeman*:

And among striking omissions are the linguistic ones. Apart from proper names, I do not recall one Irish word in the book anywhere. The word 'Garda' never appears. It is as if there had been no Gaelic League, as if the Republic had never been proclaimed, as if there were no Treaty, no 1922...That is pre-1919 talk, and no one remarks on it. An Ireland from which politics and political awareness have simply been subtracted, that is an unsettling place indeed.³⁹⁸

Possible reasons could be advanced. Perhaps O'Brien wanted to recreate a pre-Treaty Ireland to maintain the Joycean atmosphere and environment, or perhaps he wanted to make the text less Irish and more comprehensible to a non-Irish reading public, or again, having accumulated too many Irish politically satirical scenes he had finally felt the section would simply collapse under its own weight.

Recomposing the actually published version of the CNR by adding the eliminated passages, it is feasible to imagine it within the texture of *ASTB* as the "Cyclops" chapter of *Ulysses* dealing with all-Irish topics from nationalism to nostalgic patriot feeling, racism etc. In its final version the CNR only sports residual material of the originally intended section: a parody of the *Táin*, reference to a cattle raid and to a street battle enlarging to a war-like dimension as in the Easter Rising, and refers to Hamlet's impotence before the usurper Claudius and to the victorious defeat of Brian Boru.

The original project encompassed myth: *reductio ad absurdum* of the *Táin*; history: the Easter Rising, Brian Boru; language: the controversy between Irish and English; nationalism and the green being, racial superiority: other races should contribute to the perfect Green Irish race, nationalist rhetoric: one of the cowboys stands in the Gap of Danger, a reference to the National Anthem.

³⁹⁸ Hugh Kenner "The Fourth Policeman", in Anne Clune, Tess Hurson, op. cit., p. 65.

The final copy still exhibits myth as *reductio ad absurdum* in the encounter of Medb and Fergus, and the whole affair of the cattle raid; it still retains references to history, the Easter Rising and Brian Boru etc, but does not stress the language question, referring to neither the political symbol of the Dark Rose, nor the “Green Being” or the 2000 heaps of cold beef as a result of the cattle raid. The excluded passages, taken together, suggest that all the parts excised from the final publication have as their lowest common denominator what Budgen, introducing “Cyclops”, defined as “the Irish question”.³⁹⁹

Just as the “Cyclops” chapter was meant as a reminiscence of the I-narrator who actually took part in the reported story, Shanahan’s is a first-person narration, a digression from the development of the main story-line which, being saturated with encounters and other memories, risked unbalancing the whole structure of the novel O’Brien admitted that the “Cyclops” chapter in *Ulysses* was one of his favourites. “The chapter dealing with the citizen and his dog Garryowen in Barney Kiernan’s is *superbly funny*, and the great sleepy reverie of Molly Bloom that brings the book to an end is truly comic.” (“Enigma”, *CL*, 16 June 1962). O’Brien often gave signs of respect for the chapter throughout his career. On June 16, on the first Bloomsday he had inaugurated together with John Ryan to celebrate the day on which *Ulysses* is set,⁴⁰⁰ he declared:

It would surely establish the utterly ignored fact that Joyce was among the most comic writers who have ever lived. Every time I get influenza I read about the Citizen and his Dog; penicillin has nothing on them”. (*CL*, 16 June, 1954)

But in 1944 in “Cruiskeen Lawn”, he paid an even more explicit tribute to the twelfth chapter of *Ulysses*.

In the manner of Borges’s “Pierre Menard, author of ‘Quixote’”,⁴⁰¹ O’Brien here started to reproduce another “Cyclops” chapter beginning with Joe going into Barney Kiernan’s pub to meet the Citizen to report about a meeting in the City Arms:

cattle traders, says Joe about the foot and mouth disease. There he is, says I, in his glory-hole with his cruiskeen lawn and his load of papers, working for the cause. The bloody mongrel let in a grouse out of him that would give you the creeps⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ See Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of “Ulysses” and Other Writings*, (London, Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.156.

⁴⁰⁰ For a memory of the first Bloomsday, see John Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood*, (Gigginstown, Mullingar: The Lilliput Press, 1987), p. 138: “He and I worked on several projects. Jointly we put together the James Joyce special number of *Envoy*, which was the genesis of *A Bash in the Tunnel*. Another of our ventures was to organize the first ‘Bloomsday’. On 16 June 1954, the fiftieth anniversary of the day on which the events of Joyce’s *Ulysses* took place, we decided to commemorate it by covering as much of the original ground as the book had charted”; for a photographic record of this event see Peter Costello and Peter Van De Kamp, *Flann O’Brien, An Illustrated Biography*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), pp. 17-19, 20.

⁴⁰¹ A well-known short story written by Jorge Luis Borges and included in *Ficciones*. In the story the protagonist attempts to capture the art of *Don Quixote* by faithfully copying it.

⁴⁰² This passage, almost-entirely quoted from “Cyclops”, is included in a dissertation about copyright and meta-narrative techniques. See Myles na Gopaleen, “People in Books”, in Kevin O’Nolan, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-9.

What he actually produced was not a literal transcription, but some pieces coincide word by word and line by line with those of Joyce. Unlike Pierre Menard he did not have to learn a language or recuperate the Catholic faith nor *be* the author. After reproducing two fragments from the twelfth chapter he added some bits of his own personal creation and added: "Ah well, I might as well admit that that piece was written jointly by myself and Mr James Joyce, and we can do that sort of job fairly well, if we say it *ourselves*".⁴⁰³ And pretending he has a better idea he suggests a play by Shakespeare with "characters and speeches taken from several plays, and with a real plot which adds up. Hamlet kills Macbeth. Othello carries Ophelia away to the forest of Arden, Polonius marries Cleopatra, and suchlike carry-on. Order your corpses in advance".⁴⁰⁴

At this stage the final destructive anxiety of influence had not yet overwhelmed him. In this fragment he is jokingly admitting he might have liked to write it himself. But even here there is a suggestion that he might do better. He might modify Shakespeare's canon, by providing different endings for his tragedies. To his friends and in "Cruiskeen Lawn" he often quoted passages alleging Joyce's superiority in recreating Dublin vernacular simply by the omission of a comma or the inclusion of a "mister": " 'Eh, mister! Your fly is open, mister!' It was the use of the *second* 'mister' that showed Joyce for the subtle artificer that he was."⁴⁰⁵

"Cyclops" embraces all of Ireland's "mythic self-image" which is clearly depicted and described through various parodies; through inflation and deflation sentimental patriotism is ridiculed. Catalogues of saints, clergymen, heroes and tourist places are interspersed with mock-heroic Fenian Saga, imitations of Irish legends, Ireland's idyllic past. O'Brien thought "Cyclops" the best chapter in *Ulysses* not only for its formidable humour and probably for the idea of gigantism which well served him to construct the figure of Finn in *ASTB*, but also for the way the hero is reduced to a laughing stock, *reductio ad absurdum*, incongruency. The catalogic enumeration of Irish heroes like "Cuchulin", framed by figures who are by no means heroic such as

The Man that Broke the Bank in Monte Carlo...The Woman Who Didn't... (*U*, 382-83).

saturates the desire for self-glorification. The execution in "Cyclops" reaches its crescendo when it is transfigured into a tourist attraction, a picnic:

⁴⁰³ He is still quoting from the chapter where "*Sinn Feinn*" "Ourselves" is quoted by the Citizen during his monologue. Italics added.

