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*Brno studies in English*. 2021, vol. 47, iss. 2, pp. 153-166

ISSN 0524-6881 (print); ISSN 1805-0867 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2021-2-11>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/144882>

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Access Date: 30. 11. 2024

Version: 20220831

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# INTRODUCING FLANN O'BRIEN: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PARATEXTS OF TRANSLATIONS TO CZECH AND POLISH

*Brno Studies in English*  
Volume 47, No. 2, 2021

ISSN 0524-6881 | e-ISSN 1805-0867  
<https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2021-2-11>

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Brian O'Nolan has not become a widely known author in Poland and the Czech Republic. He nevertheless has some presence in the two countries, mainly under his most popular pen name, Flann O'Brien. The article studies the strategies of presenting the writer and the context of his work in the paratexts of translations to Polish and Czech. It concentrates on two recurring themes: one is the connection to James Joyce and other major literary figures, the other—the Irish-language. The former predominates in the Polish reception, while the latter is characteristic to Czech paratexts. Together with the selection of texts to be translated, this forms a different narrative of who Brian O'Nolan was in the two target cultures and opens more space for recognition of his other literary personas in the Czech context.

## **Key words**

*Flann O'Brien; Myles na gCopaleen; Brian O'Nolan; translation; paratexts*

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Brian O'Nolan's robust creativity in inventing literary personas and the twisted trajectories of his artistic career constitute a story that is potentially very interesting to new readers. It is not, however, easy to squeeze in within a blurb or a brief afterword. His engagement of Irish themes in some of his work and his bilingualism may add to the difficulty—if the work is presented in translation, the target reader might not be aware of the relevant contexts, including the linguistic situation of Ireland. This article surveys how the writer and his work are presented in the paratexts of the Polish and Czech translations, the majority of which are attributed to his most famous pen name—Flann O'Brien, to draw a comparison between different strategies of selecting relevant aspects of his career and its cultural background to be included in the materials provided for the readers.

The primary objects of the study are blurbs on the book covers, afterwords, and biographical sketches in books and journals that accompany the translated texts. Additionally, selected reviews and entries in surveys and reference works on literatures in English language were analysed for more context on the reception of Flann O'Brien in the two target cultures. In order to trace the translations and other relevant material, the following sources were consulted: for the Polish part—*Polska Bibliografia Literacka* in its electronic and paper form (the latter

covering the years 1944–1988), for the Czech texts—the bibliography of Flann O’Brien’s Czech translations compiled by Ondřej Pilný and published in the second edition of his translation of *The Third Policeman* in 2014, Daniel Samek’s *Czech–Irish Cultural Relations 1950–2000*, and the journal and magazine content database ANL *Výběr článků v českých novinách, časopisech a sbornících*. As is often the case with work on O’Brien, the bibliography compiled by The International Flann O’Brien Society was a good place to start.

Two themes became central in the process—the connection to James Joyce and other major literary figures on the one hand, and the Irish language on the other. James Joyce’s influence on O’Brien’s writing and other affinities between the two authors are a much exploited theme in many introductions to O’Brien worldwide. It is as popular as it is problematic: O’Brien was irritated by the comparisons made throughout his career. This literary connection serves as a bridge to discussing various features of his work, most often its experimental character, humour (often discussed not so much with connection to Joyce but through Joyce’s words, i.e. through quoting Joyce calling O’Brien “a real writer, with the true comic spirit” on the covers of O’Brien’s works) but also the various aspects of the two authors’ Irishness. For O’Brien his Irishness is also often discussed through his bilingualism and his works written in Irish—his columns and his Irish-language novel *An Béal Bocht*.

O’Nolan’s short story *The Martyr’s Crown* was first published in Czech in 1965, the year before the author’s death on April 1, 1966. The vast majority of the translations to Czech and Polish, however, come out not merely after the author died, but quite a significant time after it. His novels do not appear until the mid-1990s, with only a couple of publications preceding them. The biographical notes and other paratextual presentations of the author thus mainly take a retrospective view, most often marked by at least 30 years of distance.

Anne Clissmann published the first book-length study on O’Brien in 1975. In the late 1980s, two O’Brien biographies appeared (by Peter Costello and Peter van de Kamp, and Anthony Cronin), and from the early 1990s critical interest in him grew with numerous articles and several monographs published in book form since then. His works have been published in several editions and with them came informative texts on the blurbs, reviews, essays, etc. The authors of Czech and Polish paratexts have for the most part entered an already fairly well established tradition of introducing O’Brien to the readers with certain themes “globalised” for their reception.

