

Flann O'Brien
CONTESTING LEGACIES

EDITED BY
RUBEN BORG, PAUL FAGAN
AND
WERNER HUBER



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Vienna, January 2014

Ruben Borg

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examples of possible points that could be made in a possible conversation on the subject of the place of science in society.³⁵

The fragmented, contradictory and complementary multiple perspectives on science provided by *Cruiskeen Lawn* stimulate dialogue and thought while giving a balanced view of the real attitudes to science circulating in mid-century Ireland. This sceptical dialogic tendency in O'Nolan's work resists the elevation of one interpretation or way of looking at the world to the status of singular truth. The impact of relativity, wave mechanics and quantum physics made the universe a noisy, shifting, uncertain and exciting place. Writers and artists tried to crack the code of the universe as represented by scientists, mathematicians, theologians and historians. In 1928, Wyncham Lewis claimed that artistic experiment, mutually necessitated and inspired by twentieth-century physics, involved 'not only technical and novel combinations, but also the essentially new and particular mind that must underlie and should even precede, the new and particular form, to make it viable'.³⁶ Despite his tenacious conservatism in some matters, O'Nolan's work betrays his possession of a new mind in others, as evidenced by his predilection for multiple interpretations, particularly as the multi-faceted and Janus-faced Myles of limitless experience. Like the White Queen, who in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871) tells Alice that 'sometimes I have believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast',³⁷ Myles was expert at believing six times as many impossible – or possible – things within a single column and thousands more throughout the life of *Cruiskeen Lawn*.

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THE TRIAL OF JAMS O'DONNELL An Béal Bocht and the force of law

Maebh Long

Throughout the course of *An Béal Bocht* (1941) the question 'Phwat is yer nam?' is put to Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa three times. The first time, in which he also learns the answer, *Jams O'Donnell*, occurs as a bloody and violent event of rebirth through renaming (ABB, 25). The second time transpires when the Seandúine wishes to fool an inspector into giving the family money and so Bónapárt, to prove he can speak English, answers the question with the rote response (ABB, 109). The third time heralds the beginning of Bónapárt's twenty-nine-year jail sentence and is accompanied by a firm hold on his arm (ABB, 112). Thus the name 'Jams O'Donnell' is associated with violence, trickery and arrest and yet, by the conclusion of the text, Bónapárt joyfully identifies with the imposed moniker. This essay analyses the ontological implications of 'Jams O'Donnell' and the position of the name and the Irish language within Bónapárt's trial.¹

The prosecution of Bónapárt Ó Cúnasa is undoubtedly unethical: he is tried and convicted in court proceedings conducted in a language that is foreign to him. In *An Béal Bocht* the Irish language is other to the law and its speakers must bow to the decrees of a legal system wholly beyond their understanding. Justice – supposedly outside of language, theoretically wholly translatable and universal – is in this case absolutely anglophile and anglophone. Hence, in this short scene O'Nolan performs the sentiments written in 'The Pathology of Revivalism': Irish is a 'prison of a language'.² For the English speaker there is the law, but for the Irish speaker there is only prison, only the restriction of a language other to justice and right.

Bónapárt's trial calls to mind the 1882 Maamtrasna murders, which saw the brutal killing of John Joyce, his wife Bridget, his mother

Margaret, his daughter Margaret and his son Michael.³ The family were shot and beaten and dogs consumed the flesh from the arm of the dead grandmother. Of the accused and sentenced to death, was one Myles Joyce, a man to whom the trial was as incomprehensible as Bonapart's, as he spoke no English. Joyce spent his trial 'with his head leaning on his arms',⁴ and when the jury returned after six minutes of deliberation and the judge declared him guilty, understood nothing. When the interpreter eventually explained the verdict, Joyce spoke of his innocence in a language that few present understood.⁵ As the *Freeman's Journal* of 20 November 1882 wrote, 'the condemned man, touched on the shoulder by the dark warder, then turned slowly away and with a step, lingering and sorrowful and a heavy sigh, with which there was an indistinct exclamation in Irish [...] he descended to the cells.'⁶

A contemporary account states that while walking to his hanging, Joyce turned to every official of the jail he met [...] and, with all the fiery vehemence of the Celt, declared, in a language which nearly all those who surrounded him were strangers to, that 'he was innocent. He feared not to die. But he felt the indignity of being put to death as a murderer.'⁷