⁴⁰⁴ Kevin O'Nolan, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

⁴⁰⁵ John Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood*, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

special quick excursion trains and upholstered charabancs had been provided for the comfort of our country cousins of whom there were large contingents. (*U*, 396)

Even in the published version of *ASTB* a similar atmosphere is reproduced to celebrate the CNR ranch. "One of the most antique and outstanding ranches" appears as parody of the Irish past which also incorporates a tourist description of the premises, to be visited under specific conditions.

Visitors can readily reach the ranch by taking the N. 3 tram. The exquisitely laid out gardens of the ranch are open for inspection on Thursdays and Fridays, the nominal admission fee of one and sixpence being devoted to the cause of the Jubilee Nurses' Fund. (*ASTB*, 56)

In the CNR episode references to the cattle theme which runs through *Ulysses* can be traced even though in *ASTB* it has not got the female-bovine connotation it has in *Ulysses*. As previously demonstrated, it has a topological value.

There may also be a reference here to *Finnegans Wake*. If we can imagine the phrase 'Circle N' Ranch as an encoded reference to Dublin topography, it is worth considering John Garvin⁴⁰⁶ explanation about the strange initials, NCR, occurring in different contexts in *Finnegans Wake*. Perhaps O'Brien was aware that the letters NCR often occurred in *Work in Progress*⁴⁰⁷ (*Finnegans Wake* was published, after *ASTB*, in 1939, on the 4th of May).

This thoroughfare may be discerned dimly in *Finnegans Wake* 284 amidst a reference to some of the Illuminated capital Letters of the TUNC Page of the Book of Kells. The Letters NCCR from the words Tunc CRUCIFIXERANT are used to make an enlarged capital C out of the two C's and to produce with the preceding and succeeding N and R the letters NCR... But the fact that the letters may stand for 'North Circular Road' is not overlooked, for the reference to these letters in footnote 5 runs 'A gee is just a Jay on the Jaunts cowsway' it means that the traffic problem of cattle 'on the hoof' being driven along the North Circular Road from the Cattle Market to an abattoir or to the quays has again occurred to ...Joyce.⁴⁰⁸

Reference to the North and South Circular Roads is manifest in *Finnegans Wake*, the NCR and SCR (256.32) all stressing circularity, cycles, the ring-like shape of the roads. The two circular roads and the adjacent canals originally marked the limits of the city boundary. At

⁴⁰⁶ O'Brien's intellectual senior officer at the Civil Service.

⁴⁰⁷ *Work in Progress* was published in various fragments which appeared in the *Transatlantic Review*, in *Transitions* and in other magazines from 1924 to 1938, before appearing in book form as *Finnegans Wake* on May 4 by Faber and Faber in 1939; *ASTB* was published by Longmans on March 13, 1939.

⁴⁰⁸ John Garvin, "Hades", *Disunited Kingdom and the Irish Dimension*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, Toronto: Noble and Barnes, 1972), p. 61.

one time herds of cattle were driven along the NCR from the Cattle Market at Prussia St. to the docks (2m84.F5): one of Leopold Bloom's schemes was to lay tracks so that they could be transported by tram. [256.32 NCR and SCR⁴⁰⁹; 284.26 NCR; 284.F5 on the jaunts cowsway; 295.31 our twain of doubling bicirculars; 310.07 circumcentric megacycles; 321.13 east circular route; 547.33 rigstresse 553.30 my nordsoud circumlums]⁴¹⁰

Whatever their immediate destination may be, a local slaughterhouse or exportation to England, their ultimate destiny (jaunts cowsway) is identical: they will be butchers' meat, cut into joints.⁴¹¹ "The initials NCR on page 284 ...stand for North Circular Road. The " 'jaunts cowsway' in footnote five ...refers not only to the giants Causeway, but also to the use of this Dublin road for driving cattle to and from the cattle market. One of Bloom's pet projects in *Ulysses* was the provision of trams to transport the cattle to the docks and so end this practice".

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I suggest that the Circle N Ranch itself and the cattle theme may derive partly from the passages quoted above. Bloom's main worry is the viability of the cattle in the city of Dublin, whereas O'Brien's main idea in linking the passages via his parody was the viability of the cattle theme through Irish culture. Once again, describing the slaughter of 2000 steers and the scenery of death, the fragment of AMS might also be connected with Bloom's concern about the dead meat trade.

A very interesting article in "Cruiskeen Lawn" combines the themes I have examined in the Circle N Ranch passage - cattle raid and the *Táin*, and cattle and Bloom in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.

You have noticed of course that the Corporation have been taking notice of the menace and stench caused by having the cattle market in the middle of a residential area on the North Circular Road and have planned to abate the nuisance by transferring the market to another residential area...To get back to the abbot war... When I think of the Corporation, I think of the City Hall and then of Cooley, the architect who designed it. I knew him well...Everybody knows how cattle fascinated Cooley. Didn't he design the Bull Wall? He too was worried about the cattle market. Transport, he argued, was the key (or quay) to the whole problem...I don't believe the Pat-res Conscripti will put a foot wrong if they sanction the execution - even at this XIth hour if it is not too 8 - of the exquisite Cattle Drive of Cooley...The terms of the abattoir facilities ...and development of internal and external cattle, sheep and swine trade, and ancillary meat and food trades (*CL*, 25 June 1943, Friday, p. 3)

⁴⁰⁹ The initials mentioned above are taken from *Finnegans Wake*. "A matter of initials: GPO, DUTC is the Dublin United Tram Company. NCR and SCR are the North Circular Road and South Circular Road, Dublin." See William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to "Finnegans Wake"*, (London: Thames and Hudson: 1969), pp. 169-70.

⁴¹⁰ Louis O. Mink, *A Finnegans Wake Gazetteer*, op. cit., p. 425, all the numbers in brackets refer to *Finnegans Wake* page numbers and lines.

⁴¹¹ John Garvin, op. cit., p. 61.

⁴¹² John Garvin "Allusions to Finnegans Wake", *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. XI, n. 3, (Spring, 1974), pp. 266-278

In the untitled passage there are remarkable coincidences with two texts from *Ulysses* both related to Bloom:

A divided drove of branded cattle passed the windows, lowing, slouching by on padded hoofs...outside them and through them ran raddled sheep bleating their fear. I can't make out why the Corporation doesn't run a tramline from the park gate to the quays...Instead of blocking up the thoroughfare... Wouldn't it be more decent than galloping two abreast? (*U*, 122)

A scheme to enclose the peninsular delta of the North Bull at Dollymount ...A scheme to connect by tramline the Cattle Market (North Circular Road and Prussia Street) with the quays (Sheriff street, lower and East Wall) parallel with the Link line railway laid ...between the cattle park, Liffey junction and terminus of Midland Great Western Railway... (*U*, 846)

In "Cruiskeen Lawn" O'Brien refers to the Corporation having finally taken notice of Bloom's preoccupation, he goes on to juxtapose references to *Ulysses* with the *Táin* and the architect Cooley, who, not unexpectedly, gives him an immediate connection with the cattle Drive of Cooley or as it is more widely known: *Táin Bó Cúailgne* or *The Cattle Raid of Cooley*. As we have already seen Bloom was also concerned about the dead meat trade: "Roast beef for old England. They [the British] buy up all the juicy ones. And then the fifth quarter is lost: all that raw stuff, hide, hair, horns...Dead meat trade. Byproducts of the slaughterhouses..." He also comments on the fact that during the funeral they have to proceed two abreast to let the traffic of the branded cattle pass. "Wouldn't it be more decent than galloping two abreast?". O'Brien's punning on "double beasted" to recall "two abreast" leaves no doubt as to its textual provenance: "I know the external sheep too – he is the man who can't afford the double-beasted – excuse me, double-breasted suit of best wolf-skin".