When Flann O’Brien was first introduced to Czech readers in 1965, it was under his real name, Brian O’Nolan, with a short story translated by Aloys Skoumal. The story appeared in an anthology of Irish short stories *Ni králi, ni císaři (Neither King Nor Kaiser)* edited by Skoumal. The collection was published in a military publishing house and, in a move that is not unfamiliar in the history of publishing Western writers in the countries of the Soviet bloc in the first decades after World War II, was advertised to the reader as presenting the revolutionary (and anti-imperialist) struggle of the Irish. Skoumal in his afterword skilfully manoeuvred between what complied with the official ideologies of the time (and was thus probably needed to have the book published at all) and his own agenda which

was presenting Irish writing to Czech readers supplemented with background information on Irish history that helped them to make sense of the stories included in the collection.

Before the whole collection was published, the story came out in a weekly magazine *Kulturní tvorba*. In a short note provided with the text, the upcoming anthology is advertised. It is revealed to the readers that the collection celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising. Only the last sentence is devoted to introducing the author himself. He is defined as a Dublin humourist, both of his most famous pseudonyms (Flann O'Brien and Myles na gCopaleen) are introduced and a note is made of his bilingualism. No titles of his works are provided. The note published in the book adds information about his place of birth, education, and his non-literary career as a civil servant and a journalist but does not offer much more detail on his literary works. Again, no titles are provided.

The somewhat peculiar setting of revolutionary writing serves as a reminder that the constellation of factors forming the target literature systems might not have been in favour of translating O'Brien's works in the early days of his career or even the later days of his growing popularity. However, as O'Brien's fame came delayed, with most publications in book form appearing shortly before and after his death in 1966, politics alone are not to be blamed for his late arrival on the Czech and Polish literary scene. Bohuslav Mánek notes that the mid-1960s thaw in Czechoslovakia "made it possible to introduce or re-introduce foreign modernist writing, initially under the pretext that the ideological opponents should be studied so that they might be defeated" (Mánek 193). This meant that Joyce, to whom O'Brien was so often linked, was slowly making a comeback in the 1960s, the pre-war translations of his major works having initially been published in Czech translations in the 1930s. The new 1976 translation of *Ulysses* by Aloys Skoumal was, in Mánek's words, "a great event in the literary world" despite its limited availability to the general public (Mánek 194–195). In Poland, post-war interest in Joyce and Joycean authors arrived even earlier with the late 1950s being, as Jolanta Wawrzycka notes, "pivotal years in the reception of Joyce's work in Poland" (Wawrzycka 223). The late 1960s publication of *Ulysses* translation arguably became an even greater event than it later did in 1970s Czechoslovakia with many re-editions (and a greater availability to the general public) shortly following.

In 1973 Martin Hilský translated and commented on fragments of *At Swim-Two-Birds* in a major Czech literary journal devoted to foreign literatures *Světová literatura*. On the contents page the text is presented as a review with examples but it largely consists of O'Brien's narrative with embedded summaries of missing parts and other commentary that enables the readers to form an idea about the novel. Given the structure of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, in which plot summaries and explanations punctuate the narrative, Hilský's notes tie in with O'Brien's text in a manner not unfamiliar to that employed by the original author himself.

A bio note on the author is provided with the text. O'Brien is said to be following the tradition of Lawrence Sterne with no other authors mentioned. *At Swim-Two-Birds* is most often read and presented through references to Joyce, thus the lack of them may appear striking. However, in the context of the target culture it is understandable. Despite Joyce's major works appearing in Czech translations

fairly early in the 1930s, the publication of his works was largely terminated by World War II. The post-war ideas of progressiveness were of a somewhat different nature than those that enabled the 1930s Czech versions of Joyce and thus the 1973 readers of O'Brien had a limited access to Joyce's most iconic works. Sterne, on the other hand, was available, in Aloys Skoumal's translation published in 1963 and again in 1971. Arguably this serves as a reminder that the constellation of relevant translated works available in the target culture has an impact on how a new translation is contextualised. In the context of my comparison between the Polish and Czech receptions of Flann O'Brien, this later becomes even more important as the first O'Brien's novel to appear in full in Czech is the originally Irish-language *An Béal Bocht*, while in Poland the experimental *At Swim-Two-Birds*, widely considered to be Joycean, appears together with *The Third Policeman* in 1996.