Even with the blindfold over his eyes Joyce continued to proclaim his innocence – in Irish – but his death was treated with no more respect than his trial:

The rope caught in the wretched man's arm and for some seconds it was seen being jerked and tugged in the writhing of his last agony. The grim hangman cast an angry glance into the pit and then, hissing an obscene oath at the struggling victim, sat on the beam and kicked him into eternity.⁸

Prior to Joyce's execution, two men, also due to be hanged, wrote dying confessions proclaiming both their guilt and Joyce's innocence. One of the witnesses publicly confessed to the Archbishop of Tuam that his testimony was false and that Joyce was innocent. Although this testimony was corroborated by a further witness, the authorities refused to reopen the case.⁹ As George Trevelyan, Irish Chief Secretary from 1882, put it, cavalierly equating all involved, 'What earthly motive could we have in hanging one peasant more than another for the murder of another peasant?'¹⁰

What difference indeed, in executing one Jams O'Donnell or another? At issue in both the trial of Myles Joyce and the trial of

Bónapárt Ó Cúinasa is the problem of language and of the proper name. For those of Trevelyan's mentality, whether Bónapárt killed the old man or not becomes irrelevant: (a) Jams O'Donnell killed, so (a) Jams O'Donnell must go to jail. Once (a) Jams O'Donnell is incarcerated, justice has been served. The enactment of a trial is sufficient to ensure that justice is done and thus the *process* of law is privileged. If Kafka's man from the country cannot pass through the open gates to the Law, it is nonetheless his gate, his doorkeeper, all in his name. For Bónapárt there is merely a gate for Jams O'Donnell, a gate for a category rather than a unique individual and neither the doorkeeper, nor the law itself, deign to speak his language. He is not before the law, he is beneath the law; beneath its notice as an individual but nonetheless under its control. His position in relation to the law can only be negative: he can transgress but he cannot be protected.

Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin write of the force or violence behind law. Derrida's 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"' argues that 'in its origin and in its end, in its foundation and its preservation, law is inseparable from violence, immediate or mediate, present or represented'.¹¹ The act of creating or founding a law is always an act of violence, as it immediately alters which actions can and cannot be performed with impunity. Law-making effects a swift change on the legal landscape, a sharp blow that alters and reshapes so as to enable the lawmakers to retain control. Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence' makes a direct attack on the brutality of laws created to preserve and retain state power: 'Lawmaking is power making and, to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence'.¹² Benjamin argues that too often the law is a 'mythic violence' that manifests itself as 'bloody power over mere life for its own sake'.¹³ It is a law-making based on the capriciousness of a reactionary and tyrannical politics desperate to retain power and is exemplified for Benjamin in the gods' punishment of Niobe for her pride in her children. The violent reaction of the gods 'establishes a law far more than it punishes for the infringement of one already existing'.¹⁴ The law Niobe transgressed did not predate her act, but was formed in the act of her transgression. Inasmuch as Niobe did not break public law but tempt fate with private boastfulness, Benjamin argues that modern law and the police wield the same intrusive and inescapable power as fate. Their surveillance tactics make no distinction between the public and the private; all become points of control which further the power of the state.

The law that Bónapárt comes before is not a law working towards just ends but rather a power-making of mythical violence and the force of the law is brought to bear on him. He can no more escape the heavy clasp of the policeman's hand on his arm than he can fate; indeed, as we will see, the law and fate become inseparable. Bónapárt is that against which the law can be enforced, the point against which the law is imposed and therefore shown to operate. The purpose of Bónapárt's trial and conviction is to prove that the law functions: he is within and yet without the law, an object to be punished but never a subject to be protected. In the Greek myth Niobe is punished by being turned to stone; silenced and robbed of the power to protest. In *An Béal Bocht* the Irish-speaking Bónapárt is *a priori* silenced, always already petrified by the violent exclusion/inclusion of the English-language legal system.¹⁷

Occurring under British rule, in the Myles Joyce trial the Irish were the others necessitating an enforceable law; in the Bónapárt trial Irish speakers are that other. Thus the English-speaking Irish re-enact the exclusion and separation to which all were subject under British rule, filling the vacant position of excluded other with those from the Gaelacht. While the Irish language was constitutionally enshrined in 1937 as a symbol of independence and individuality, in practice it was treated as the language of backward peasants and Irish-speakers as anachronistic, troublesome stereotypes or category types rather than individuals.