O'Brien also played on realistic data, Cooley really was the architect of Dublin's City Hall, but was more relevant as offering a unique connection with the "abbot war" of the *Táin* which could be interpreted both as slaughter of the cattle raid and as the war, a controversy between the abbeys. According to "N. Aitchinson (1987) the *Táin* was composed in south east Ulster, as anti-Ulaid propaganda at the behest of Armagh clerics."⁴¹³ O'Brien's Cooley was fascinated by cattle and its transport. The article in "Cruiskeen Lawn" well illustrates the short-circuit phonetic- thematic connections operating in the Circle N Ranch.

⁴¹³ Quoted in Ruairi Ó hUiginn, "The Background and Development of *Táin Bó Cúailgne*", J. P. Mallory ed., op. cit., p. 29.

“An Encounter”

In conclusion it may be worth scrutinising an interesting creative text published in “Cruiskeen Lawn” in 1944 under the self-declaring title: “An Encounter”

An Encounter I said a good thing to an old cabby the other night. In a hurry out to Cabinteely to buy some carpet slippers for the granda, I hailed this Jem stuffed up somnolent on the box. After working on him for a time, managed to restore life, got in and off we went. Well it took us about an hour to get to **Lansdowne Road**. I opened the door, jumped out (difficult thing to do without opening the door) and shouted to this **heavily moustached** Ben Hur. Do you see this says I, pointing to the good crombie overcoat. I do, says he, it's an overcoat. Good says I, I was afraid you thought it was a coffin NOW WILL YOU FOR THE SWEET LOVE AND HONOUR OF THE DEAD CHIEFUSE THE SO-AND-SO AND **WHIP!** That is all very well to talk the old **fool** mumbled but you must know this is only a horse-drawn vehicle...Indeed then and bejapers and I don't doubt you me good man says I for do you know what I'm going to tell you divil a human hand had hand act or part in the delineation of this rick-shaw. There was only one thing to do, of course. Unyoked the horse, got him over the railings into the Veterinary College and then in between the shafts with myself. Made Cabinteely in 40 minutes. No trouble to me of course. I am, as you know, a **hack**. (CL, 7 Feb., 1944, Monday, p. 3)

O'Brien is dealing here with the dark side of Joyce's short story. Belonging to the cycle of youth, “An Encounter”, reveals its ambiguity as it moves towards freedom. As is usual with most of O'Brien's parodies, this fragment reveals no binary set of similarities. It does not involve the two young boys heading for Ringsend but there is only mention of a strange encounter between the narrator and a cabman, whereas in the short story there is reference to an old man, a pervert who stirs the protagonist's anxious feelings, his fear of being like him as he finds many aspects in common with the strange man. A few hints reconstruct the atmosphere of the moribund reality of *Dubliners*. The cabman's heavily moustached Ben Hur counterpoints the old man with ashen-grey moustache in “An Encounter”, and in the first part of the article it is meant that the cab goes slowly, even though the adverb “slowly” is not used.

When the boys meet the pervert they notice that, “he was shabbily dressed in a suit of greenish-black and wore ...a jerry hat... He seemed to be fairly old for his moustache was ashen-grey... He walked towards us very *slowly*, always tapping the ground with his stick, so *slowly* that I thought he was looking for something in the grass”(D, 16) From now on Joyce's story starts building subtle sexual innuendoes. The old man starts talking about the long gone happy schooldays, then of books and sweethearts. The narrator notices that “his attitude on this point struck [him] as strangely liberal in a man of his age”. Mentally going in circle he dwells on girls, soft-handed girls. He again *slowly* moves away from them and probably masturbates, going back to the boys and sitting by them. Then he asks if Mahony often “get[s] whipped” And from this point onwards, in a musical crescendo, Joyce indulges in the old man's sick reveries. And he suggests rough boys “ought to be whipped and well whipped”.

“When a boy [is] rough and unruly there [is] nothing would do him any good but a good sound whipping...what he [wants is] to get a nice warm whipping”.

His iterative use of the same term, adding to it here an adverb “well whipped”, there a sequel of double adjectives, “good sound” and “nice warm”, emphasises the morbidity of the old man, rendered more emphatically when resumed in O’Brien’s cryptic parody with “Use the So-and-So and Whip” But the old man would whip “if ever he found a boy talking to girls or having a girl for a sweetheart he would whip him and whip him”. Not content with this “if a boy had a girl for a sweetheart and told lies about it then he would give him such a whipping as no boy ever got...”

Up to now Joyce has used and reused the terms “whipped, whipping, whip” about ten times. In the second musical movement “sweethearts” and “whipping” conflate and the first causes the other to be effected. “NOW WILL YOU FOR THE SWEET LOVE AND HONOUR OF THE DEAD CHIEF...USE THE SO-AND-SO AND WHIP!”

What is relevant here is that Flann O’Brien alludes to the short story in his title, then linguistically lingers on a few elements which might suggest that he is referring to Joyce’s short story, such as “heavily moustached” which recalls the “ashen-grey moustache” of the old man, the topographical reference of Lansdowne Road alluding to the place which marked the measure of the boys’ failure as they were not able to go home marching back to the point of departure, and, of course, “whip” as the term recurs several times in “An Encounter”. But this unusual titled text is also suggestive of another reading, of a different encounter, projecting it on O’Brien’s literary obsession: Joyce In this article he imagines a meeting with a “heavily moustached” man, an old man who is old, somnolent and stuffed up, the latter meaning both replete with food and too self-centred. Significantly enough, Fob/Myles, after working on him for a time, which might refer to O’Brien’s reading and studying of Joyce’s writings, “managed to restore life”, that is, revitalised his work. They set off for Cabinteely, but it takes them an hour to reach Lansdowne Road. O’Brien/Myles complains. that he did not want to be carried as though he were dead, as if he were “dressed” in a coffin. He shouts and asks the cabby to whip the horse “for the honour of the dead chief”. Arousing his interest in the dead chief Parnell⁴¹⁴ he hopes to shake Joyce’s somnolent spirit and convince him to whip the horse to speed up. The hackney driver, the old fool, tries to justify himself, but O’Brien/Myles, impatient, finally sends the incapable horse to be dissected at the Veterinary College, thus implying that the impenetrability of Joyce’s writing needs to be deciphered in a perpetual exegesis. Having got rid of it he can indulge in his final revitalising act. He transforms the vehicle (Joyce’s production) into a rickshaw, a more agile and swifter means of transport, saddling himself

⁴¹⁴ Cf. “Me dead chief, Parnell” where O’Brien alluded to Joyce’s hero in “Cruiskeen Lawn” on another occasion (*CL*, 23, June, 1943, p. 3).

with the task of a horse, drawing the carriage. By driving Joyce's carriage he substitutes the horse, that is, the slow-old-somnolent artistic expression to which, in O'Brien's opinion, Joyce was confined.