A short fragment of the beginning of *At Swim-Two-Birds* in Jarosław Anders's translation was published in 1976 in a major Polish literary journal devoted to foreign literatures, *Literatura na Świecie*. The Poles at that time had already had their post-war literary great event with *Ulysses*. Maciej Słomczyński's translation came out in 1969 and caused quite a stir with several later editions arriving within a relatively short time. In this context, making a connection to Joyce while introducing O'Brien was not only reasonable but desirable as Joyce was almost certain to attract the readers' attention.

The *LnŚ* issue in question presented mostly Irish and African literature. The Irish part contained a varied selection of samples of Irish writers' work (representing prose, drama, and poetry) as well as two essays on Irish literature. Most of the writers were presented in short bio notes that immediately followed the translation of their work. Interestingly, while the command of Irish is mentioned for Frank O'Connor, whose *Guests of the Nation* directly precede *At Swim-Two-Birds* in the journal, it is not for O'Brien.<sup>1</sup> The very brief note concentrates on stressing the importance of *At Swim-Two-Birds* within O'Brien's canon, naming it a work that combines Joyce's technique with Irish mythology. His other works listed are *The Hard Life*, *The Dalkey Archive* and *Faustus Kelly*. His real name is given (in its Irish spelling) with no mention of other pseudonyms or his career as a columnist—he is defined as a writer and a playwright.

O'Brien is also mentioned in Wojciech Kalaga's essay printed in that issue. The essay deals with the old poetic traditions of Irish literature and is thus partly concerned with Irish language writing. However, O'Brien is not mentioned in it for being an Irish-language speaker/writer but as an example of an author who might be recognised as being Irish by Polish readers (alongside Yeats, Synge, O'Casey, Behan, and Joyce) despite the general tendency to view Irish writers as English writers (Kalaga 171). This suggests a certain visibility of O'Brien in Poland despite the lack of existing translations, but it was probably very limited, most likely to academic circles.

As for the next presentation of O'Brien for the Polish readers, half of the 1984 May issue of *Literatura na Świecie* is devoted to him (and so appears to be its cover with a picture of a man riding a bicycle, a theme central to *The Third Policeman*). It presents large sections of the mentioned novel (in Andrzej Grabowski's trans-

lation), Lorna Sage's essay on Flann O'Brien (which discusses both the Irish-language *An Béal Bocht* and connections to Joyce in some detail), a selection of Myles na gCopaleen's columns (in Grażyna Cendrowska's translation), and O'Brien's essay on Joyce, *A Bash in the Tunnel* (in Robert Ginalski's translation). The essay is followed by Nancy Caldwell Sorel's essay on Joyce and T.S. Eliot and a translation of Joyce's satiric poem [*Rouen is the rainiest place getting*]. The connection to Joyce is thus further stressed, although Myles na gCopaleen and the Irish language are also given some attention.

The full translation of *The Third Policeman* (in Andrzej Grabowski and Małgorzata Grabowska's translation) was not published until the mid-1990s. 1996 saw the publication of two O'Brien novels in Polish translation: *The Third Policeman* and *At Swim-Two-Birds*.<sup>2</sup> Joyce features in the blurbs on the back of both covers. *The Third Policeman* advertises O'Brien as a writer "warmly recommended by James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and Grahame Green" who recognised in him "one of the greatest talent of our century". A quote from the *Observer* is provided, stating that "even Joyce", the author of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, can envy O'Brien. With these titles printed in bold font, they are more than likely to catch the reader's eye. Other book titles, also printed in bold, are *Alice in Wonderland*, to which *The Third Policeman* is also likened, and the title of *The Third Policeman* itself. Other than the literary references, the blurb provides O'Brien's real name, the information that Flann O'Brien was one of his many pseudonyms (without naming any), that he wrote five novels (without naming them) and numerous columns (naming *The Irish Times* as his workplace), and the year and place of his birth. For the latter only "Strabane, County Tyrone" is provided without mentioning the country. For those not familiar with Irish geography, the newspaper's title, *The Irish Times*, may be the only hint that O'Brien was an Irish writer as he is not referred to as such in the blurb. After introducing the author, the blurb also briefly introduces the novel itself as a crime fiction/thriller and a comic story full of absurd humour, the latter being the reason Lewis Carroll's work is referenced. No further informative texts in form of an introduction or an afterword to the translation are provided alongside the text proper.