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), Giorgio Agamben writes on the Greek division between *zoē* and *bios*, whereby *zoē* is simple, natural life, 'the simple fact of living common to all living beings', while *bios* is a particular way of life, 'the form or way of life proper to an individual or group'.¹⁵ The individual must convert *zoē* – life, existence – into the *eu zēn* – the good life or politically qualified life – that is *bios*. *Bios* exists within the political realm, while 'simple natural life is excluded from the *polis* in the strict sense and remains confined – as merely reproductive life – to the sphere of the *oikos*, "home".¹⁶ In Ancient Greek political society natural life was relegated to the domestic: a private space separate from, but still included within, the public *polis* and thus we find the inclusion, through exclusion, of *zoē* and the foundation of Western politics on a complex relation between exclusion and inclusion.

While Aristotle may speak of *zōon politikon*, the political animal, it is in order to stress that the human, whose political and philosophical ability is paramount, is also an animal; or, in Michel Foucault's terms,

that a human being is 'a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence'.¹⁷ While the living body of the subject was traditionally considered private and domestic and as such excluded from the political, within the modern era 'man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question'.¹⁸ In other words, the modern era is the period of the biopolitical, in which control is manifested through the power 'to make live and let die'.¹⁹ Biopower or biopolitics transforms the political body into a biological body and an obsessive focus on the body, birth rates, life expectancies and health becomes a point of domination. Thus *zoē* enters *bios* and one's world is framed by one's physical or biological existence. This contamination of *zoē* and *bios* is referred to by Agamben as 'bare life', as what is created 'is neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself'.²⁰

Agamben equates 'bare life' with *homo sacer* ('the sacred man'), a figure within Roman law who 'may be killed and yet not sacrificed'.²¹ If one kills the sacred man, one is not punished for murder or manslaughter and yet the death will not have been a ritual sacrifice. One may kill without contamination and without committing sacrilege. The *homo sacer* is, therefore, outside both human and divine law, or, more accurately, included within the law as an exclusion, as he is neither executed under the normal functioning of the law nor sacrificed to the gods. The sacred man lives a 'life devoid of value', a 'life unworthy of being lived'.²² His is thus a 'life exposed to death', a 'bare life'.²³ Neither *zoē* nor *bios*, but a blighted and deposed amalgamation of the two, 'bare life' is 'a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man',²⁴ and those who are designated 'bare life' are 'the slave, the barbarian and the foreigner, as figures of an animal in human form' [my emphasis].²⁵

Agamben links 'bare life' to Carl Schmitt's 'state of exception': a period when the normal functioning of law is suspended in a time of emergency. For Agamben, Nazi concentration camps exemplify the 'state of exception', as the inmates there exemplify the 'bare lives' exposed to death. *Homo sacer*, or the 'bare life', is, therefore, a mode of political subjectification by dint of objectification: it is made an object of the cessation of the law in a space where distinctions between law and order, reason and chaos, innocence and guilt become meaningless. Different periods have given us bare life under different names: Jew, Palestinian, gypsy, homosexual, refugee, detainee; those who were

'lacking almost all the rights and expectations that we customarily attribute to human existence and yet were still biologically alive, [who] came to be situated in a limit zone between life and death, inside and outside, in which they were no longer anything' but bare life.²⁶ 'Bare life' is those who are designated anthropomorphous animals; human vermin, whose lack of rights, political place, means of expression, or even a fully formed language 'prove' the legitimacy of the supposedly unconditional rights of 'real' citizens.²⁷

An Béal Bocht portrays the inhabitants of the Gaeltacht as 'bare life' living in a state of exception, as they are viewed by English speakers as humanoid animals. But the purpose the bare life in the Gaeltacht serves is somewhat unusual. The camps run by the Nazis were states of exception as sites of ethnic cleansing, where the 'purity' of the German race could be secured by the removal of 'lesser', 'bare life'. In *An Béal Bocht*, the Gaeltacht is a state of exception inhabited by an inferior people, but an inferior people who prove the racial purity of the Irish not by being removed from it, but by being that purity itself. They are not the excluded impure that prove by comparison the purity of the general populace, but the excluded pure that prove by association the purity of the general populace. They are 'bare life' because they are antiquated, inferior relics of the past, even as that past proves the 'Irishness' of a rapidly changing country.