O'Brien finally deflates his oneiric self-emphasising his delusions of grandeur, and defines himself as a hack,⁴¹⁵ playing at the same time on the multireferentiality of the term. He is now both a hack-cab and a hack-journalist.

As many critics and biographers have remarked, Flann O'Brien's view of Joyce was ambiguous and ambivalent. He deeply admired the genius, but also detested his having reduced "the entire literary world to a state of chronic and helpless exegesis." (CL, 12 September 1949).

Especially when he realised after the 2nd World War that he had "the word 'Joyce' firmly attached to him...like a tin tied to a dog's tail"⁴¹⁶, as most critics associated O'Brien with Joyce's work, his predecessor became an overwhelming, bulky presence to dispose of. Until the fifties he could resist the risk of being related to him. Going through "Cruiskeen Lawn" there are several articles about Joyce or alluding to Joyce, but as time went by and Flann O'Brien never acquired the critical recognition he aspired to, while Joyce's critical fortune became exaggerated, the anxiety of influence led him to strange reactions. He basically expelled and exorcised Joyce's presence from his parodies in "Cruiskeen Lawn" (He was mainly harsh and used vitriolic satire against him) or he overemphasised it, as in the *Dalkey Archive* where he made a character of him, but a self-denying character. There, Joyce reneges his authorship of *Ulysses* and hopes to become a Jesuit to darn their underclothes! During the fifties, he would never have openly used a title from *Dubliners* for his passage in the *Irish Times* because he was fully aware that his writing was viewed as derivative. And he resented this.

Throughout "Cruiskeen Lawn", there are also times where Flann O'Brien enjoys his company or identifies himself with J. A. J.:

There's one [gnomon] in Clongowes where I was reared...I remember the day I stood staring at it...hoping I was observed by the masters. Most unusual boy, thinking already of life and times must lend him some books. The young clean mind, most beautiful thing of all. (CL, 23 May, 1942, p. 2)

Or when he pretends he has created something that the well-known Dublin-Trieste-Paris-Zurich author wrote, as in "Mangan has always fascinated me. First thing on leaving

⁴¹⁵ Hack: [An abbrev. of Hackney, mostly familiar or contemptuous] a horse let out for hire, the driver of a hackney carriage, a poor writer, *slang* a prostitute. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, pp. 910-911.

⁴¹⁶ Anthony Cronin, op. cit., p.188.

Clongowes, I wrote a little job on him –Hauptmann thought highly of it.” (CL, 8 March, 1943, p. 3)

In an article of 1947 he was quite happy to accept “many digs at the expense of [himself] and James Joyce” to the extent that he allegedly shared a ferry in Ringsend. On Wednesday, June 18, 1947 on page 4 of the *Irish Times* he wrote in reply to an article by Daniel Corkery

wherein he had many digs at the expense of myself and James Joyce (i.e., Ireland’s non peasant class)... Well time will show whether we merited such reproaches. At least Joyce and I never compromised in our detestation of people who cannot exist without being “from” somewhere; we were *here*, that’s all, and in our early university days we were rowing men. [Not that *that* paid very well, though; we had a small ferry down at Ringsend and though we spent an entire forenoon rowing men, all we had to show for our pains was four bob!)]...

Until the fifties in “Cruiskeen Lawn” we find traces of his feeling one with Joyce, that he partook of his genius, later articles show an ambivalent attitude. On the reissue of *ASTB* in 1951 in the States, he gives John Garvin⁴¹⁷ a copy of the first edition. In the dedication of *ASTB* to his friend however, there is clear evidence that he privately admitted sharing the authorship of his main novel with Joyce:

— “After many a summer lives the swan” —

To John Garvin from the joint authors Nolan & J. A. J.

28/2/51.

so that John Garvin finally received a book written by two writers a writer and his ghost-writer? It is noteworthy that O’Brien is still making this significant admission in 1951. In the same year in *Envoy*, O’Brien no longer feels he can compare himself with Joyce or outdo him.

Years before, in 1941, in “Cruiskeen Lawn”, he had cooperated with Joyce in composing a fragment of the text of *Ulysses*, the letter Mr Deasy had written to the editor of the *Freeman’s Journal*.

The following passage plagiarised from the second chapter of *Ulysses*, appears on the 2nd of August, 1941, p. 6, under the heading “Dútaig Soige”. Half-disguised in the Irish column could easily pass unnoticed. It is the exact copy of the same letter written by Mr Deasy on the Foot-and-Mouth disease and entrusted to Stephen to take it to the newspaper where he worked. Joyce’s letter is here reproduced and re-addressed to another newspaper and passed as an original letter written to Myles Na gCopaleen, care of the *Irish Times*. But in this case

⁴¹⁷ I saw the above quoted dedication thanks to the kindness of Mrs Catriona Garvin who now owns the book. This is the 289th copy of the American edition as O’Brien himself states on the dust cover. It was published in New York by Pantheon in 1939.

O'Brien did not simply verbally recopy the text, he added something. His manipulation did not affect the text, it can be considered as a surface structure linguistic altering. He only padded it up rendering Deasy's letter more discursive by eliciting what in Joyce's text was elliptical or understated, also changing the order of the paragraphs in the final part of the letter and eliminating sentences. But this way our joint author O'Brien did not admit having shared its authorship of *ASTB* and of part of *Ulysses* with Joyce, but he himself manipulated the text, even if at a degree zero, making Joyce's text more explicit and "ready to use" in a different context.

Dútaig Soige

To Myles Na GCopaleen,
Irish Times.

[Sir, -] May I trespass on your valuable space [?]¹

That [the] doctrine of *laissez faire*, which so often in our history. [has been permitted to operate to the national detriment, is again rearing its ugly head in relation to] Our cattle trade. [That trade now bids fair to go] The way of all our old industries. [One is reminded of the] Liverpool ring which jockeyed the Galway Harbour scheme. [Now, again, on the occasion of a] European conflagration. [one may well wonder how long our] Grain supplies [will continue to reach us] through the narrow waters of the channell. [The nation's peril in this regard could not, of course, be expected to pierce] The pluterperfect imperturbability² of the department of agriculture. [If one may be] Pardoned a classical allusion. [the case of] Cassandra. [possibly because they were uttered] By a woman who was no better than she should be. [were ignored. One need not discuss with what result.]

To come to the point at issue... Foot-and-Mouth disease known as Koch's preparation. [Or] Rinderpest. [(to cite the more correct title) can be, and has been, cured.]

From now on the order of the paragraphs differs from Ulysses

...My cousin, Blackwood Price, writes to me [that] it is regularly treated and cured in Austria by cattle doctors there. They offer to come over here... [The specific is] known as Koch's preparation. [It is a] Serum...[prepared from the] virus at [found in affected horses] Rinderpest. Emperor's horses ...[Experiments have been carried out by] veterinary surgeonson horses at the German State Farm] at Murzsteg, Lower Austria. Mr Henry Blackwood Price. [has courteously offered the Government here an opportunity of giving the system] Courteous offer a fair trial...