The cover of the Polish translation of *At Swim-Two-Birds* advertises it as "foremost polemics with the works and ideas of James Joyce". Unlike *The Third Policeman*, this book is supplied with an extensive afterword written by its translator Krzysztof Fordoński. The first paragraph informs the reader that Flann O'Brien is a pseudonym of Brian Ó Nualláin, a name Fordoński uses once more, though he otherwise consistently refers to the writer in question as Flann O'Brien. Already in the second paragraph Joyce is mentioned (together with Grahame Greene and William Saroyan) as an early enthusiast of the novel and is then referred to a couple of more times as the text proceeds. It is through Joyce's words (as reported by Niall Sheridan) that O'Brien is introduced as a comic writer with the information that Joyce believed *Ulysses* was taken too seriously by the critics, which arguably has the potential to reassure readers somewhat intimidated by the notion of the "polemics with Joyce". In the last paragraph Fordoński argues that a thorough reading of *At Swim-Two-Birds* requires rereading it several times and going back to Joyce might prove necessary as well. Despite presenting O'Brien as a writer with

much humour and the novel as a joke on overt modernist ambitions, Fordoński thus warns the reader that it may not be an undemanding type of entertainment. The book is published in a series called “Masters of literature” which suggests aiming at a more ambitious reader who may seek challenges such as this.

A discussion of the novel’s main themes in the afterword, which explains some of the specifically Irish context, certainly helps to navigate the reader through the book. The afterword provides some background information on the elements of Irish mythology presented in the novel, such as Finn Mac Cool and king Suibhne<sup>3</sup> and visually communicates Irishness through the use of green on the cover. However, despite the fairly extensive introduction of O’Brien and his career in the afterword, the only mention of his command of Irish is through the information that he published *An Béal Bocht* in that language in 1941.

After the translations of O’Brien’s novels were published in Polish in 1996, in 1997 *An Béal Bocht*, or to be precise its English translation *The Poor Mouth*, became the first novel by O’Nolan to appear in Czech. It naturally invited a discussion of the author’s command of Irish and his use of humour but it did not necessarily call for references to Joyce. And indeed, none are made in the book. Joseph Brooker notes that “*The Poor Mouth* looks, from a distance, simpler than O’Nolan’s earlier novels” and goes on to argue that “the simplicity is misleading” (Brooker 63). What this simplicity means for O’Brien’s arrival on the Czech literary scene, however, is that his satirical talents can be pushed to the forefront without the burden of having to live up to expectations set by referencing Joyce. The readers are invited to enjoy the book on their own terms rather than being presented with a quest to discover all of its hidden meanings as in the last paragraph of Fordoński’s afterword.

The biographical note on the sleeve begins by introducing O’Brien as a novelist, columnist, playwright, and civil servant, mentioning not only his real name and Myles na gCopaleen but also his less known pseudonym George Knowall. It informs the reader that the book presented to them was originally written in Irish (but not that it was published under the name of Myles na gCopaleen). Of O’Brien’s other works, it concentrates on *At Swim-Two-Birds* and with reference to both of the novels O’Brien’s parodic skills are stressed. The words “Irish” and “Gaelic” feature prominently in the text with each of its five sentences containing at least one instance reaching a very high density in the last sentence which describes the themes of *The Poor Mouth*. A certain redundancy in stressing the Irishness of each element named corresponds to the novel’s parody of the über-Irishness of the Gaeilgeoirí.

The short afterword to the novel was written by Ondřej Pilný (who later translated and wrote a more substantial afterword to *The Third Policeman*). In it, Pilný briefly discusses the sources O’Brien parodies in *The Poor Mouth* but also the language of the original source text, which he concludes with a discussion of the current state of the Irish language.