The state of exception demonstrated by Bónapáirt's trial is also an interesting inversion of the normal functioning of the exception, as it is created not by suspension but by continuation. At precisely the point at which the law should be interrupted and when it should acknowledge linguistic difference, it absolutely and resolutely functions as normal. Jams O'Donnell becomes a cog within the machine of the law, a law that turns around him, ignoring any points of alterity. The refusal to acknowledge the Irish language performs the exclusion of Bónapáirt from justice and inscribes Jams O'Donnell into the harsh force of the law. As Aristotle writes, all life has a voice, but only *bios* has language and so,

language is for manifesting the fitting and the unfitting and the just and the unjust. To have the sensation of the good and the bad and of the just and the unjust is what is proper to men as opposed to other living beings and the community of these things makes dwelling and the city.²⁸

Language manifests justice and to use language is to be fully human. Without it, one is not of the law and of the city but of the wild, barbaric

outside. The term 'barbarous' comes from the Greek meaning one who does not know how to speak: the savage or the barbarian is one whose language is not considered civilised or cultured. As 'bare life', as one straddling the divide between the human and that which is heterogeneous to the human, one does not speak, or, rather, one speaks in a barbaric, improper tongue, making the noise of animals. To refuse to recognise the legality of a language is to refuse to recognise the humanity of the speaker.

Hence, the treatment that the people of the Gaeltacht receive, starkly exemplified by Bónapáirt's trial, effectively denies them inclusion within the category of *bios* and repositions them as 'bare life'. The category of *bios* is predicated on a thinking, reasoning individual complete with language and a proper name. When Bónapáirt is tried as Jams O'Donnell he is tried as a life, but a 'bare life' that is outside (proper legal) language and outside the proper name. He is subject to the normal functioning of the law and he has the right to a trial, but a trial in which he cannot participate, a court case in which he has no speech. He is, therefore, not subject but object, located inside and outside the law, which functions around him, including and excluding him.

Throughout *An Béal Bocht* the position of the Irish language is problematised. While it is a human language that fills mouths with sweet words, it is also confused with the grunting of swine. The ethnographer who comes to Corca Dorcha joyfully records the words of Bónapáirt's pig because, as Bónapáirt explains, '*Thuing sé go mblonn an dea-Ghaeilge deacair agus an Ghaeilge is fearr beagnach dóhuinte*' (ABB, 36).²⁹ An inhuman language, Irish is spoken by those indistinguishable from animals. The pig was able to deceive the ethnographer because it was wearing clothes and it was wearing clothes in order to fool an inspector who had come to check that all the children in the house could speak English. Such is the treatment of Irish-speakers that Bónapáirt eventually asks the Seandúine: "*An bhfuilir cinnte [. . .] gur daoine na Gaeil?*" (ABB, 90).³⁰ But their humanity – in all senses of the term – is something that the Seandúine cannot confirm: "*Tá an t-ainm sin annuigh orthu, a uaislin, ar seisean, "ach ní fiththeadh deimhniú riamh air. Ní capail ná cearca sinn, ní róna ná taibhsí, agus ar a shon sin is inchreidae gur daoine sinn [. . .]"* (ABB, 90).³¹

The question – are we a people? – becomes even more negatively weighted when we look at the implications of the name 'Corca Dorcha'. According to Patrick Weston Joyce's seminal work on Irish place names,

corc and *corca* mean 'race' or 'progeny',³² and while *dorchta* is usually translated as 'dark', according to Irish lexicographer Patrick S. Dinneen it also means 'hidden, secret, mysterious; shy, distant [...] malignant'.³³ Hence Corca Dorcha means hidden race, secret race, malignant race, but most importantly, dark race, or dark progeny. While in the place name one hears overtones of Mary Shelley's 'hideous progeny',³⁴ the deliberate play on a racist slur seems unavoidable. If the Irish-speakers are a people, they are the dark race, the 'niggers' of Ireland, with all the terrible overtones of racial difference, inferiority and immaturity that term implied/implies. And if this dark race resemble pigs and the language they speak is confused with the grunting of pigs, how can it truly be a language at all and not simply the cries made by the animalistic 'bare life'? How then can Irish and the Irish speaker ever be given the full rights of *bios*, legally, politically and socially?