[Every right-minded Irishman will agree that the acceptance of this offer is in accordance with the] dictates of common sense. [It is surely time that we gave our undivided attention to this] Allimportant [all important]³ question. In every sense of the word [we should] take the bull by the horns.

Thanking you for the hospitality of your columns (*U*, 40-41)

I remain,
Yours truly,

Edward Deasy

¹ The parts in square brackets are O'Brien's additions or changes.

² To be noticed the occurrence of "to pierce with a pluterperfect - pluterperfect imperturbability" already traced in *ASTB* and analysed at the beginning of this chapter, p. 101.

³ O'Brien prefers "All important" to the more emphatic Joycean's "Allimportant".

“Two in One”

To understand why O'Brien's feelings towards Joyce were so contradictory and manichaeian I would like to draw attention to one of the most macabre short stories he wrote, “Two in One”⁴²¹ and put it into perspective with the article “An Encounter” and the introductory Editorial Note, the brilliant anecdotal depiction of James Joyce O'Brien wrote in 1951, when asked to make an assessment of Joyce's artistry. “It is the story of a taxidermist who murders his hated employer, disposes of the body, retaining only the skin; and then assumes both skin and identity so that the missing person is himself, for the murder of whom he is hanged in the end.”⁴²² It was published in *The Bell* under the pseudonym Myles na Gopaleen and it is worth analysing to realise O'Brien's critique of mastery, of God-like father figures and of Joyce.

“Two in One” is the most excruciating critique of authorial dominion that O'Brien could conceive. From “Scenes in a Novel”, the progenitor of *ASTB*'s mutiny against the tyrant-writer Trellis, O'Brien challenged the position of the author as the holder of truth. The author is not God and cannot recreate reality through fiction. All his writers-characters are doomed to die or disappear, as in *The Dalkey Archive* in which “Joyce” loses his consciousness of being an author. In “Two in One” Murphy, Mr Kelly's employee, is writing an absurd story in the condemned cell; he is already paying for his daring act of unsettling the balance between reality and unreality.

The protagonist hates his employer because even though he knows that he “had a real interest in the work, and a desire to broaden [his] experience”, he gives him jobs of little importance. Feeling underestimated, a great sense of dissatisfaction mounts in him. To the qualities comprised in the profession of taxidermist, “zoologist, naturalist, chemist, sculptor, artist and carpenter”, which also recall some of the sciences Joyce had to deal with when tackling the scientific aspects of his books, he adds that of murderer. In a fit of rage, frustrated because he cannot compete in the same field as his master, he hits him violently several times. Only by looking into his eyes can he be sure he is dead and he finally decides he will embalm him as though he were an ape. He first thinks he will sit him “on view asleep on a chair...for the benefit of anybody who might call” (this would explain O'Brien's open and declared parodies of Joyce in the forties.) But then he realises he is running the risk of being discovered (his integrity as a writer might be in danger). Finally, he has a brilliant idea: “*I would don his skin and, when the need arose BECOME Kelly! His clothes fitted me. So would his skin. Why*

⁴²¹ Myles na gCopaleen, “Two in One”, *The Bell*, XIX: 8, (July 1954), pp. 56-61

⁴²² Anthony Cronin, op. cit., p. 215.

not?". He proceeds to operate on his body. He disposes of the flesh and bones (he disembodied Joyce's works) and kept the external part, (so that he would be like Joyce, but not Joyce himself). The sentences in italics could well be seen as a manifesto of O'Brien's artistic aim to be as good as Joyce; if his clothes fitted him he might as well wear his skin. He wished to embody his art as a lifeless, dead skin. But to make Joyce seem alive he had to give him living parts of his body, his eyes through which to look, and his teeth to bite the world with.

In this highly articulated icon a phenomenon similar to the article of 1944, "An Encounter" is operating. The protagonist takes over Joyce's obsolete role of conducting a cab and substitutes Joyce's horse (art) with himself, transforming the vehicle into a more agile vehicle, a rickshaw. At that stage, in 1944, even if in a dreary dream-like parable, O'Brien still thought he could outdo Joyce, that he was invincible, whereas now, in 1954, he feels defeated. In "Two in One", sporting the master's skin is great fun for Murphy, he feels comfortable in his wrapping, and decides not to remove it. But he later has to face an inevitable reality: he cannot remove [his skin]. As in "Two in One" O'Brien must have initially thought that Joyce was a removable skin. Until the forties *Ulysses*, though not an officially banned book,⁴²³ was virtually banned by zealous booksellers and unknown to most Dubliners so it could be relatively easy to dispose of his aesthetics. But after a few years, as O'Brien transposed it into fiction, "the horrible truth dawned on [him] when [he] tried to take the skin off. It wouldn't come off! It had literally fused with [his] own! And this process (as O'Brien sadly realised) kept advancing. "[Joyce's] skin got to live again, to breathe, to perspire." Murphy is finally arrested for having disappeared into the features of his master. He is at the same time murderer and murdered, but O'Brien felt that [Joyce] was a murderer anyway. In 1954 O'Brien felt he was guilty of being entrapped in the mummification of himself into Joyce. He deserved to be punished for losing his identity.

Probably if the *Third Policeman* had been published and recognised as a masterpiece, he would have ceased treading in Joyce's footsteps. The process of discovery, imitation, incorporation, the attempt to dispose of Joyce, and his ultimate failure, (he is himself under the guise of somebody else), can be realised when examining O'Brien's trajectory. At first he delighted in parodying Joyce in *ASTB* as Trellis. The undemocratic writer who compels his characters to inhabit both the same premises and the same book with him is a god-like writer: Trellis/Joyce. With "John Duffy's Brother", a brilliant parody of "A Painful Case" he demonstrated he could re-make a short story from *Dubliners* with unexpectedly exhilarating effects. The article "An Encounter" of 1944 and the one of 1947 show him doing things with Joyce, but also taking his place because he felt he could be as ingenious as Joyce or even

⁴²³ "which means simply that any person asking for it in a bookshop would probably be lynched" (Jay-Day, *CL*, 16 June 1954).

better. But, as time went by, in the fifties, a period of frustration⁴²⁴ and of discouragement embittered him and in "A Bash in the Tunnel" O'Brien is a dumb and immobile witness of Joyce's gratuitous creativity which, in his opinion, proceeded by turning real people into fictitious ones. "Two in One" with O'Brien operating as plagiarist-taxidermist of his Joyce/ boss, ends up by imprisoning him in the skin of his beloved-hated Joyce. Whereas in the *Dalkey Archive* what had started off as a revenge on that "bugger" Joyce, by inverting the co-ordinates of Joyce's world, debunking his myth, finally reached a balanced critique of the work and a comprehensive human portrait of the man on whom he was doubtless still projecting his ideas about good and evil, and of manichaeism Catholicism.