Before *The Poor Mouth* was published in book form, individual chapters appeared in the journal *Souvislosti* with biographical notes by *The Poor Mouth*’s translator, Jan Čáp. The first note, which appeared in 1993, is very short and provides very basic overview of who the author was and what the translator found most

relevant to introducing *The Poor Mouth*. The second one, published with another translated chapter in a 1997 issue, is a longer essay (longer than Pilný's afterword in the book) which gives a more general overview of O'Brien's career. In this text Čáp addresses both the Irish language (its use by O'Brien as well as its modern-day status) and affinities to Joyce but also to a figure relevant from the target culture's point of view—Jaroslav Hašek.<sup>4</sup>

When *The Third Policeman* is published in Czech in 1999 in Pilný's translation, the blurb on the dust sleeve and the afterword take up the themes already discussed in the texts by Čáp and Pilný himself and develop them further. The afterword, after a brief introduction of the novel and its author, begins with the subject of the Irish language and Myles na gCopaleen's career, on which it dwells for a couple of pages. *An Béal Bocht* is discussed in the process, with a reference to the existing Czech translation and with a large portion of the information included in its afterword repeated. After the discussion of *An Béal Bocht*, *At Swim-Two-Birds* is introduced as well and to a similar extent.<sup>5</sup>

The paragraph on *At Swim-Two-Birds* ends with the information that it was inspired by Joyce's work and the next paragraph deals with O'Brien's relationship to Joyce. It addresses the problem of O'Brien getting weary of the critics' constant comparisons of his work to Joyce's and informs the readers that partly as a result of that weariness Joyce was made a character in O'Brien's late novel *The Dalkey Archive*. The paragraph itself is rather short and Joyce is not further mentioned until the final paragraph of the afterword in which Pilný argues that although O'Brien's novelistic career might have started in a Joycean fashion, his later work, including *The Third Policeman*, bears more similarities to Beckett's writing, a point Pilný makes at the beginning of his discussion of the novel he translated. However, the affinity to Beckett is not explored in the text in the manner affinities to Joyce were handled in the way O'Brien so despised. It is not an attempt to merely change a tag on O'Brien from Joycean to Beckettian but an invitation for the readers to consider this particular connection while also stressing O'Brien's originality and giving them much other material to think about.

The afterword was reprised in the second edition of the novel in 2014 with an additional text by Pilný which outlines the post 1990s reception of O'Brien, including the developments in criticism, film adaptations, the activities of the International Flann O'Brien Society, and a bibliography of available Czech translations. 2014 also sees the Czech translation of *At Swim-Two-Birds* published. The novel was translated by Martin Pokorný and published by Rubato, a small publishing house specialising in avant-garde, experimental literature. Although the novel uses much material with which the Czech readers might be unfamiliar (and thus arguably needs an afterword or an introduction more than *The Third Policeman*), the readers are not offered anything other than a blurb on the back of the cover. It begins by stating that the novel is among the most important prose writings of the 20th century and that O'Brien is generally considered to be the most important Irish writer after James Joyce and Samuel Beckett (without making it clear whether "after" refers to time or hierarchy). This grand opening is then followed by quoting favourable opinions on O'Brien by Graham Green, J.L. Borges and James Joyce. The third and final sentence of the first paragraph addresses the



novel itself, noting its comic, satirical and parodic character while the second paragraph outlines O'Brien's literary career, naming *The Poor Mouth*, *The Third Policeman*, and his column as his works with no mention of his two other novels, dramas, and short stories. The information about existing Czech translations is added in brackets but without the mention of the second edition of *The Third Policeman*. Likewise Pilný does not mention the translation of *At Swim-Two-Birds* which suggests there might have been no awareness between the two teams about the other one's project.

The minimalist front cover surprisingly contains a Gaelic element. The word "Sláinte!" (literally meaning "health" and widely used as a drinking toast in Ireland) is printed in a circle made of the translated text of the poem found within a book, [*A pint of plain is your only man*]. "Sláinte" itself does not appear anywhere in the novel but it is likely to be known to at least some readers with an interest in Irish culture. While this hardly constitutes strong evidence that the Irish-language was of particular importance to the those behind the Czech translation of the novel, it is worth noting that combining interest in O'Brien's more experimental writing and him as an Irish-language author has some tradition in Czech context. Between the publication of fragments of *At Swim-Two-Birds* in Martin Hilský's translation in 1973 and the full novel translated by Martin Pokorný in 2014, Štěpán Kosík (signed as jj) published an essay on Flann O'Brien in a samizdat journal *Kritický sborník*. Before writing on O'Brien in 1989, he had already published a few articles on Joyce in the same journal. In the late 1980s he attended Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies' summer school of Celtic studies and taught himself some old Irish (Samek 23). His interest in O'Brien was thus fuelled by both his admiration for the Joycean style of writing and the Celtic elements included in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. In his general introduction of O'Brien he also mentions the Myles na gCopaleen pseudonym and the author's career as a columnist. While introducing O'Brien as a novelist he names three of his works: *At Swim-Two-Birds*, *The Third Policeman*, and *An Béal Bocht*, calling the last of these undisputedly the best novel ever written in Irish. The article thus confirms that the Irish language and Irish-language writing were of interest to at least a part of the Czech readership.