If for Stephen Dedalus Ireland is 'the old sow that eats her farrow',³⁵ for O'Nolan, Irish is, to those who do not speak it, the language of pigs. And the emblematic pig of *An Béal Bocht* is Ambrós. Ambrós was the runt of the litter and because he was too weak to fight for a place at his mother's teat, he was fed cow's milk by hand by the Seandúine. Weak and unnatural, Ambrós became excessive; huge and possessed of a smell defying oral and written description. Swollen, unresponsive, the pig rotted from the inside, becoming a living corpse. His stench nearly killed Bónapárt's mother and in the end, hesitant to split his throat, they allow a neighbour to block the windows and doors so that it suffocates on its own odour. Reading Ambrós as an allegorical representation of the Irish language, we understand it as a language rotting from within, harmed by and harming those who would seek to protect it, detrimentally insulated from the life that would enable it to live properly. A living-dead language, in the end it asphyxiates itself. Thus O'Nolan presents a complex – and noisome – contamination between the treatment the Irish language received by those who wished to protect it and those who saw it as an anachronistic remnant of poverty and insularity.

So that English speakers would not have to sully their mouths with the language of the (in)human other, all the male inhabitants of Corca Dorcha are given the English-Irish proper name of Jams O'Donnell by the vicious schoolmaster Aimeirgean O Lúnasa.³⁶ But a proper name, Derrida insists, has 'no meaning, no conceptualisable and common meaning' and, when pronounced, 'can designate [*viser*] only a single,

singular individual, one unique thing'.³⁷ A name denotes a distinct individual, regardless of the number of times new-borns are given the Irish name 'Bláthnaid', for example, in each case it refers to a specific and singular 'Bláthnaid'. Each instance of 'Bláthnaid' exists in homonymic relation to every other instance; while they may sound the same, they designate wholly different signifieds. Derrida writes that proper names 'designate individuals who do not refer to any common concept',³⁸ proper names do not mark a particular category. There is thus no conceptual or categorical requirement that a certain child be given a certain name: while a tree falls into a particular biological classification and under the strictures of taxonomy is included in a specific species, genus, or family, there are no specific classificatory conditions stating that, because of particular characteristics, the child reside in the category of Bláthnaids. Such a category does not exist and there is no general concept that is 'Bláthnaid'.

While 'Jams O'Donnell' masquerades as a proper name, it very clearly functions instead as a common noun. It signifies in a way a proper name does not; it denotes the category or genus of 'male, Irish-speaking peasant'. 'Jams O'Donnell', it should be stressed, is not a new name given to each boy, but the '*gail-leagan a ainm féinig*' (ABB, 27)³⁹ – his name otherwise, his name adulterated to English, his name reduced to the general common noun. Jams O'Donnell is not a unique marker, but a common signifier denoting not simply common properties but a common category. As Bónapárt is tried as Jams O'Donnell, he is, therefore, not tried as a unique individual, but as a member of a social group. His function is representative: he represents, in the eyes of English-speakers, the unlawfulness of the Irish peasant and the subsequent functioning of justice. Because the system must act, at the very least, as the simulacrum of legality, Bónapárt is not wholly picked at random, but as a peasant suspiciously in possession of gold coins. Beyond this, further investigation is unnecessary.

While Bónapárt's trial, as it is presented to us, is an undeniable travesty, clouding the transparently unethical conduct is a deep ambiguity. The conceit of *An Béal Bocht*, it cannot be forgotten, stipulates an author and an editor: the author is Bónapárt himself, writing from jail and the interfering hand of the editor – 'Tá an scríbhinn seo go díreach mar a fuair mé i ó láimh an údair ach amháin go bhfuil an mhórchuid *fíorgha ar lár*' (ABB, 7)⁴⁰ – that of Myles na gCopaleen. While Bónapárt's lack of English makes the legal proceedings a painful farce, it also means

that he can honestly and convincingly fail to present any evidence that might demonstrate his guilt. Writing from jail, his version presents his innocence, but this innocence is rendered suspect by a series of repeated structures and inconsistencies in his account. Did, therefore, Bónapárt take the money from Maoldún as he avows, or did he in fact murder and rob the gentleman in Galway, as the law courts insist? One might protest that Bónapárt is too weak and cowardly to kill, but O'Nolan's texts repeatedly feature the execrable abilities of the pathetic and the evidence against him is, at the very least, highly suggestive.