Editing a special number of *Envoy* on Joyce in 1951 meant staking out the right to be a leading voice in the non-stop critical debate that had involved Joyceans and anti-Joyceans since the publication of *Ulysses*. Appointed as guest editor by John Ryan, he collected articles by Irish authors, assembled unpublished letters, personal memories and obituaries. Significantly enough, most of the theses presented in the essays seem to belong to the same cultural matrix as O'Brien. Denis Johnston's complaints about Joyce having become an enigma seem to have a dialogic counterpart in O'Brien's subsequent article "Enigma" of 1962.⁴²⁵ O'Brien and his friends shared most of the theses put forward in the special *Envoy* number and particularly the idea of Joyce's unnoticed comic strain, Joyce having fun in creating his obscure conundrums, Joyce's "punning", (one of the main points of Niall Montgomery's article and also present in O'Brien's introduction) constantly surfaced in O'Brien's "Cruiskeen Lawn".

O'Brien's editorial note "A Bash in the Tunnel" is quite unconventional. In the subsequent anecdote included in the editorial note of the special number of *Envoy* in 1951, he simply observes the Irish artist, locked in the toilet of a train engaged in resentfully drinking somebody else's whiskey, "being whisked hither and thither by anonymous shunters". He adds "I think the image fits Joyce: but particularly in his manifestation of a most Irish characteristic—the transgressor's resentment with the nongressor."⁴²⁶ He concluded his article cynically stating why Joyce had become a myth:

perhaps the true fascination of Joyce lies in his secretiveness, his ambiguity (his poliguity, perhaps?), his legpulling, his dishonesties, his technical skill, his attraction for Americans. His

⁴²⁴ In 1953 O'Brien was forced to leave his job. As Tom Garvin recalls in a personal communication, his father John helped O'Brien to keep his job for another two or three months until alcoholism was recognised as an illness and so he might be entitled to a pension for his job.

⁴²⁵ Cf. "Now that is all past- except in his home—and he has become instead an enigma. A great many conscientious workers are professionally interested in the study of this enigma, and many reputations have already been committed to the hazard of the printed page.", "A Short View of the Progress of Joyceanity", *Envoy*, 5, n. 17, 1951 p. 18.

⁴²⁶ Flann O'Brien, "A Bash in the Tunnel", Editorial Note, *Envoy*, 5, n. 17, 1951.

works are a garden in which some of us may play... But at the end, Joyce will still be in his tunnel, unabashed.⁴²⁷

By resorting to anecdotes to validate his theories about Joyce's "ambiguity (poliguity perhaps?)"⁴²⁸ he conjured up a remarkable story which graphically represented the situation of the Irish artist and by Irish artist he eventually meant Joyce. He is like a drunk closed in the toilet of a train, drinking somebody else's whiskey. The door of the toilet shows the simple word ENGAGED, while he is no doubt engaged in his activity. Joyce's "transgressor's resentment with the nongressor"⁴²⁹ was the criticism O'Brien felt Joyce would have moved against him. O'Brien did not have the courage to be a real transgressor. Significantly enough, in the above-mentioned article of 1944, titled "An Encounter" a similar image is depicted. As we have seen, this article leaves room for hope.

"J-Day", an article written in June 1954 for the First Bloom's Day seals the harshest critique O'Brien made of Joyce, while other contributors were celebrating the great writer he wrote his most excruciating lines:

It is June 16th – and James Joyce wrote half a million words about what happened in Dublin on June 16th, 1904. The book is called "Ulysses" and is really the record of what happened a bona-fide traveller of that day, with impaled in the text an enormity of "philosophical material." In this task Joyce did not go into somebody's workshop and choose the tools he needed: he took the whole lot. Thus does one find side by side monasticism and brothelism...But not until James Joyce came along has anybody so considerably evoked depravity to establish the unextinguishable goodness of what is good...Joyce was in no way...a Dubliner. In fact there has been no more spectacular non-Dubliner. Not once did he tire of saying that he was never at home. This absence may have been a necessity of his literary method, but it has often occurred to my irreverent self that maybe he hadn't the fare.

Joyce was a bad writer. He was too skilled in some departments of writing, and could not resist the *tour de force*. Parts of "Ulysses" are of unreadable boredom...Joyce was illiterate. He had a fabulously developed jackdaw talent of picking up bits and pieces, but it seems...Every foreign-language quotation in any of his works known to me are wrong, and his few attempts at a Gaelic phrase are absolutely monstrous. Anybody could have told him the right thing. Why did he not bother to ask? Was the man a leg-puller? Was "Finnegans Wake" the ultimate fantasy in cod?...Did James Joyce ever exist?... (CL, 16 June, 1954, p. 4)

O'Brien's editorial note of 1951 on Joyce already showed signs of dissatisfaction and resentment. It lacked emotional involvement, it was cynical and detached, but was not entirely abrasive. While Dublin intellectuals, were resurrecting and celebrating Bloom's itinerary through Dublin – he, himself was the one who with John Ryan launched the "celebration"⁴³⁰ –

⁴²⁷Ibid., p. 11.

⁴²⁸Ibid., p. 11.

⁴²⁹Ibid., p. 9

⁴³⁰ an anonymous article begins declaring : To-day is the golden jubilee of "Bloomsday"... Only time will prove whether or not "Ulysses" is one of the world's great novels; for the book is no more than 32 years' old ...There can be no question that it is one of the most influential novels of the present century, and as the advertisements say, no historian of modern literature can be without it." (*Irish Times*, 16 June 1954), p. 5.

and in the same issue James Joyce was being used in an advertisement,⁴³¹ he had the courage and cheek to say that “Joyce was a bad writer.”

In the 1951 *Envoy*'s issue, Denis Johnston describes Gogarty's anger at being often referred to as a character in *Ulysses*. Commenting on an essay by an American critic, Gogarty exclaimed “that's what we've come to...the fellow once spent an evening with me in Holles Street Hospital. And now some character in Canada is probably getting a PhD for analysing his profound knowledge of midwifery.”⁴³² Gogarty went home in a tantrum, and wrote a scolding article saying that “Joyce was a phoney and his *Ulysses* a joke [and] *Finnegans Wake* was a colossal hoax, with no other purpose than to pull the academic leg of the entire world...”⁴³³

He continues a prisoner of the metafictional trap Joyce had laid: “All his life, Gogarty has been a celebrated wit in his right, but now in his riper years himself being regarded more and more merely as a character in the book of an early hanger-on whom he never liked. Would any man of spirit not be entitled to lose his temper, just a little, at being forced into such a role? What more degrading fate could befall anybody?”

Gogarty complains because he has been turned into a mythic character and ironically because he will go on living within the pages of a celebrated book. He has attained immortality and yet he loathes it.

O'Brien's comment that “Joyce spent a lifetime establishing himself as a character in fiction [that] Joyce created, in narcissus fascination, the ageless Stephen. Beginning with importing real characters into his books, he achieves the magnificent inversion of making them legendary and fictional,” ties in with the destiny Joyce later had to undergo as late as 1964 in the pages of the *Dalkey Archive*.

“What more degrading fate could befall anybody [than to become a character in the book of a writer]? The rhetorical question Denis Johnston asked when commenting on Gogarty's experience, is appropriate for O'Brien's use of Joyce in the *Dalkey Archive* (and later for Calvino's use of O'Brien in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*.)⁴³⁴ What does it feel like to become a character in somebody else's fiction?

⁴³¹ Joyce's Portrait by Sean O'Sullivan was used to advertise Prescotts, Cleaners and Dyers of Distinction which had been mentioned in *Ulysses*. Cf: “To-day is the fiftieth anniversary of Bloomsday. June 16th, 1904, was the day which James Joyce immortalised in *Ulysses*, in which the central character is Leopold Bloom...And when I sent her for Molly's Paisley shawl to Prescott's ...Trams: a car of Prescott's dyeworks...Even Prescotts had given decades of dependable cleaning to Dubliners.” (*CL*, 16 June 1954), p. 5.