For the second edition of *The Third Policeman* in Poland, which came out in 2001, the content of the paratexts have changed only slightly. Apart from the blurb on the cover, the second edition introduces the author in a biographical note on the first page (in accordance with the format of the series in which it was published) and the material found in the first edition's blurb is distributed between the two texts with little new information added. Again only "Strabane, County Tyrone" is provided as his birthplace and no references to O'Brien's Irishness are made other than the title of the newspaper he wrote for. The blurb concentrates on the novel this time with references to Joyce, Beckett, and Greene moved to the biographical note in the book. However, quotes from Joyce and Anthony Burgess (who was not referred to in the first edition) praising O'Brien have been printed on the cover. The blurb thus subscribes to the strategy of validating O'Brien's status as a major writer through references to other major figures with more recognition within the target culture, a strategy already present in the pa-

ratexts of the Polish translation and which characterises the Czech edition of *At Swim-Two-Birds*.

The third edition of *The Third Policeman* in Poland came as a part of a series presenting Flann O'Brien's works which was meant to celebrate the centenary of his birth. It was preceded by the publication of *The Hard Life* in 2007 (translated by Krzysztof Puławski) and *The Dalkey Archive* in 2008 (translated by Hanna Pustuła), which, as the editor of those books Krzysztof Fordoński revealed, were to be followed by *At Swim-Two-Birds* and a selection of columns with the intent to "put all the crucial works of O'Nolan back on the market by 2011" (Fordoński 80). The plans have sadly not come to a fruition with only the re-edition of *The Third Policeman* joining the two new translations in 2012. In terms of bringing new information to the readers with the books themselves, the series did not have much to offer. There were no introductions or afterwords in the novels, only blurbs on the cover. They briefly presented O'Brien as one of the most famous Irish authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with no references to other prominent authors and provided a short overview of the novels. Joyce is thus only mentioned as a character in *The Dalkey Archive* with no background information on why this might be significant for O'Brien. The novels' arrival, however, meant that O'Brien could be further introduced in reviews published both in literary journals and mainstream media.

One of the reviewers who took the opportunity to discuss more than the reviewed novel was Jerzy Jarniewicz, an established translator and literary critic and one of the editors of *Literatura na świecie*. His informed review of *The Hard Life* in one of Poland's leading newspapers, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, provides an overview of O'Brien's life and career and his review of *The Dalkey Archive* in *Literatura na świecie* (2009) ends with him expressing a wish that *The Poor Mouth* and a selection of columns and shorter prose were also made available to the Polish reader.

In 1997 Jarniewicz himself translated and published a fragment of *The Dalkey Archive* in *Literatura na świecie* and he is a fine example of a phenomenon that characterises the reception of Flann O'Brien in both Poland and the Czech Republic. Although the Irish author hardly reached mass recognition and popularity in either of the two countries, in both he has attracted the attention of people willing to make an extra effort to introduce him to other readers, such as his translators Jan Čáp, Ondřej Pilný, or Krzysztof Fordoński. All offer much more than merely professional competence when dealing with O'Brien, displaying genuine enthusiasm for his work in their writing on him. One signal of the special treatment O'Brien receives can be found in the biographical note in the issue of *Literatura na świecie* which contains Jarniewicz's translation of *The Dalkey Archive*. The issue is an Irish one, almost exclusively devoted to presenting Irish authors and essays on Irish literature (with a special focus on Northern Ireland). The biographical notes on all of the authors are all gathered together at the end of the volume and almost all follow the same format: they begin with the name, the year of birth and specify the field of the author's work with the adjective Irish preceding it (e.g. Patrick McCabe (1955) – Irish novelist, Derek Mahon (1941) – Irish poet). Flann O'Brien, on the other hand, is not introduced as merely an "Irish novelist" but as "one of the most interesting Irish novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." Arguably though, the effort invested into convincing the readers of

O'Brien's importance in this case also proves they could not be safely expected to be aware of it.