The entire Maoldún incident bears remarkable continuity to events already encountered, in that the Maoldún Bónapárt meets is an extension of the Seandúine's version of the tale, not the Middle Irish saga.⁴¹ No longer a beautiful, noble adventurer, Máel Dúin is rewritten as the avaricious, self-interested pirate Maoldún, who in the great flood takes to his ship neither to avenge nor to save, but to steal from those who can no longer resist.⁴² While Maoldún does speak in Middle Irish – and here we have to detect the help of the editor, Myles na gCopaleen – the story he tells is the same story related to Bónapárt by Ferdinand. While the otherworldly features of Bónapárt's 'voyage' mean that it conforms to the mystical elements of the heroic cycles, it also means that Bónapárt can present a highly interrupted narrative. The episode thus combines the stylistic devices of the Middle Irish tale with the confusion and interruptions of a dream work, ending, unsatisfactorily with the equivalent of 'and then I woke up'. Hence, the oneiric quality of the descriptions – 'aibhneacha colgacha buí ag gluaiseacht eatarthu ag lionadh mo chluas le dorradán diabhailta d'íshaoitá, s'riábhailte de chara raigeacha bána', 'criathar de phoill béaldorcha d'íthónacha ina raibh ná huisc luatha ag titim go síorthitimach' (ABB, 96)⁴³ – are coupled with repeated accounts of Bónapárt's overwhelming fatigue. While on the summit he says 'Ní fheadar ná gur lígeas tharam gan fhios tamall den lá faoi shuan nó ar chaolchadfaí' (ABB, 97),⁴⁴ and all is concluded when he wakes up suddenly at the bottom of the mountain, with no memory of the descent, naked and clutching a bag of gold.

While Bónapárt's clothes may have been stripped from him by the tumultuous waters, they may also have been discarded as they were covered in blood. Indeed, Bónapárt's later reaction to blood in the house is presented through the echo of a guilty and troubled murderer: a year after the Maoldún incident, as Bónapárt deliberates on how to spend the money, his house is suddenly awash with blood. Thinking that the

apocalypse is nigh – and judgment day with it – Bónapárt anxiously asks his mother about the source of the 'cahlianna dearga' (ABB, 104).⁴⁵ It transpires that it had come from another old man, the Seandúine. Echoing the words of Lady Macbeth, Bónapárt breathes, "Ní raibh an choinne agam, [...] go raibh an oiread seo fóla sa Seandúine" (ABB, 105).⁴⁶ And thus Bónapárt decides to spend his money. Money, it should be noted, that is later perfectly acceptable in a shoe-shop. While the shopkeeper might raise an eyebrow at a peasant's possession of gold, his reaction would undoubtedly be greater had the peasant attempted to pay him with an archaeological artefact.

Bónapárt's voyage to the top of Hungerstack thus hovers between a true, if supernatural, event, a pathology concocted to repress guilt and an attempted alibi. The case for Bónapárt's guilt or innocence can be extended almost infinitely, as the defence might argue that the Maoldún incident occurred a year before, while the murder was committed 'go déanach' (ABB, 110),⁴⁷ or that the repetition of the story of the captain shows not the character's guilt but the author's interest in narrative redoubling. But the real significance of this chapter lies not in finding a definitive answer to the problem, but in the openness or undecidability itself. Bónapárt is the victim of an indifferent and unlawful system, but he is not an unambiguously innocent victim. O'Nolan's parodies allow for no idealism or romanticism; the people of Corca Dorcha cannot be depicted stagnantly as fallen nobles enslaved by the English tongue. *An Béal Bocht* writes against all homogeneity and static sameness, be it biased or simplistic representations, the racial, social and linguistic purity of the *fíor-Ghael* (true Irish) valued by the Gaelic League – and enforced with all the blind determination of adherents of eugenics – or the equally reductive and negative creation of the lower caste that is Jams O'Donnell.