⁴³² Denis Johnston, “A Short View of The Progress of Joyceanity”, op. cit., p. 13.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p. 14

⁴³⁴ Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1979) (tr. from the Italian by William Weaver). For Calvino's treatment of O'Brien in the novel see my article “O'Brien and Calvino between Lightness and Heaviness” in Carla De Petris, Jean Ellis, Fiorenzo Fantaccini, eds., *The Cracked LookingGlass*, (Rome: Bulzoni, 1999), pp. 185-204.

So in the sixties, still feeling that he had not had enough opportunities to deal with Joyce, he decided to embody him in his fiction, thus mummifying Joyce into himself. He declared it thus to his readers from "Cruiskeen Lawn": "Joyce not dead, but is living in disguise in semi-retirement in Skerries: this, with reference to a book which Myles (as Flann O'Brien) is writing. Myles proposes a new edition of *Ulysses* which would have an explanatory and bibliographical preface written by him noting in particular who wrote the book; the edition would be called *Uncle Thom's Cabin* (*CL*, December, 23, 1961). O'Brien makes up his own story with Joyce still alive and hiding in the little village of Skerries. He also makes up the character of Mick in quest of the great author, endowing him with the enthusiasm which must have animated the young O'Brien when he first discovered Joyce.

Joyce works as a curate in a pub; he has stopped writing, and would like to become a member of the Jesuit family. Basically O'Brien wanted to take his revenge on him for having become famous and acclaimed all over the world. He wanted to show the Americans that he too could make outstanding discoveries. He too had secrets to reveal about the distinguished Irishman. Having developed a certain degree of resentment against the American and European critical studies and biographies (Gorman, Ellmann) he added a coda to the literary biography of James Joyce. And indeed he made him the shadow of himself. No celebration of artistry for art's sake, but the paradoxical invention of a man who, having lost his memory, aspires to become a clergyman. By subverting the rigid principles dominating Joyce's way of life O'Brien delineates the characteristics of an anti-Joyce.

The following extracts from the letters he sent to Timothy O'Keeffe and Cecil Scott show O'Brien's mixed feelings of anger and a certain respect towards the master

But Joyce. I've had it in for that bugger for a long time and I think this is the time. A man says to me: "What do you mean by 'the late James Joyce'? You might as well say that Hitler is dead. Joyce is alive and living in retirement and possibly in disguise in Skerries, a small seaside place 20 miles north of Dublin." My search for him there, ultimately successful, brings us into the genre of "The Quest for Corvo". Our ludicrous conversation may be imagined but it ends with Joyce asking whether I could use my influence to get him into the Jesuits. (21 September, 1965)

It is quite true that James Joyce has been dragged in by the scruff of the neck but I think this is quite permissible within the spoofy canon of the book... The intention here is not to make Joyce himself ridiculous but to say something funny about the preposterous image of him that emerges from the treatment he has received at the hands of many commentators and exegetists (mostly, alas, American.) (6 January, 1964)

From the first letter it emerges that it is O'Brien himself who is in search of Joyce "My search for him, ultimately successful" and that he finally finds him and captures him in his writing. Yet another time O'Brien repeats the same ritual pattern of imprisoning a writer (Trellis) in the web of another writer (Orlick).

Curiosity is what drives Mick to meet Joyce, along with his great admiration for all his work except his poetry.

Dr. Crewett's reply: "You are certainly fond of your Joyce" (*DA*, 112) stresses my point about the intellectual Dubliner's "possession" of Joyce. "I never suspected you of such enthusiasms." (*DA*, 112).

Mick's potential to clear up misunderstanding and mistakes by planning a "real book about Joyce" must have been the secret hope of O'Brien's colleagues and friends whose aim was to eliminate a lot of stupidity about the great writer. Now and then spotting mistakes and wrong references to the reality of Dublin, (an inexhaustible source of laughter was the incorrect reference to Joyce's father always wearing a monocle), often adding unreliable autobiographical information letting it freely circulate, they felt they were the only true *connoisseurs* of Dublin's Joyce. But they never felt they wanted to challenge themselves to the point of writing the "real book on Joyce." So Niall Montgomery as late as 1970, like Mick in the *Dalkey Archive*⁴³⁵, did not agree to being defined as a critic or exegete in John Ryan's *A Bash in the Tunnel*⁴³⁶, even though he had contributed to it with his essay "Joyeux Quicum Ulysse...Swissairis Dubellay Gadelice". John Ryan's "Notes on Contributors" reveal his inadequacy: "When asked if he could be described as a Joycean scholar he answered: 'Good lord no! Can't stand Joyce. I'm a Proustian myself'.⁴³⁷

John Jordan's contribution to *A Bash in the Tunnel*, the 1970 enlarged edition of the 1951 special number of *Envoy* on Joyce originally edited by O'Brien, is revealing as regards the intellectual Dubliner's attitude towards Joyce. Although he belonged to a different generation, his afterthought is representative of the conflict O'Brien and his friends had gone through, and can help us understand why O'Brien's initial drive to venomous satire of Joyce in the *Dalkey Archive* was finally watered down.⁴³⁸

There still exists in Ireland a body of opinion which tends towards reductive comment on the labours of foreign Joyce scholars. I have heard derisive comment even on Richard Ellmann's by now classic biography. These people pride themselves on their first-hand information on, and intimacy with, Ireland, with Dublin, with the Roman Catholic Church. Yet only three full-length studies of any aspect of Joyce have been written by Irish people to date⁴³⁹...The acknowledged Irish Joycean mandarins, Niall Montgomery and 'Andrew Cass', have not found it worth their while to assemble their findings in book form⁴⁴⁰...On the native side there is ...a burden of resentment that good American dollars, especially, should be lavished on a local who started off little better than many another middle class Irish boy...My countrymen veer between extravagant praise and snide

⁴³⁵ Similarly Mick, in the *DA*, when asked by the doctor, disclaims this role: "Lord, don't tell me that you are also an author and exegetist in your own right? No, I don't claim to be that at all, but if I could gather the material... (*DA*, 112) Only when the doctor is reassured that he is not going to use Joyce to write a book on Joyce, he unveils his secret.

⁴³⁶ The enlarged edition of the 1951 special number of *Envoy* on Joyce originally edited by O'Brien.

⁴³⁷ John Ryan, op. cit., p.252.

⁴³⁸ John Jordan, "Joyce Without Fears: A Personal Journey", John Ryan, ed., *A Bash in the Tunnel*, op. cit., pp. 135-6.

⁴³⁹ J. F. Byrne, *Silent Years: An Autobiography with Memoirs of James Joyce and Our Ireland*, 1953, Padraic and Mary Colum, *Our Friend James Joyce*, 1959, Constantine P. Curran, *Joyce Remembered*, 1968.

⁴⁴⁰ John Garvin was referred to as Andrew Cass (Cassandra), later, in 1976, he published *Joyce's Disunited Kingdom*.

depreciation of those who have been successful by international standards. And a fair share goes to the intellectual and the artist.