The Czech reception has its own twist on O'Brien, presenting him not only as interesting and important, but also as relatable and relevant in the Czech context. The second presentation of some of O'Brien's columns in Ondřej Pilný's translation quite literally added a new layer to the text. While the first publication in *Literární noviny* in 2003 only presented the translated text with an introductory note on the author, in *A2* magazine in 2010 some of the literary references from the source text relevant to the Irish context were crossed out and replaced with Czech names and titles in a hand-written font. This invites the readers to consider O'Brien as someone culturally close to them. A similar strategy, though in a less innovative form, was also used for explaining literary sources for *The Poor Mouth* which were linked by Pilný in the afterword to a Czech novel portraying a rural past, Božena Němcová's *Babička*.

In both countries, the selection of columns were published using two pseudonyms—Myles na gCopaleen (which was originally used by O'Nolan for the columns) and Flann O'Brien (under which they were later published in book form). *The Poor Mouth*, which was published originally as *An Béal Bocht* also under the name Myles na gCopaleen and only attributed to Flann O'Brien when the English translation came out after O'Nolan's death, is also presented with two names in the journal *Fa-Art*, which published a fragment of the novel in Polish translation in 1993 (produced from the Hungarian version by Wiesława Rusin). In Czech, the novel was entirely Flann O'Brien's. Although both the blurb on the sleeve and the afterword name other pseudonyms, neither of these texts make a connection between Myles na gCopaleen and *The Poor Mouth*. Despite that, the pseudonym found its way to being used in the Czech context to a much greater extent than in Poland. While the catalogue of the National Library in Poland returns very few results for Myles na gCopaleen (and all are works on O'Nolan rather than by him), the National Library of the Czech Republic largely ignores his real name and instead offers quite a few results for Myles na gCopaleen.

It is also in the Czech context where more diversity in O'Nolan's names is preserved. The 2014 re-edition of *Ni králi, ni císaři* collection keeps the name as Brian O'Nolan despite the fact that since the 1960s the author it refers to has gained some profile in the Czech Republic as Flann O'Brien. In 2016 an Irish-language short story *Aistear Pheadair Dhuibh* was published in Martin Světlík's translation in a collection of Irish-language short stories edited by Radvan Markus, *Muž, který vybuchl*. As was in the case of Skoumal's collection, the original name under which it was published was kept in translation, in this case as Brian Ó Nualláin. Both of the collections concentrate on presenting Irish writing in general rather than individual authors (although both provide notes on them) and thus changing the name to connect the text to a more recognisable persona appears to be an unnecessary move.

On a more pragmatic ground, neither of these collections is a big project made with a mass reader in mind where it might matter whether one name is more famous than the other. Yet a similar effect can be observed for O'Nolan's other works published in Czech. The interest in the broader context of Irish culture,

and more specifically in the linguistic situation of Ireland, invites a discussion of Myles na gCopaleen and works produced under that pseudonym in the Czech paratexts to a much greater extent than it does in the Polish paratexts, which tend to be oriented towards presenting O'Brien as a singular figure, with other singular figures, such as Joyce, as the most relevant context. The logic of a great writer appears to call for a more unified persona than the playful conglomerate of authors produced by O'Nolan and it leaves less space to discuss that part of his corpus which does not so easily fit the idea of experimental modernist fiction.

In that context it is also worth noting that the status of Flann O'Brien as an experimental author was made official relatively early in Poland in a survey of the English novel in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Bronisława Bałutowa. The first edition of the book was published in 1983 and the introduction informed the readers that an attempt has been made to select only the most important novelists of the period and that the size of the space allotted to them in the book reflects their importance. The four pages devoted to O'Brien, primarily as the author of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, can be seen as a good result in the 270 pages of the book's text proper. Bałutowa mentions his career as a columnist and all of O'Brien's other novels together with the information that *An Béal Bocht* was written in Irish but leaves no doubt as to which one of them should be considered his most important work.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the discussion of that one novel, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, is to a large extent organized through references to James Joyce.