As Bónapárt is taken off to jail as Jams O'Donnell, he sees a man who looks familiar, a man 'cromtha, briste, agus chomh tanál le tráthníní' (ABB, 112).⁴⁸ Speaking the English sentence beaten into his head long ago, he asks, 'Phwat is yer nam?' and receives the expected reply: 'Jams O'Donnell!' (ABB, 112). With joy Bónapárt shakes the old man's hand and exclaims, "Is é is ainm agus sloinne domsa féin, [...] Jams O'Donnell freisin, is tusa m'athair agus is follas go bhfuil tí tagtha as an gcúiscín!" (ABB, 113).⁴⁹ Fresh from a trial he could not understand, with news of his twenty-nine-year sentence, Bónapárt sees an old man and asks his name, not in Irish but in English, doing so with a question

that has only one answer. The old man gives it, replying with the generic common noun rather than proper name and the little boy who looked in the milk jug for his father meets him at last. That is, meets Jams O'Donnell. The ambiguity regarding Bónapárt's guilt is repeated in his reunion with his father: does he meet his father or does he meet another Jams O'Donnell? Again, the situation must remain open and undecidable. Should Bónapárt meet his birth father, then the unending cycles of inescapable destiny are reinforced: as his father served twenty-nine years, so too does he. Jams O'Donnell will always serve a twenty-nine-year sentence, regardless of the crime, because that is his inescapable destiny.⁵⁰ Thus, fate and the mythic violence of the law system coincide; his status as 'bare life' exposes Bónapárt to a legal system that punishes with the inevitability of fate.

However, should he simply meet another Irish peasant, then the repetition of fate remains unchanged, but a slightly darker point is made. This darkness does not merely lie in the fact that Bónapárt deludes himself, but in the fact that Bónapárt repeats the reduction of the Irish-speaker to the realm of 'bare life' that his trial induced. He self-identifies not by proper name but common noun and allows the repetition of that common noun to denote 'father'. All sense of specific lineage is undone and the consanguinity denoted by family names is suppressed before the overwhelming strength of the larger taxonomic category: Jams O'Donnell. Exact family ties and units become irrelevant as each individual (male) Irish-speaking peasant is reduced to a member of the set of 'male, Irish-speaking peasant' and the unique characteristics denoting the specificity of each subject and each family unit are lost. What is even more distressing than the external use of this common noun is its assimilation by the people of the Gaeltacht themselves. The inhabitants of Corca Dorchta and the Gaeltachts thus become a homogeneous, incestuous mass: any frail old man from the Gaeltacht can be Bónapárt's father, because as Jams O'Donnell he is Bónapárt's father and cousin and neighbour and friend and Bónapárt himself. By treating all members of the set of Jams O'Donnell as ostensibly the same, as bare life, speakers of the pig language, the incest prohibition no longer applies, although it is not without effect: Jams O'Donnell can marry the daughter of Jams O'Donnell, who gives birth, it should be noted, to a piglet, only to die a year and a day later amongst the pigs.

The common characteristics of all members of the set overshadow any differences and they are effectively interchangeable. Hence, from

his house Bónapárt can see the Gaeltachts from Dingle on the southwest coast to the islands off Donegal on the north-west and the map that accompanies the Irish text clarifies this position. Physical, geographic space is elided as difference is elided: Bónapárt can see all the Gaeltachts because they are all (more or less) the same. While the compass points that all point west and the central positioning of Corca Dorchta humorously present the relative cognitive mapping of those in the Gaeltacht, they also serve to stress the elision of difference by those inside and outside the Gaeltacht alike: inasmuch as all the Gaeltachts become indistinguishable, anything not-Gaeltacht becomes repetitions of 'thar lear' (abroad) and 'de odar saighd' (the other side). Hence, as Bónapárt is being led off by the garda – the English word 'peeler', with Irish transposition *phlear*, is used in both texts – the man says, "Kum along *Blashtemian!*" (ABB, 113). Bónapárt is not from the Blaskets, but the Gaeltacht is all the same: any name, any designation will do. The order of the world becomes an order based on static uniformity, on upheld clichés.

Should the repetition of 'Jams O'Donnell' seem like an excessive flight of fancy, the repetition of names in the Maamtrasna murders prevents its dismissal as mere tragicomic hyperbole. Not including the victims, the case involved eight men with the surname of Joyce and six with the surname of Casey, while the first name John figured six times, Patrick five times, Michael twice, Anthony twice and Thomas twice.⁵¹ Thus, while the name of the murdered man was John Joyce, it was also the name of an independent witness and a young man caught up in the murder. John Casey, the supposed leader, must be distinguished from his son John Casey, who assisted with the murder, as well as from a third John Casey, wrongfully sentenced to hard labour. The victim, Patrick Joyce, should not be confused with the Patrick Joyce given penal servitude, nor with the independent witness Patrick Joyce, nor with the executed murderer Patrick Joyce. Such was the confusion that an 1884 account produced a table of names, so that the men involved could be told apart (see below^w).