The way the myth of Joyce is recycled in the *DA* responds to the theories O'Brien and his friends had constructed, considering Joyce from the standpoint of being Irish and of sharing the same *milieu* and intellectual arrogance. He would strip him of all his secrets, dreams, boasts and regrets. (*DA*, 114)

-Tell me...my name?

- Yes. Your name is James Joyce.

It was as if a stone had been dropped from a height into a still pool. The body stiffened. He put a hand about his face nervously.

-Quiet please! Quiet! I am not known by that name here. I insist that you respect my affairs
The voice was low but urgent.

Of course I will, Mr Joyce. I shall mention no name again. But it is really a deep pleasure to meet a man of your attainments face to face. Your name stands high in the world. You are a most remarkable writer, an innovator, Dublin's incomparable archivist...

-Ah, now don't be talking like that. (*DA*, 144)

And it is incredible that he even disregards the major work which made him universally famous:

-Mr Joyce, tell me about the writing of *Ulysses*...

-I have heard more than enough about that dirty book, that collection of smut, but do not be heard saying that I had anything to do with it. Faith now, you must be careful about that. As a matter of fact, I have put my name only to one little book in which I was concerned...*Dubliners*. At the last moment Gogarty wouldn't let his name go on the title page. Said it would ruin his name as a doctor...

-Very interesting. But what else have you written, mainly?

-So far as print is concerned, mostly pamphlets for the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland. I am sure you know a stand inside the door of any church, on marriage, the sacrament of penance, humility, the dangers of alcohol...

-Yes. But *Ulysses*?...

-I don't want to talk about that exploit. I took the idea to be a sort of practical joke but didn't know enough about it might seriously injure my name. It began with an American lady in Paris by the name of Sylvia Beach. I know it's a horrible phrase, but the truth is that she fell in love with me. Fancy that!

- How did Miss Beach express her love for you ?...

-Ah-ha! Who is Sylvia? She swore to me that she'd make me famous... But her plot was to have this thing named *Ulysses* concocted, secretly circulated and have the authorship ascribed to me. Of course at first I didn't take the mad scheme seriously.

- But how did the thing progress?

-I was shown bits of it in typescript. Artificial and laborious stuff, I thought. I just couldn't take much interest in it, even as a joke by amateurs...Of course it wasn't Sylvia Beach who showed me those extracts.

-Who was it?

-Various low, dirty-minded ruffians who had been paid to put this material together. Muck-rakers, obscene poets, carnal pimps, sodomous sycophants, pedlars of the coloured lusts of fallen humanity...

-I paid very little attention to it until one day I was given a piece from it about some woman in bed thinking the dirtiest thoughts...Pornography and filth and literary vomit, enough to make even a blackguard of a Dublin cabman blush. I blessed myself and put the thing in the fire.

-Well was the complete *Ulysses*, do you think, ever published?

-I certainly hope not.

-Mr Joyce, he said solemnly, I can tell you that you have been out of touch with things for a long time. The book *Ulysses* was published in Paris in 1922, with your name. And it was considered a great book...(*DA*, 191-194)

From this fragment it is clear that the Joyce O'Brien made into a character had to be a grotesque image, he wanted to take a revenge on him and depicts Joyce as a deranged artist who has turned into a bigoted, pious humbug, and finally admits having written and published *Dubliners*, but not *Ulysses*. He is the writer of Catholic leaflets and wants to become a Jesuit.

I am a man who is much misunderstood – I will say maligned, traduced, libelled and slandered. From what I've heard, certain ignorant men in America have made a laugh of me. Even my poor father wasn't safe. A fellow named Gorman wrote that 'he always wore a monocle in one eye.' (*DA*, 149)

Even though O'Brien's treatment of Joyce was ludicrous when he subverted Joyce's affirmed agnosticism, denying his authorship of the works which gained him international repute, O'Brien's vitriolic depiction is not at all convincing. Although his criticism is redolent of Niall Montgomery's and his friends' anti-Joyceanity, O'Brien gives his balanced and objective opinion of Joyce. Through Mick's voice we hear O'Brien's critical point of view: "Dexterity, resource in handling language, precision, subtlety in conveying the image of Dublin and her people, accuracy in authentic speech, humour", these are the qualities O'Brien endlessly celebrated in Joyce's work. When Mick finally gives him up to the Institution Joyce had fled from in terror, the Jesuits, and makes a fool of him when he is finally offered to darn their underclothes, he feels regretful. "It was an inexpressible relief to find himself again in the street. Though feelings were confused and there was a stale sense of guilt. Had he cynically made a fool of Joyce?" (*DA*, 214)

Unlike the other intellectuals and his friends who had had "physical contact" with Joyce, (Beckett, Niall Sheridan, Niall Montgomery), O'Brien did not. But he endlessly continued to meet him on his pages. He once said "the man himself –whom I once met" (*CL*, 7 July 1958, p. 6) he even passed off as true a non-existent correspondence with Joyce:

In regard to letters from Joyce, he asked me some years ago to make some confidential enquiries on business and related matters. Apart from the fact that the letters are of no literary interest whatever, I don't think it would be proper to exhibit them publicly. Yours sincerely,
Brian O'Nolan.⁴⁴¹

He had lots of different encounters with him, literary encounters, pleasant and creative, delightfully bordering on genius-like madness, frustrating. In the end in the figments of his imagination O'Brien was profoundly angry, but humane.

Like Stephen, he had once believed that he could: "go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience

⁴⁴¹ From a letter to Ewan Phillips, Anthony Cronin, op. cit., p. 191.

of [his] race”, but then he had realised these words meant nothing as he stated in 1954, in J-Day:

My own first contact with the man in a literary collision was a quotation fired at me. This: “ I go to encounter [...] Many a time had I read that piece with admiration. In recent years I have asked a few wise men what the words mean. They mean nothing (CL, 16 June 1954)

He no longer believed he could write something with Joyce or outdo him. In the attempt to remove Joyce from his literary world, O’Brien had also incorporated Joyce into his fiction; like an old *file* entrapping his enemy in his incantatory, cursing words. At this stage in his career as a writer he no longer thought he could mould the uncreated conscience of his race. He had made an attempt and had left a permanent trace.

4. Conclusion

With the present thesis I have studied the sources of the parodies which constitute the intertextual textures of *ASTB*. *ASTB* finally shows a double intertextual register. It demonstrates that it was originally intended as an comprehensive work both drawing on early and middle-Irish texts and Joyce's texts. With this challenging mirroring of Irish cultural background O'Brien can no longer only be considered as a comic writer, "the true comic writer", but rather, a comic critic. His writing was far more critical of traditional Irish literary culture and sociocultural reality than that of an entire generation. His critical insight in giving *Buile Suibhne* an outstanding position among the celebrated Irish texts of the past for example, predates subsequent scholars and poets. *ASTB* is itself, in the attempt to recreate, like *Ulysses*, the book of books, the book-world, O'Brien's Irish Summa, which also calls into question Joyce as the Irish literary myth, a milestone of the twentieth century. Such a project is doomed from the very beginning. O'Brien could not plagiarise, pastiche, parody Irish myths and get under the skin of Joyce without being affected by the whole process. Bit and pieces of the works he had plundered remained attached to him, and finally risked emptying him of part of his self.

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