There appears to be a connection between the broader context of the two target cultures and the way Flann O'Brien is represented in them. The significance of Maciej Słomczyński's translation of *Ulysses* and the position it granted to Joyce within the landscape of the Polish literary scene seems to have weighed upon the Joyce-oriented discussion of O'Brien. Similarly, an interest in all things Celtic, prominently expressed by the Czech Celtomania of the 1990s, arguably helped to shape the presentation of O'Brien in the Czech Republic. Despite the realities of a globalising world and some macro-level cultural proximities between the two target cultures (mainly the restrictions on access to Western literature before 1989 and the publishing boom after they were lifted), the two cultures appear to have managed to produce differing narratives about Flann O'Brien and his literary career. Some aspects, on the other hand, were imported from the source culture. Sascha Morrell notes that Joyce's comment on the "real writer, with the true comic spirit" has appeared on reprints of *At Swim-Two-Birds* and that it "works as a product endorsement from an established name in the business" (Morrell 149). The same tactics have been used for referencing other writers, whether to inform the reader of their admiration for O'Brien or to compare him to them. It is nevertheless clear from the paratexts that those broader factors have operated through individuals who generously invested their time and talents to promoting an author who, despite their efforts to popularise him, has not become commercially successful. Their personal interests and agendas can often be traced in their introductions and may open the path for the readers to consider the topics proposed. A certain anecdotal evidence to argue for the importance of such framings offers itself in a short review of *The Dalkey Archive* published in 2010 on a Polish literary blog *Całkiem subiektywne recenzje książek*. The author

(signed as m.k.e.) offers some facts on O'Brien and even embeds links to articles on Wikipedia about O'Brien, *An Béal Bocht*, James Joyce, and Skerries (a resort town, where Joyce is found by the protagonist of *The Dalkey Archive*). His mention of *An Béal Bocht* as the single novel published by O'Brien in his native language seems to suggest that writing one novel in Irish might be a disappointing result, which in turn may suggest little awareness of the linguistic context so carefully presented to Czech readers in Ondřej Pilný's afterwords and Jan Čáp's essay in *Souvislosti*. We may live in a world that offers readers unprecedented access to information outside of the books they are reading, yet isolated pieces of factual information may fail to produce a wider understanding offered by an informed discussion of relevant topics in afterwords and introductions. Such paratexts thus certainly continue to be of importance to translated texts.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> A slightly longer note on Brendan Behan, also presented in Jarosław Anders's translation, similarly does not mention his command of Irish, suggesting that mentioning bilingualism for O'Connor did not represent a deeper interest in the subject among the editors.
- <sup>2</sup> They were preceded by some more publications in journals and magazines. A popular weekly magazine *Przekrój* published two short stories: *John Duffy's Brother* in 1995 and *The Martyr's Crown* in 1996, both in Wojciech Falarski's translation and neither accompanied by any information on the author. Fragments of *The Poor Mouth*, which has never been translated to Polish in full, appeared in *Fa-Art* journal in 1993, and fragments of *At Swim-Two-Birds* were presented in *Odra* journal in 1996.
- <sup>3</sup> Despite having "Sweeny" in the title of the translated novel (following O'Brien's alternative title for the novel, *Sweeny in the Trees*), Fordoński tends to refer to the character as Suibhne rather than Sweeny in the afterword.
- <sup>4</sup> More detailed discussion of the paratexts of *The Poor Mouth* in its book form and in fragments published by *Souvislosti* can be found in Szot (2019).
- <sup>5</sup> This arguably presents a departure from an established critical practice as it respects neither chronology nor an unofficial hierarchy of O'Nolan's work which tends to present *At Swim-Two-Birds* as the more important work. From the target culture's point of view, however, it seems logical as *The Poor Mouth* was already available to the Czech readers while *At Swim-Two-Birds* was not. Also the 1990s in the Czech Republic were a time of a heightened increased interest in anything Celtic, a phenomenon which came to be known as Celtomania.
- <sup>6</sup> The publishers in both Poland and the Czech Republic clearly take a different view, with *The Third Policeman* being the only O'Brien novel to be published more than once. Also in *Slovník spisovatelů* a note on O'Brien by Ondřej Pilný discusses *The Third Policeman* in greatest detail, with the discussions of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, *An Béal Bocht*, and *Cruiskeen Lawn* column being similar in size.

## Acknowledgement of funding

The paper was financially supported by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports under grant IGA\_FF\_2019\_031 (International Academic Competences in Anglo-American Literary Science, Linguistics and Translation Studies).

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