Addressing the Maamtrasna trial in a Trieste newspaper, *Il Piccolo della Sera*, in 1907, James Joyce wrote that Myles Joyce, 'the figure of this dumbfounded old man, a remnant of a civilization not ours, deaf and dumb before his judge, is a symbol of the Irish nation at the bar of public opinion'.⁵² In *An Béal Bocht* Myles places the Gaelic League, the government, the English-speaking public and the Gaeltachts themselves before

the law, in a novel whose status as farce or parody belies a vehement indictment of representations of Irish and the Irish speaker and the dehumanising effects this treatment produces.

APPENDIX *Protagonists in the Maamtrasna Murders*

(Harrington, *The Maamtrasna Massacre*, p. ix)

List of Names.

ARRESTED FOR THE MURDER.

Patrick Joyce, Shanvallycahill,	executed, guilty
Patrick Casey,	executed, guilty
Myles Joyce,	executed, innocent
Michael Casey,	penal servitude, guilty
Martin Joyce (brother to Myles),	penal servitude, innocent
Patrick Joyce, Cappanacraha (another brother),	penal servitude, innocent
Tom Joyce (son of Patrick),	penal servitude, innocent
John Casey (little), Cappanacraha,	penal servitude, innocent
Anthony Philbin,	approver
Thomas Casey,	approver

THE ACTUAL MURDERERS (NOW ALLEGED).

John Casey (big), Bun-na-cnic,	supposed leader, at large
John Casey, Junr. (his son), Bun-na-cnic,	at large
Pat Joyce, Shanvallycahill	executed
Pat Casey,	executed
Pat Leyden,	now in England
Michael Casey,	penal servitude
Thomas Casey,	approver

INDEPENDENT WITNESSES.

Anthony Joyce
John Joyce, Derry (his brother)
Patrick Joyce, Derry (John's son)

OTHERS.

John Joyce, Maamtrasna,	the murdered man
Michael Joyce (boy), do. (son),	who died of wounds
Patrick Joyce (boy), do. (son),	who recovered
John Joyce (young), Bun-na-cnic, the man whom the murderers called out to join them	

BRIAN O'NOLAN misogynist or 'ould Mary Anne'?

Thomas Jackson Rice

In the final scene of Brian O'Nolan's last completed novel, *The Dalkey Archive* (1964), the protagonist Mick Shaughnessy finds himself proposing marriage to his girlfriend Mary, notwithstanding his recently formed resolution to 'put an end' to their relationship: 'His association with Mary, now that he contemplated it soberly, had been really very superficial and small; perhaps banal would be the better word' (CN, 734). He has decided to enter the Cistercian religious order and spend the remainder of his life monastically, in the company of men. Before he can break this news to her, however, Mary informs him that she has accepted a marriage proposal from their mutual acquaintance, the concupiscent Hackett. O'Nolan's readers never know how seriously each has considered this proposal, for both Hackett and Mary shortly think better of this arrangement and all apparently turns out well for Mick and Mary:

[...] Mick You're just a bloody fool.

- But the bloody fool you're going to marry?

- I suppose so. I like Hackett here, but not that much. (CN, 786)

So O'Nolan's comedy ends traditionally enough, not only with this promise of marriage, but also with Mary's assertion in the novel's final sentence that 'I'm certain I'm going to have a baby' (CN, 787). Considering her efficient management of Mick and probable manipulation of their relationship, who can doubt her?

Well, some might doubt her success and not just because readers familiar with O'Nolan find it difficult to take this traditional comic ending seriously. Keith Hopper construes Mary's assertion as a literal statement of her condition rather than merely an expression of her hope to bear a child: 'By the end of the novel [...] we discover that

studies. Fennell has published essays on Irish dystopian literature, the aesthetics of comic-book justice and the politics of monsters and monstrous communities, as well as contributing informal articles to *The James Joyce Literary Supplement* and *The Parish Review*. He recently contributed five original translations of Brian O'Nolan's early Irish-language short stories to *The Short Fiction of Flann O'Brien* (2013) and a translation of O'Nolan's unpublished Irish-language stage play, *An Scian to Flann O'Brien: Plays and Teleplays* (2013). Fennell is also the author of the monograph *Irish Science Fiction*, forthcoming from Liverpool University Press.

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